Tourism, Culture and Business
Issue 17 · 2013

Icelandic Times

The Healing Country
Celebrating Art and History
Hidden Secrets Revealed

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Tourism, Culture and Business

Icelandic Times

Issue 17 • 2013

They used to call Iceland "Europe's Best Kept Secret," as tourism was as undeveloped and unknown to most. That has all changed today, with a highly professional tourist industry easily meeting world standards and leading the way in innovation.

However, there are still so many secrets for the adventurous traveller to uncover. While the major sites, such as Þingvellir, Gullfoss and Geysir are wildly popular, many visitors are trying different tours and writing rave reviews on sites like TripAdvisor.com. Yet, there is still so much more to be discovered in this country of secrets and hidden jewels.

In this issue, we are introducing not only some new places to visit but also new fields of interest, such as health. Iceland has some of the purest water in the world. The sheep feed on the mountains in summer, eating herbs and grasses which, in turn, flavour their meat. No unnatural additives, drugs or steroids are pumped into them, making them a very healthy food choice.

All around the country, restaurants pride themselves on being able to offer fresh fish, often caught just a few hours earlier. Fresh vegetables are grown year round and you will find your meals at restaurants will generally be made from very fresh ingredients, often put together by a master chef.

Icelanders are keen on sports played both indoors and outside. Keeping fit and healthy is promoted, with pools and sports facilities in practically every little village. Gyms are also very popular and are usually open to visitors.

Designers are preparing for the major 'Design March' festival, the National Museum celebrates its 150th anniversary, Reykjavik Art Museum celebrates Kjarval—and the birds are celebrating the soon-coming Spring.

Iceland is as alive as ever. Celebrate with us!

—Andrew Scott Fortune

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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'

How to make use of QR codes

Use your QR code reader application on your smartphone or iPad to scan the QR codes. QR code reader applications can be downloaded free for all makes of smartphones

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The opinions expressed in Icelandic Times do not necessarily reflect those of the editor, publishers or their agents. Though the content of this issue have been meticulously prepared, no warranty is made about the accuracy and completeness of its content.

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Volcano House Rocks

New film, new food, new music and new tours

If this is your first time in Iceland, a visit to Volcano House will provide you with a splendid overview of how volcanic activity has moulded and shaped Icelandic society and its impact on the country as a whole. Icelanders, after all, have always had to deal with ever unpredictable mother nature, who usually has the last word in the matter of how one plans one's day or, as the case may be, one's life.

Cinema on Fire

In the heart of Volcano House lies a small paying cinema. New for 2013 is a dramatic film by Emmy-nominated producer, Jóhann Sigfússon, documenting eruptions from Settlement days to the latest eruption of Eyjafjallajökull and showing their effects on the population.

There are two other 20-minute documentaries chronicling two of Iceland's most notorious volcanoes of the last 40 years.

The first film takes you back to the 1973 eruption in the Westman Islands. The real protagonists in this volcanic drama however, are the Icelanders themselves, who managed to evacuate all 5,000 residents from the island in just a few hours in the middle of that fateful night.

The second film covers the recent eruption of Fimmvörðuháls and Eyjafjallajökull, in all its fiery splendour and glory, which will undoubtedly leave you with a better understanding of what brought most of Europe's air traffic to a standstill just a few years ago. The accompanying dramatic music and breathtaking aerial photography contributes all the more to this riveting documentary's impact and power.

A downtown café

Volcano House is also known as a late-night café where you can order a proper espresso or cappuccino, teas, hot chocolate, or try a cold Icelandic beer or a shot of Brennivín.

Time-honoured Icelandic cakes served with whipped cream and skyr desserts are baked on the premises. Check out the new menu which includes a hearty and warming plokkfiskur (a creamy white fish stew with potatoes) or the langoustine (mini-lobster) soup, both served with traditional rye bread. There's even that curious combination of cheese toast with jam, that has been a much loved national snack for generations of Icelanders.

A little night music at Volcano House

Musical evenings of Icelandic folk tunes as well as more modern sounds by various local musicians are planned for weekend evenings, June through August. Pop in for a listen and browse Volcano House's interesting hands-on collection of volcanic ash and rock, semi-precious stones from East Iceland and other geological curiosities.

Book a Volcano Tour

Lastly, now that your curiosity is piqued, it's time to book a tour to see any one of Iceland's magnificent volcanoes. Volcano House has recently teamed up with leading tour guides and agencies to offer you a variety of volcano tours around the country that you can book right at Volcano House.

-ASF

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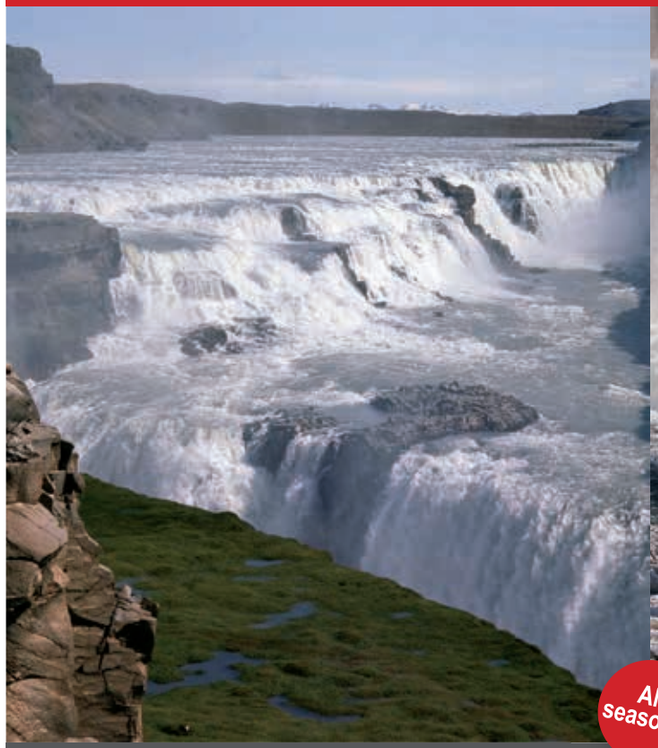
More Iceland for less money



All seasons!

Blue Lagoon Schedule

Pickup at hotel in Reykjavik upon request
09:00 / 10:30 / 12:30 / 14:45 / 16:45

Blue Lagoon to Reykjavik
12:30 / 14:00* / 16:00 / 18:00 / 20:30
* Via Keflavik Airport

Blue Lagoon to Keflavik Airport
14:00 / 21:00**
** From 15. June – 15. Sept.

- Please book in advance.
- Be ready in front of your hotel. Pickup can take up to 30 min.

The South Coast - Skógafoss - Vík

Our tour takes us along the south shore and on to the charming village of Vík. Highlights on this tour: Waterfalls Skógafoss and Seljalandsfoss. The basalt columns at sandy beach of Reynis- fjara and the glacier Sólheimajökull, where you can touch the ice. We drive along the volcano Eyjafjallajökull, last eruption in 2010.

Pick up time: Mon/Wed/Fri at 08:00
Duration: 10 hours
Professional English guidance

Grand Golden Circle

Highlights visited: The farming districts in the south, Faxi waterfall and the spectacular Geysir. The waterfall Gullfoss, the national park Thingvellir, including the Rift valley and the Rock of law which was the site of the first Viking parliament.
Time for lunch at Geysir (not incl. in price).

Pick up time: Daily at 08:00
Duration: 8 hours
Professional English guidance
Please notice: You can join The Blue Lagoon evening tour after arrival.

Golden Circle Afternoon

Highlights visited: The national park Thingvellir, the waterfall Gullfoss, the spectacular Geysir.

Pick up time: Daily at 12:30
Duration: 5-6 hours
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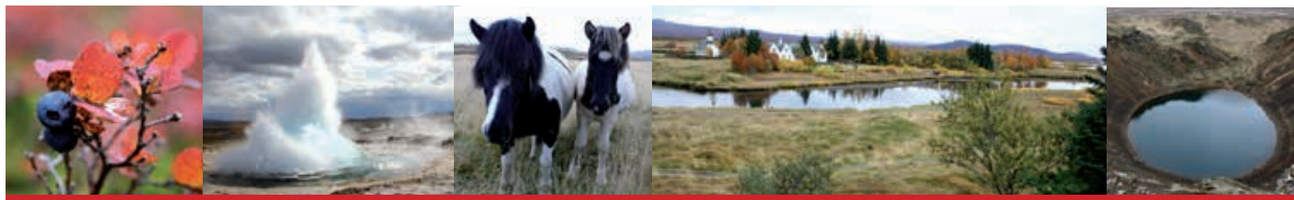

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Reykjavik Art Museum

A perpetual flux of Icelandic art

It may not come as a surprise that Reykjavik Art Museum can provide an exhibition of 1,000 artworks, given that it is Iceland's largest museum. This year, Reykjavik Art Museum celebrates Kjarvalstaðir's 40th anniversary with quite an unconventional exhibition of Icelandic artworks. Reykjavik Art Museum's three different locations Hafnarhús, Kjarvalstaðir and Ásmundarsafn exhibit a wide variety of artwork; everything from classical Icelandic sculptures to cutting edge contemporary art works.

Kjarvalstaðir

Forty years ago, the opening of Kjarvalstaðir was a big event on the Icelandic cultural scene as the museum was the first building specially designed for the visual arts. Located in one of Reykjavik's most popular outdoor spots, Miklatún, Kjarvalstaðir is named after Iceland's most beloved painter, Jóhannes S. Kjarval (1885-1972). Unfortunately, Kjarval passed away just a year before the museum was opened but he had already given a large part of his life's work to Reykjavik city. Kjarval's roots lay in the old Icelandic rural community, but his life and art are tightly bound to the cultural awakening of the nation in the first half of the 20th century.

To celebrate the anniversary, the biggest exhibition of Icelandic artworks ever to be held in Iceland just opened in Kjarvalstaðir. "Zoom Out—Salon Exhibition from the Collection" will be in a state of flux, as new works are regurlarly installed and others removed, even as visitors roam through the gallery area. This is a unique opportunity to get an unedited view of Icelandic art; with a new view every day as the exhibition constantly changes over the three month period. Additionally, on the 24th of March, a festive celebration of the anniversary will be held in Kjarvalstaðir.

Hafnarhús

Located by the harbour in Reykjavik's city centre, Hafnarhús is dedicated to contemporary art. It hosts a grand collection of the works of the acclaimed pop-artist Erró. His works are one of Hafnarhús' biggest attractions but there is currently another interesting exhibition there, too, the works of Robert Smithson: "The Invention of Landscape." Smithson was a pioneer of the Land Art Movement, which was at its height in the late 60's and confuses the borders between art and landscape.

Ásmundarsafn

Located in a spectacular building in the east side of Reykjavik, Ásmundarsafn used to be the home of Ásmundur Sveinsson, an early 20th century Icelandic sculptor. He sought inspiration for his magnificent sculptures in Icelandic nature, literature and the common people, so that his sculptures are interesting manifestations of Icelandic folklore.

Each of Reykjavik Art Museum's locations has its own characteristics and emphases; the different exhibitions, as well as the buildings themselves, providing visitors with a inspiring experience in pleasant surroundings. *-NHH*

Harbourside Sushi

Sushismiðjan–Midori, a Top Class Restaurant at the Old Harbour

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

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

Sitting on the patio on a cool autumn day, enjoying a delicious sushi and the view over the harbour to Mount Esja across the bay, this is the life! For freshness, the harbour is the place to be. The combination of Icelandic fish and

sushi cannot be beaten for quality and flavour —and its presentation is top class.

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

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

-ASF

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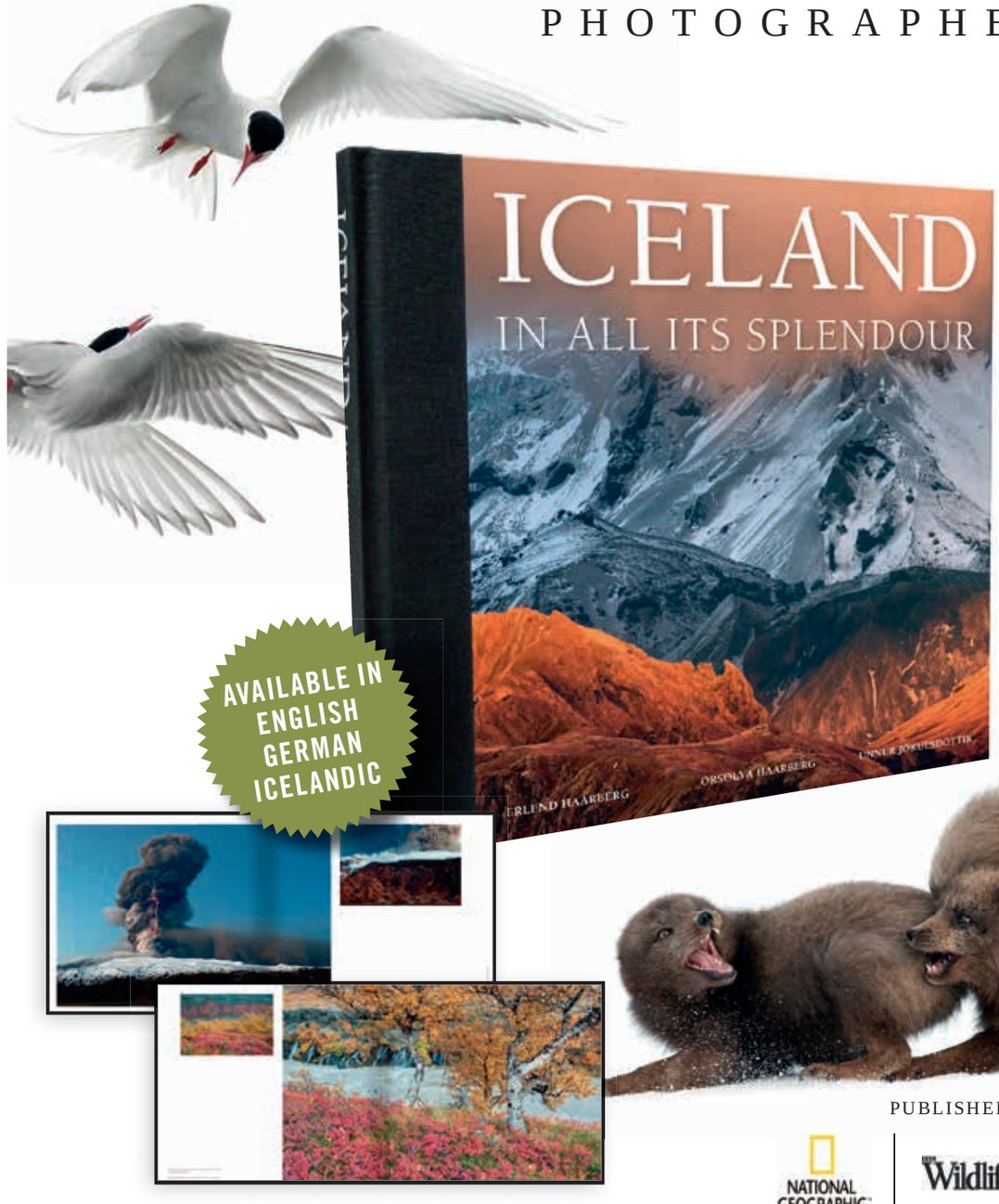

PUBLISHED IN:
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
Wildlife
Terre Sauvage

PANTANIR/HOW TO ORDER:
Sími/Phone: +354 575 5600
Netfang/E-mail: forlagid@forlagid.is
Website: www.forlagid.is
Forlagið publishing
Bræðraborgarstígur 7
101 Reykjavik, Iceland
FORLAGIÐ
www.forlagid.is

Handknitters United

The One Stop Shop for All Things Woollen at the Handknitting Assn.

Sheep came to Iceland with the Viking settlers and they quickly proved their worth, not only for their meat but also their wool. Living conditions were very basic and especially tough in the cold and dark winter months. Sheep helped keep the settlers alive.

These Icelandic sheep have two types of fleece—an outer, weather and water repellant layer and a soft, warm fleece close to the skin. Combined, they have provided warm clothing for farmers and seamen, adults, children and babies for centuries. Making sweaters became a tradition in farmhouses, cottages and houses around the country.

The Handknitting Association of Iceland was founded in 1977 to help overcome problems that knitters were having in getting their handiwork marketed. A group of women formed the association, established standards and guidelines for the production that was - and still is, an important supplement to many family incomes and shortly thereafter, opened a shop to sell their members' woollen goods on Skólavörðustígur, the main shopping street that descends from Hallgrímskirkja, the cathedral overlooking the city.

As the name indicates, these woollen creations are hand made. The motto from the outset has been, 'Buy directly from the people who make them'. Walking into the shop, one cannot help but be amazed at the skill and productivity of these ladies—and some men, too, from all walks of life, living in all parts of the country. Every item has that sense of individual uniqueness that only handmade items carry.

The world of knitting has changed dramatically since the association began. A few decades ago, the designs took on the form of the 'lopapeysa' or sweater, with its distinctive scalloped pattern, which has become so popular worldwide, but numerous young Icelandic designers have also turned their attention to wool as a medium of choice for their fashion designs, resulting in new products, styles and colours. There is a wide range of sweaters, gloves, hats, scarves, socks, bags and many other items in sizes to suit everyone from a Viking warrior (or farmer) to a pretty fashion model to a newborn baby.

The store has become a centre not only for selling the finished products but also for supplying the wool and all the accessories required to make woollen items.

The association has established high standards for the wool they supply the knitting community so as to get an equally high quality product back to sell. This is all the best genuine Icelandic wool with its unique characteristics.

Visitors can have their purchases shipped to them and they can also email orders from the website in the comfort of their own homes. That includes the patterns, wool, needles and accessories, not just the clothing. If knitting is your hobby, there is a world of warm designs just waiting for you.

-ASF

Images by © Gabriel Rosenberg

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www.handknit.is

Fire under the Snow

Under the mountains behind Reykjavik lies a hidden power

The columns of steam, rising high into the sky, are clearly visible from the capital. Deep below the mountains, the earth is still burning hot and today, that heat provides a source of warmth and electricity for all the capital area.

The Geothermal Energy Exhibition on the Mountain

Just about a 20 minute drive by car, Sterna line or Iceland Excursions-Grayline Iceland coach, the Geothermal Energy Exhibition on Hellisheiði makes a fascinating and educational visit at any time of the year. In many ways, it is even more spectacular in the snowy winter months, providing such a contrast between the conditions on the surface compared to those below ground.

This is the newest and largest geothermal plant in Iceland and Orkusýn provides a rare look into the one of the world's most powerful clean energy resources. Multimedia displays and experienced guides explain how Iceland has become a leader in this form of clean energy and you can get a close look at its production.

Refreshments are available in the café while books and DVD's about geothermal energy are to be found in the souvenir area. If you would like to get a better understanding of clean energy, this is the best place to visit.

-ASF

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Fjörukráin
A Viking village, set in the heart of Hafnarfjörður, Fjörukráin consists of two restaurants, where you will be served and entertained by Viking-clothed staff. There is also a modern hotel and 14 Viking cottages, with all modern conveniences.
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Best way to see the city

Reykjavik Bike Tours' original way to see Reykjavik is also the best

If you're in good health and know how to balance a bicycle, you'll enjoy riding with one of Reykjavik Bike Tour's entertaining and professional guides. They offer bicycle tours and rentals in Reykjavik all year. In summer, they also do day trips out of town in a minibus with a bicycle combination to places not to be missed.

No. 1 on Trip Advisor

Reykjavik Bike Tours has enjoyed top position on the Trip Advisor social traveller website for the past three years. It is Ursula and Stefan's family business, founded in 2009. Travellers appreciate the friendly welcome, knowledgeable guides, the outdoor activity and excellent quality bicycles.

Classic Reykjavik Tour – 2.5 hrs / 7 km

This tour is the perfect introduction to the capital city of Iceland and is offered all year. You can expect to see some of the city's hidden secrets while learning about its history from a professional and enthusiastic local tourist guide. You get to know what the city is all about—in terms of its history, best museums, best restaurants, current special events and much, much more. Perhaps the most important aspect of this tour, apart from the exercise, of course, is the direct access to the local guide giving the tour.

Holiday Bicycle Tour

Reykjavik Bike Tours offers one scheduled tour in winter, and five scheduled tours in summer; two in the city, and three which require the assistance of a minibus and trailer. Combine all five and you've got yourself a holiday bicycle tour.

The two city tours are the Classic Reykjavik – 2.5 hrs / 7 km, and the Coast of Reykjavik – 2.5 hrs / 18 km. The Classic tour has plenty of stops and is quite easy for anyone in good health. The Coast tour is also fairly easy but covers more than twice the distance of the Classic tour.

The three tours that involve the use of a minibus and trailer are: Golden Circle & Bike – 8 hrs / 25 km; Westman Isles & Bike – 11 hrs / 11 km and Lake Challenge & Bike – 6 hrs / 64 km. For more information, please visit Reykjavik Bike Tour's website.

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

-SHV

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A Grill Party with Class

Fine food in a fun setting at Sjávargrillið

On Skólavörðustígur's busy shopping street, midway between Hallgrímskirkja and Laugarvegur, you'll find some of the best seafood dishes in Reykjavik in the cosy and lively Sjávargrillið restaurant.

Upon entering, you are greeted with a relaxed atmosphere and a pleasant aroma from the kitchen. The walls are innovatively decorated with driftwood and scrap iron from Iceland's fishing history. You immediately get the feeling that, in Sjávargrillið, you'll be dining with class—but not in a stifled or formal setting.

Owner and head chef, Gústav Axel Gunnlaugsson, the youngest chef ever to win Chef of the Year award, says that was exactly what he initially planned when designing the restaurant. "We want our customers to feel like they can have a good time here and feel relaxed while enjoying a top class meal," says Gústav.

To drive the point home of having a good time, Sjávargrillið has recently introduced the Grill Party menu item, in which groups will be presented with a buffet-style grill party at their own table and the theme of the party will be designed after current events.

As the name implies, Sjávargrillið specialises in seafood, while offering a good selection of quality meat and vegetable dishes. Gústav places special emphasis on using quality Icelandic materials whenever possible and even has his family finding and gathering materials. For example, his grandmother has dutifully been sending fresh handpicked blueberries from Gústav's hometown of Húsavík as fast as she can pick them.

Be sure to check out the winter menu. As the days get shorter – traditional Icelandic holiday dishes will be plentiful.

-ASF

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Refinement in Reykjavik

Einar Ben brings style and class to dining

Einar Ben is one of a select few restaurants in the highly competitive Reykjavik scene, where new, trendy places come and go on a monthly basis, that has found its way into the Icelandic psyche and has been able to maintain the delicate balance of class, comfort and top-rate food that inspires customers to return.

Discreet and Tasteful

Upon entering the refined hall on the second floor of a century-old gentry's townhouse, it is easy to see why Einar Ben has become a part of Reykjavik's culture. It is free of pretense and excess whilst offering one of the best dining experiences in town.

The interiors are elegantly decorated, honouring the building's rich history and when walking around the restaurant, you feel you're passing through a home, instead of garish or bare and minimalistic dining halls.

The restaurant is, in fact, the former home of one of Iceland's greatest heroes, after whom it is named. Einar Ben was a poet and pioneer who personified the dreams and ambitions of Icelanders in the early 20th century.

You'll also notice the quiet, professional, yet friendly staff who seem to take pride in catering to their visitors, as opposed to rushing in and out as many paying customers as possible in one night.

Classic Dishes With a Twist

All of this is a pleasant addition to what matters the most: the meals. Philip Harrison, Einar Ben's English chef, takes great pride in only using the freshest Icelandic ingredients. When I dropped by Einar Ben's on a cosy Sunday evening, a new delivery of game reindeer had just arrived in Reykjavik.

"Our dishes are based on the classics: fish and 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 its ingredients, whereas the dishes are also based on French and Danish traditions.

We pride ourselves on healthy portions and hearty sauces", says owner Jóhann. That doesn't prevent innovation, however, and the restaurant has just developed a new menu that builds on their experience.

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 pureé, mashed potatoes and spinach confirmed that Jóhann's claims of Einar Ben's seafood expertise were not exaggerated – truly exquisite. The lamb loin served with crushed potatoes and parsnip pureé was cooked to perfection and shows what he means when he says that Icelandic lamb is 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 out on the town should try the red bar as well.

-ASF

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A Viking's Valhalla

Food, Drink and Entertainment at the Viking Tavern

Welcome to the Land of the Vikings! You may not see their long boats in the harbour today, but there's one in Vikingakráin's restaurant. With their love of food and drink, is it any wonder that it has been converted to the bar for this Viking dining hall, set in the loft of one of the old buildings in the centre of Reykjavik.

As you walk through the entrance gate in the high wooden stockade, you feel you're entering a Viking hall.

Every night, diners are regaled by entertainment in true Viking tradition with actors, poets or storytellers. The experience is so authentic that, as you enjoy their hospitality with food and drinks, sitting at massive wood tables, you can easily imagine yourself as a Viking.

Give them a call to book your dinner, as this is a popular venue. It's the way to be totally immersed in the life and culture of the Vikings - and will doubtless give you a few surprises and something to tell people when you get home. After all, how many people encounter Vikings and live to tell the tale?

-ASF

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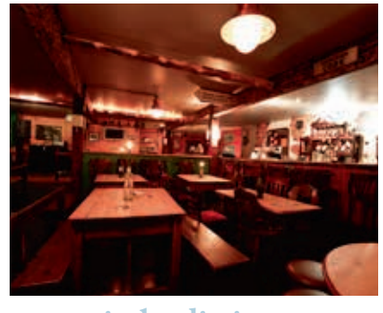
The Happiest Pub in Town

What the Vikings brought from Ireland: The Dubliner

The country is Iceland. The clients are international. The beer is cold. The music is live. The atmosphere is totally Celtic. This is the Irish pub that everyone comes to Iceland to find. This is the happiest pub in town. This is the Dubliner.



Now you know why the Vikings stopped off in Ireland on their way here. They knew a good thing when they saw it. They swiped all the beautiful girls and the best beer and some of the men. Everyone knows what the Irish are like with some beer inside them. Out come the greatest singers and musicians, the most spellbinding story-tellers, the most eloquent poets…Need I say more?

You can meet them yourself in this downtown pub where pleasure is just a pint away. And if you fancy yourself as a singer, go on Thursdays for their open mic evenings. You'll find the audience very sympathetic, won't yer now?

-ASF

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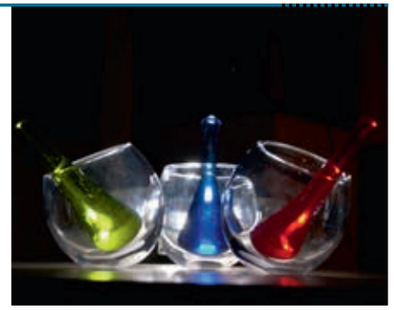

Design March in Reykjavik

Kraum, promotes new designs for Design March Event

The field of design is recognised as one of the most dynamic areas in society today. The importance of its role cannot be underestimated and there are now hundreds of designers, young and old who, taking the country's natural resources, are creating a national identity on the world stage.

Secrets to be revealed in March

Designers across the country are working feverishly to prepare their new designs to be unveiled at the March 14th to 17th Design March events in Reykjavik. From clothing, accessories and jewellery to lamps, this promises to be even more exciting an event than in previous years. One to watch out for is the raven's nest lamp. Like the magpie, the raven is given to collecting bright objects and planting them in its nest, so this promises to be interesting!

A Taste from 2012

A 26 year-old designer took the fashion world by storm last year with a range of shirts named after Odin's ravens, Huginn and Muninn, which changed the perspective on young men's fashion. Unusually, the designer is a young woman, Guðrún Guðjónsdóttir and this was her first showing. This year, she has other revolutionary designs to present.

A Competition from history

Iceland has many useful objects, designed years ago, that have become commonplace. Each year, Kraum reveals an object which designers have been asked to take from Icelandic heritage and history and bring it into the present-day with new designs. This year's competition results will be revealed in the next issue of the Icelandic Times but we can show last year's winners.

The object was the commonplace pancake pan and designers were encouraged to come up with new designed handles.

The only all-Icelandic design shop

Kraum is unique for several reasons. Primarily, it was the first one-stop shop for Icelandic design. The first Icelandic pioneer of craft and design, Skúli Magnússon, established Iceland's first production centre in the late 1700's in the same house in which Kraum now promotes and sells the work of over 200 Icelandic designers, carrying his vision into the 21st century.

-ASF

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Chocolate Fantasies

A Chocolatier's creations in Reykjavik's oldest house

Almost anyone can tell you where Reykjavik's oldest house is–and especially now. 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 volcanoes, 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 volcanoes are immortalised in flavour. Packed in pyramid-shaped boxes, they are an original gift–if the giver doesn't get them first.

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 Hearts for Lovers

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.

Canned Caviar

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 chocolate covered 'roe' 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?

-ASF

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150TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

The National Museum of Iceland preserves Iceland's heritage

Established on 24th February, 1863, the National Museum was initially housed in various attics–in the cathedral, the House of Corrections, Parliament, the national bank and the (then) National Library, now the Culture House on Hverfisgata.

When Iceland became a republic in 1944, Parliament decided to build a permanent museum close to the university, into which the entire collection was moved in 1950. Six decades later, completely redesigned and refurbished, it reopened in 2004 with events and exhibitions that have continued to fascinate all age groups.

Behind the scenes

The National museum is responsible for the preservation and management of the country's cultural heritage. It carries out many important archeological research projects, frequently in conjunction with both academic institutions and local museums, cataloguing on the specially-designed Sarpur database, conserving, preserving, cleaning, repairing and stabilising artifacts of all kinds.

The Historic Buildings Collection

The museum has a collection of over 40 different buildings from turf houses and churches, preserved in their original form, four of the very few stone buildings, a number of timber buildings of different types including the oldest belfry and the only existing windmill, on the island of Vigur, in the Westfjords.

Photographs and Prints

Iceland's largest public collection of images is preserved by the National Museum. It includes images of many different genres such as drawings, graphic prints, watercolours and paintings, besides about 4 million photographs, most of which date from 1890–1960.

Education never ends

From pre-school to university students, the museum's educational specialists provide national curriculum-based programmes to suit each age group. Collections are loaned out while the two 'hands-on' rooms always prove very popular.

Library, publications, the shop & café

There is much to see and do at the museum–especially following the state-of-the-art tours. The museum publishes a lot of its research and has its own library with over 22,000 volumes and multimedia materials. Near the reception desk is a shop with many interesting books and other materials available for purchase–and a very popular café for refreshments.

The National Museum has built up a formidable reputation for quality exhibits and programmes. This article can barely scratch the surface of its responsibilities and activities. Their website has a programme of exhibitions which gives a glimpse of the breadth and scope of its remit.

Icelandic Silver work Exhibition

As part of its anniversary celebrations, the museum is holding an exhibition of silver work, focussing on the period from the 16th century to the first half of the 20th. Despite working under primitive conditions, craftsmen produced amazingly high quality works, many of which are exhibited here, along with the tools and methods they used.

-ASF

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Healing in Iceland

With health and wellness tourism gaining more and more popularity, the opportunities facing Iceland as a health tourism destination certainly seem to be bright.

In 2010, the Association of Iceland of Health was established, whose primary function is to promote health and wellness tourism in Iceland. With the goal of developing and supporting innovative quality services regarding travel, accommodation, treatment and cure in a professional way, the association strengthens Iceland's reputation where professionalism and quality are paramount in the field of health and wellness.

Healing powers of Iceland

On an island full of steam, where fire and ice are combined, the inhabitants of Iceland have long enjoyed the privilege of geothermal water and the healing powers of natural steam baths. Widely respected and practiced, balneotherapy (healing the body and mind by bathing) has, in fact, been a part of the culture for centuries. Today, places such as the NLFI Spa and Medical Clinic in Hveragerði, South Iceland and Reykjalundur Rehabilitation Centre close to Mosfellsbær have both enjoyed its benefits. There are numerous other spas, some, such as Laugar, right in Reykjavik.

The Blue Lagoon is perhaps a better known example, a large lagoon set in the lava fields on Reykjanes Peninsula, filled with active ingredients from geothermal seawater, minerals, silica and algae. Well known for its effects on patients suffering from psoriasis, the Blue Lagoon's services are constantly developing, in collaboration with some of the worlds most distinguished scientists.

But Iceland has a great deal more to offer in the field of health and wellness and therefore the Icelandic Health Care System has been looking at opportunities regarding cross-border healthcare.

Cross-border healthcare

There are a growing number of travellers falling into the category of medical tourists – those bypassing health related services offered in their own communities – who are typically seeking the benefits of less expensive dental, eye or cosmetic surgeries elsewhere. According to a recent survey, the package deal for a British patient seeking eye surgery - including the flight, accommodation and surgery in Iceland was both less expensive plus a faster process than in his home country.

Establishments such as Sjónlag Eye Centre, a leading refractive surgery centre, with highly trained experts in laser vision correction and intraocular surgery has been providing this service to many foreigners.

Iceland's future role in healthcare

Looking at Iceland's future in health tourism, as it builds a strong reputation, recognition and respect, there are points to explore and ponder.

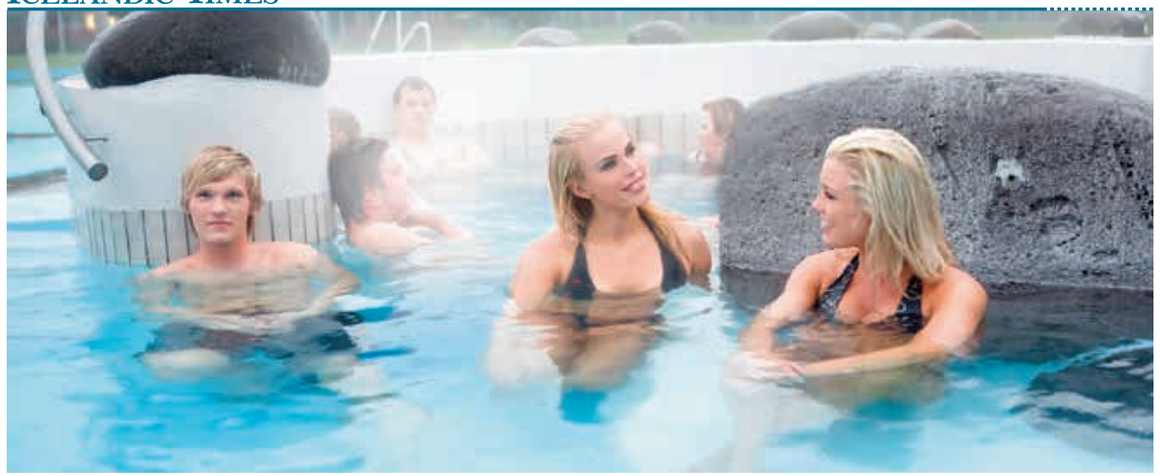
What people worldwide generally have in common is the longing for wellness of body and soul and the desire to 'get away from it all'. With Iceland's unique natural settings whether by the sea, in the countryside or in the mountains, the country is ideally positioned to fulfill such longings.

What is needed, both in the medical field and that of health and wellness, is to connect the concept of this island's healing powers and its high level of education and promote Iceland as a Wellness Country. Iceland is to be desired and sought after by foreigners all year round in the terms of what it has to offer.

While the Icelandic nation is generally well educated, sadly many of those who are highly skilled professionally in the medical field tend to look for positions outside the country as the Icelandic market for their knowledge and skills is minimal.

We have natural healing sources, we are well advanced in the medical field and have an excellent infrastructure. Together, they provide an excellent combination to bring the aspirations of people worldwide for health and wellness to fruition. It has already begun and many are seeing a long-desired change in their lives. Now the world needs to know.

-SP



The Spa in the North

In the centre of Reykjavik, there's a place to soothe body, mind and spirit

Holidays in Iceland are not your run of the mill, bake on the beach–type holidays. They're generally energetic, vigorous, strenuous. Whether it's hiking, mountain climbing, skiing, riding–or even bird watching, by the end of the day, there's generally one thing on your mind: to relax and have a good meal. There are many ways to do this, but the best by far is a spa.

Set in Laugadalur, the dale with a beautiful park and a large swimming pool in central Reykjavik, you will find World Class Laugar health and spa centre, the popular state-of-the-art gym. Here you can get a day pass, a week, a month or a year's subscription to fitness.

You will find every piece of equipment you need to keep fit, work out or do body-building. There are yoga, dance and Pilates courses and trainers on hand to help. Then, you can walk out to the Olympic-size pool complex, swim or relax in the hot pots before having a healthy meal. It will certainly leave you invigorated and feeling good.

Take it to the next level

Do you ever get that yearning for a deep, luxurious relaxation and peace that only a spa can offer? This is the jewel in the crown of World Class: the Laugar spa. Its beautiful design, with its subdued lighting is just a foretaste of the cleansing, massaging, relaxing restoration that you will encounter here.

This is the experience that you would want to give a loved one–whilst enjoying it yourself at the same time. It's the very thing that makes a company's incentive tour memorable, that produces a lasting bond between people.

The Blue Waterfall & Scented Saunas

In the foyer, the waterfall warmly soothes you as it streams down the rock face, preparing you for the choice of six saunas, each with a different ambience and fragrance, some with soothing music, others completely peaceful, some hotter, some smaller.

The Cool Pool and Hot Jacuzzi

In true Scandinavian fashion, there is a cold seawater tub to plunge in before settling into the jacuzzi's gently massaging jets.

Make a Date for a Massage

Relaxing though the saunas and jacuzzi may be, there's nothing like a full, heavenly massage to get out all the stiffness, muscle kinks, aches and pains and leave you on a cloud for the night, ready to climb that next mountain tomorrow.

Delicious Dining

After all this fun and relaxation, a rumbling reminds you it's time to eat. You don't need to leave the spa, however, as the restaurant serves full 4-course meals, with a wide range of wines, spirits and health drinks. Now you'll know, too, why Icelanders enjoy life.

-ASF

World Class
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Reykjavik's Thermal Pools

ONLY* 550 isk. ADULTS 130 isk. CHILDREN

A source of health

thermal swimming pools
Hot tubs and jacuzzi
Saunas, steambaths and showers
For health and well-being
Seven locations open early until late

Thermal pools and baths in Reykjavik are a source of health, relaxation and pureness. All of the city´s swimming pools have several hot pots with temperatures ranging from 37° to 42°C (98°–111°F). The pools are kept at an average temperature of 29° C (84° F).

*Admission January 2013. Price is subject to change

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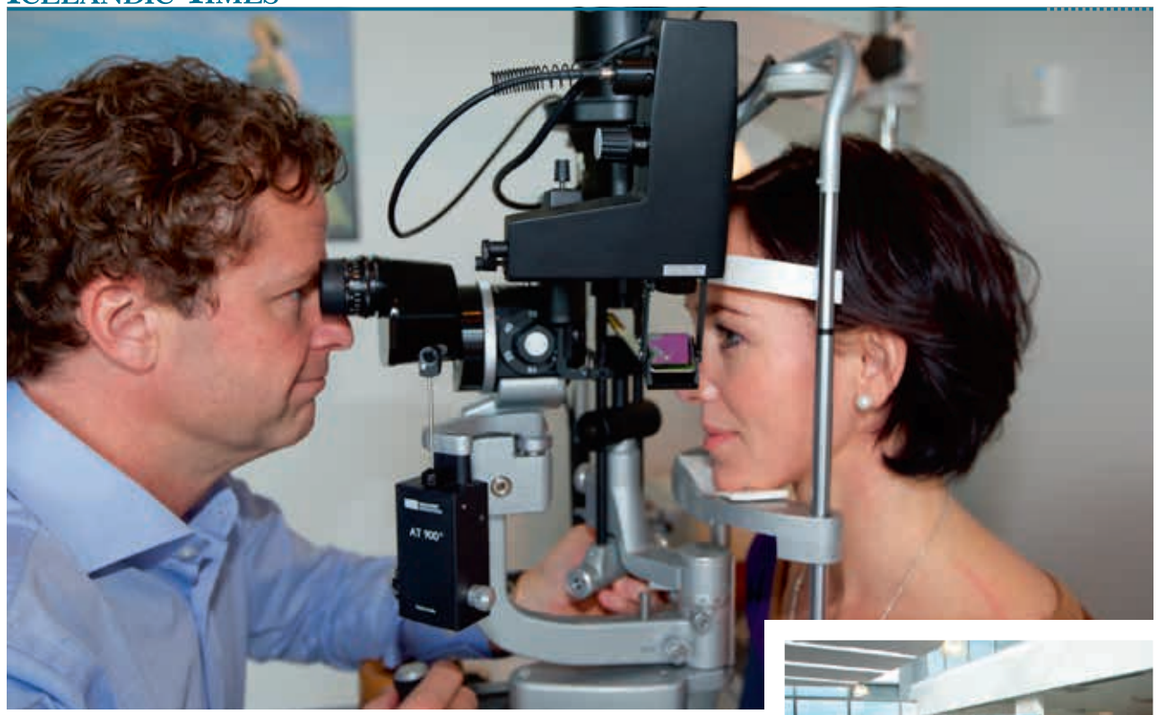

A New Set of Eyes

See Your Dream Holiday Through Refractive Surgery at Sjónlag

Standing on top of an Icelandic glacier, with its clear and unblemished majestic views in all directions, is something you can only truly experience with your own eyes and that is exactly what Sjónlag eye clinic wants to offer to potential visitors with imperfect eyesight—an affordable refractive eye surgery and Iceland's grandeur, all in one trip.

A Perfect Match

While many people wouldn't necessarily equate having lasers pointed into your eyes with a relaxing holiday, Kristinn Ólafsson, manager of Sjónlag, says they are a better match than one might think. "What we propose is a holiday with a lasting benefit. What we offer has to do with quality of life and helping people get the most of it. We want to help people see life with their own eyes and we feel that there is no better place to begin with than the beautiful landscapes of Iceland," says Kristinn.

A surgery would require only three short appointments—one pre-check-up, the procedure and a follow-up appointment. The procedure itself only takes a few seconds. "The very next day you'll be able to go sightseeing with a brand new set of eyes, as it were," says Kristinn.

Highest Standard of Quality

Kristinn says that Sjónlag would only suggest such a holiday if they were absolutely sure that the clinic was up to the highest standard of quality. "We have bought two new state of the art lasers, all our staff are highly experienced, both abroad and here in Iceland, and the clinic has done thousands of procedures with excellent results," says Kristinn.

Sjónlag offers a wide variety of ophthalmological procedures, as different sets of eyes require different treatments. "It is important that we find the correct solution for each individual, which is why we do thorough research and consultation at the beginning stages," says Kristinn.

Two in One

"Iceland's many qualities have been well documented recently—we have all these incredible natural phenomena, high quality accommodation and food, good infrastructure and it is very clean, making complications from infection almost unheard of. The current currency situation is really the icing on the cake for potential visitors, as we can offer the procedure at a fraction of the price that neighbouring countries are currently offering. You can get your eyes fixed and an unforgettable holiday in Iceland for the same price as just the procedure elsewhere," says Kristinn.

-VAG

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Sweet Memories of Iceland

Icelandic Souvenirs Your Friends and Family will Love

One of the things on the "to do" list while visiting Iceland is to pick up some really cool and fun souvenirs for family and friends. To fill this need, Ísland Treasures has a range of souvenir candies to suit almost every taste.

Why not pick up a cute box of Icelandic Puffin Eggs for grandma? She will love the beautiful painting of a typical puffin colony on an Icelandic sea cliff and be wowed by the unique taste of the combination of chocolate and liquorice that is so popular with Icelanders. That golf–playing uncle would just be thrilled to receive the funny golfers' version of Icelandic Puffin Eggs with the puffin and the golfer confused over which white ball is theirs.

Friends at work might like some Icelandic Lava Sparks—traditional Icelandic toffee in a red crispy shell which come packed with an amazing painting of Eyjafjallajökull erupting in 2010 or Icelandic Lava Pebbles—traditional Icelandic liquorice toffee with a hint of chocolate wrapped in a black crispy shell packed with a beautiful painting of Skógafoss waterfall.

Hopefully you will get the chance to view the Northern Lights dancing across the Icelandic skies on your visit but if not, why not take home some Icelandic Northern Lights—hand made, all natural, peppermint sugar candies in the amazing colours of the Northern Lights. Available in all the best tourist shops, hotels and the duty free store at Keflavik airport.

-ASF

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A Taste of the Good Life

Bringing French and Icelandic cuisine together in Þrír Frakkar

On a little corner in the little big city in the North is a small haven for the food lover. Behind the beautiful rouge exterior of Þrír Frakkar hjá Úlfari is a romantic dining room, small and intimate, like a French bistro in the Parisian Saint Michel, yet rich in Icelandic heritage through chef Úlfar Eysteinsson's artful fusion of French and Icelandic cuisine using primarily fresh Icelandic produce.

Specialising in fresh fish and known for his superb skills in creating rich flavours and a tender texture to seafood, Úlfar has earned a reputation as one of Iceland's most skilled chefs, marrying local traditions and fine French cuisine.

Úlfar's list of prestigious clientele is long and President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson is a regular customer, ordering take away to the presidential residence weekly and occasionally dining in-house.

Úlfar Eysteinsson and family bought the restaurant in 1989 and opened in the very last days of the beer prohibition. Úlfar kept the peculiar name, a name with dual reference to a long trench coat and the previous owners, two Frenchmen and a Frenchman's wife.

Þrír Frakkar hjá Úlfari is truly one of Reykjavik's hidden gems where fine dining and Icelandic family values come together in a feast for the palate!

-JB

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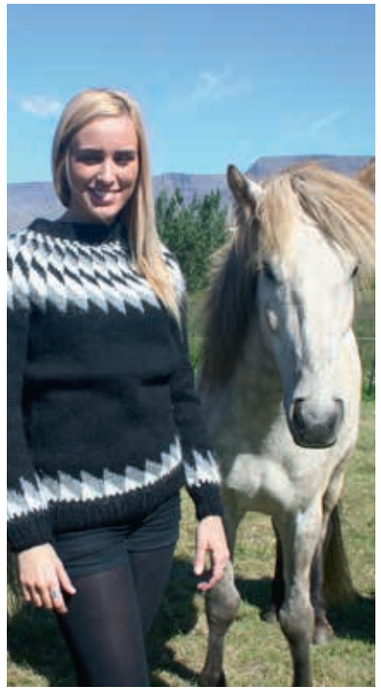
Stay Warm this Winter

Álafoss' wool keeps you warm and dry–just like the Icelandic sheep

Iceland is known for its ferocious winter storms. Generations of Icelanders have stayed warm, dry and comfortable wearing woollen clothing from the sheep that roam the mountains in this wild country. Icelandic wool is noted for its special qualities. It has a virtually waterproof outer layer and a soft, warm inner layer. The clothes are warm and shower-proof. This makes them especially comfortable and suitable for all weathers—unlike many wool clothes that end up a heavy, sodden mess when it rains.

Made in Iceland, Found in Álafoss

All the woollen clothing to be found in Álafoss is made in Iceland from Icelandic wool, ensuring that you can find these authentic qualities you are looking for. Today, the clothing ranges from traditional to high fashion. Many young designers have taken the Icelandic wool to create a whole new range of designs and colours, which gives plenty of choice for men, women and children alike. You'll find them at Álafoss alongside a stock of the traditional designs that have become a fashion statement in themselves the world over. For those who enjoy knitting themselves, balls of yarn, knitting accessories, patterns and everything associated with making the clothing, are available in the shop.



Living History

Álafoss is also a virtual museum. Built in 1896, it was here that the Icelandic woollen industry began and flourished. The mill itself has closed but the building now houses the Álafoss store. There are looms, pieces of machinery, vintage-style cash registers, original early phones and examples of equipment used to make the original company the powerhouse that drove Icelandic society for so many years in the 20th century. There is a small café which overlooks the waterfall that started it all.

It is the kind of store where you can relax and browse, enjoy the ambience and find those special gifts and personal items that are so rarely found in Europe or the rest of the world.

Just 20 minutes from Reykjavik lies the town of Mosfellsbær on the road to the north. There, after passing under the two bridges you will find a roundabout. Most traffic continues straight but if you turn right, you'll immediately see the red-roofed building of the old mill, built next to the álafoss or ála waterfall, from which the mill took its name.

-ASF

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Connoisseur's Delight

Hand-made knives by Palli are treasured across the world

Carefully carved out of diligently researched and prepared materials, often rare and always unusual, Palli's knives are now found in at least 85 countries of the world. When he makes a special knife, there can be quite a competition to own it.

Born from enthusiasm

Palli started carving knife handles over 25 years ago as a personal hobby. He enjoyed finding unusual materials to create the handles and took delight in carving each one carefully to match the individual blades.

Under the blade

Visit his workshop and you will most likely find yourself seated right under a collection of blades magnetically held to a bar on the ceiling above you. None has fallen yet! A true craftsman, he always chooses the best blades, sourcing them from as far away as Pakistan. Others come from a blacksmith in Denmark. Factory made blades come from Norway, Sweden and Germany. They are either made from fine Damascus steel, stainless steel or single high carbon steel: which keeps its sharp edge the best.

Nature's provision

What is special about these handles? Palli loves to wander the countryside, looking for new materials for his handles. Often, he will blend different materials together to form a composite handle that, when carved, will be unique. A horse's hoof, a reindeer's antler, a goat's horn, a hippo's tooth, elm, fossilized wood, ebony or even different Icelandic stones—these are but a few of the materials he uses to create a handle. Whilst most are found within Iceland's shores, his search also takes him to many different parts of the world.

The Patience of a Master

Sometimes, materials will require special treatment if they are to last and that can take time. Some woods need to dry slowly or they will split. Others, such as the fossilized tree he pulled from the water that was turning into brown coal, need more patient treatment. In this case, he wrapped it in plastic and for the next 6 years, he daily pricked a tiny hole in the covering to let just a bit more air in to dry it. Had he done it faster, it would have splintered and crumbled to dust. Such is the thought and care applied to each individual material that each handle stands out as carrying the touch of a master craftsman, a quality much sought–after.

Custom or catalogue—all are unique

Because each knife is hand made, it is a unique creation. He does have a catalogue but the images are just samples, as no knives are completely identical. He loves the challenge of experimenting with new materials. A 65 year-old dentist drill is pressed into use for intricate carvings. They can be ordered online or, in Iceland, can be found at Brynja, the handyman shop on Laugarvegur 29, Reykjavik's main shopping street and at his workshop in Mosfellsbær. It's worth the 15 minute trip there (from down town Reykjavik) to see the environment from which he draws his inspiration in his workshop next to the Álafoss waterfall.

-ASF

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A Cultural Metropolis

Reykjanes Duus Hús combines Culture and History

The often overlooked but 'must-visit' town of Reykjanesbær is the first sign of civilisation upon arrival in Iceland. Don't be bluffed by the small size of the community. The wealth of activities available to visitors and locals is extensive and locals are particularly proud of their heritage and the intimacy they share with the great North Atlantic Ocean crashing upon its rocky shores.

The best place to discover the long tradition of seamanship is at the Reykjanes Art Museum located in the Duus Hús Cultural Centre, one of Iceland's most remarkable historical documentations of life in ages past.

The Duus Hús Cultural Centre opened its doors in the spring of 2002 when the first stage was completed. In the years to come, the Cultural Centre grew from a single construction to a cluster of houses representing 100 years of architectural history in the region, the oldest being from 1877 and the most recent one from 1954. The choice of materials changed significantly from timber in 1877 to concrete in 1954.

Throughout history, the Duus Hús cluster has been a commercial centre for the local fishing industry and today, it is a memorial museum celebrating the region's long history with seamanship and fish processing.

A Veritable Armada of Vessels

The first house to open on 11th May 2002 was Bátasalurinn, where over 100 models of the Icelandic fleet have been collected. The oldest are replicas of 19th century vessels to modern 20th century trawlers. Grímur Karlsson, a former sea captain, built the majority of the collection. Other items of interest are wooden sculptures by Guðmundur Garðarsson, and souvenirs and pictures rooted in seamanship and fish processing.

The World of Art

Listasalurinn (art gallery) opened in April 2003 and numerous local and international artists have exhibited their work in the gallery. For instance, the summer 2012 exhibition was a collection of artwork from a large collection belonging to former sea captain Matthías Matthíasson and his wife Katrín M. Ólafsdóttir. Matthías Matthíasson collected art from around the world during his travels as a captain and was a friend and a benefactor to artists in the Faroe Islands, Denmark and in Iceland.

Gryfjan or the Pit Hole opened in Duus Hús on 11th June 2004, the day Reykjanesbær celebrated its tenth anniversary. Two years later, Bíósalurinn or the Cinema Room opened its doors for cultural activities, meetings, conferences, art exhibitions and theatre performances. Last but not least, it has served as a concert hall where most of the community's local artists have performed since its opening.

The last building to be incorporated into the museum is the Bryggjuhúsið or the Harbour house. It is one of the more important buildings in the Duus Hús cluster, and the goal is to make it a mirror image of the original.

To the local municipality, arts are an asset to the society of man, and the fusion of history and art makes the Duus Hús Cultural Centre a unique place to visit. Nearly 400,000 visitors have come to the art museum since the opening in 2002.

A Testament to the seamen of the past

The Fishing Season (Vertíð) exhibition that opened in June 2012 is a documentation of the pre-industrialised years when seamen would head out to sea on small rowboats.

Workers from all corners of the country would walk long distances to the shores of Reykjanes where work was plentiful during the winter season from 2nd February to 11th May. As early as the early 1800's, commercial vessels travelled to Iceland in Spring, stocked with foreign products and departed in the Autumn, laden with Icelandic seafood.

Toward the end of the 19th century, merchants set up shop along the coast of Iceland. The new commercial centre became the heart of small coastal communities erected as a result of the industry's expansion. Two of the buildings in the Duus cluster are former commercial centres.

Further in the past: The Viking World

If there is time to spare, a visit to Víkingaheimar or Viking World is a great way to end the day. It is the place to explore Norse Mythology, records of famous sagas and authentic turf houses where early settlers lived once upon a time.

-JB

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The Blue Lagoon's Hometown

Grindavík welcomes visitors to enjoy a lively fishing town's life

The Blue Lagoon is the most popular tourist destination in Iceland, and Grindavík is its hometown. The local authorities in Grindavík and tourism companies have in recent years performed outstanding work to strengthen tourism in the town. For example, opening the door for guests from the Blue Lagoon to experience Grindavík, as it takes only three minutes to drive to the centre of town.

Do you enjoy outdoor life, exercise, and adventurous activities?

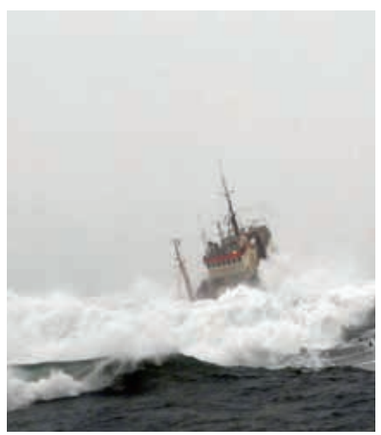
This friendly fishing town of three thousand people offers activities such as ATV / quad tours, caving and horse-riding. For those who want to get their blood moving by cycling, jogging, or walking, a 4 km walking and cycling path has been paved leading from the Blue Lagoon to Grindavík. There is also a great 18-hole golf course in the town.

Do you want to get in touch with the locals?

By the town harbour—the heart of Grindavík—are, for example, two cafés, two museums, shops and opportunities for tourists to see up close when Icelandic fishermen return to land their catch. Visitors can also have a look at the fish processing plant where the catch is processed. Grindavík is home to exceptional restaurants offering the best fish in the world, landed and processed in Grindavík!

Are you looking for accommodation?

If you are looking for a place to stay, Grindavík offers one of the best camping sites in Iceland which opened a few years ago. The site is by the new south coast road which connects Grindavík to South Iceland.



The camping site is first-rate and popular with tourists who wish to stay there for a couple of nights after they land in Iceland, or when they have come to the end of their trip and want to spend one or more days in Grindavík and its surroundings. There are also guesthouses in the town, as well as a hotel a short distance from the Blue Lagoon which specialises in showing visitors the Northern Lights.

Do you have a rental car?

When you drive, for example, from the Blue Lagoon, try taking a left turn and driving past Þorbjarnarfell mountain to Grindavík. Various information signs for tourists have been set up in the town. The signs include QR-codes. Maps and information brochures can be obtained at the Blue Lagoon and all over Grindavík. Visitors can also strike up a conversation with Grindavík locals; they are courteous, friendly, and happy to have people visit their town.

-VAG

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Mamma Mia

Tantalise Your Taste Buds and Satisfy Your Stomach

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

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

No restaurant in a fishing town would be complete without a selection of seafood dishes. Grindavík is famous for its saltfish or bacalao, as the Spanish call it, that is so popular in Mediterranean countries. Alongside this delicious cod dish, you will also find the freshest plaice, straight from the harbour just metres away.

Whether you are hankering for a hamburger or are looking for a traditional lamb or beef steak, you'll find them here, as this is a restaurant with a wide selection of dishes on its menu. Mamma Mia offers a choice of sandwiches with different original fillings, if you're looking for a lighter meal. With such a variety of meals available, you can visit often and try a new dish each time.

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

Mamma Mia has seating for 30 outside along with the 60 places inside. This makes it a convenient stop for lunch or an evening meal for tour groups visiting the museum. Mamma Mia is open from 11:30 am until 10 pm - or later, and you can order their pizzas to be delivered to your hotel, guesthouse or the campsite - even the Blue Lagoon and Northern Light Inn.

-ASF

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The Fisherman's Friend

Grindavík's cosy café culture

What I love about Café Bryggjan is its solid authenticity in a town that has served as one of Iceland's most important fishing centres for the last 500 years. Located on the quay of Grindavík's harbour, the popular fishermen's café has an almost museum-like feel to it. It is decorated with an interesting variety of sea-related memorabilia. Photo after photo of retired fishing vessels line the walls. The well-worn wooden floor would no doubt have some stories to tell, if floors could talk. About the only thing that might seem out of place is the plaster bust of John Lennon that is suspended from the ceiling and a large poster of the Beatle above the piano in the corner of the room. The owners are retired fishermen who just happen to be big Beatle fans!

When the weather allows, you can sit outside on the deck to sip your coffee, tea or glass of wine, or enjoy the cosy atmosphere inside where light lunches of soups and sandwiches or home-made cakes are served. On Wednesdays, the house speciality is a traditional lamb soup and on Fridays it's lobster soup, using the freshest ingredients, of course.

Every year, Café Bryggjan hosts its very own 'Cultural Week' with some of Iceland's well known poets, writers, and musicians, performing their works. And if you stick around long enough, someone may just strike up an old Beatle song on that piano in the corner!

-EMV

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The Art of Bacalao in Grindavík

Salthúsið Restaurant takes this famous fish to a new level of taste

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

The Salthúsið (Salt House) Restaurant of Grindavík is the first restaurant in Iceland specialising in the lowly codfish, bringing it up to new heights.

Once the staple of the poor, baccalao has been a celebrated ingredient in Mediterranean, African, and Caribbean cuisine for many centuries.

Benefiting from its proximity to the sea, Salthusið's á la carte menu features beautifully presented seafood that couldn't be more fresh: whether it's cod, haddock or catfish or even lobster—it all depends on the 'catch of the day'. Not a fish lover? The menu also features items such as marinated fillet of lamb, beef tenderloin and BBQ ribs amongst others.

Linger over a glass of wine from Salthusið's extensive wine list while listening to the soft ambient music in front of the wood-burning stove in the dining room that serves to warm and brighten those rainy days that are sometimes a part of life in Grindavík.

Aside from the á la carte evening menu, there is more casual fare for the lunch crowd, a café with free Internet access and a bar which is popular with the locals on weekends.

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

-EMV

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History Brought to Life

The Snorrastofa Cultural and Medieval Centre is in Reykholt

Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), Iceland's best known Saga writer and scholar, is the author of such important and famous works as Heimskringla, which is one of the most important sources of Scandinavian history, Snorra Edda, a handbook on poetry and mythology and probably one of the very best Sagas of Icelanders, Egil's Saga, the story of the Viking poet Egill Skallagrímsson.

Snorri's records of the Old Norse language and Nordic mythology are invaluable to modern scholars. The quality of his writing made him the foremost historical writer of medieval times throughout Europe. His style, bringing his characters to life, makes fascinating reading even today.

Snorri was a wealthy and powerful chieftain in the age of unrest and civil war preceding Iceland's loss of independence. He was murdered by his enemies in his home on the 23rd September 1241.

Snorrastofa-A Living Memorial

Snorrastofa, the Cultural and Medieval Centre in Reykholt in West Iceland, was founded in memory of Snorri. It is situated on his ancient homestead, which is considered one of Iceland's most noteworthy historical sites. Snorrastofa manages research, a library, an exhibition about Snorri and conference facilities. It also runs a tourist reception and a souvenir shop, which offers books, postcards and Icelandic designs, some exclusively for sale in Snorrastofa. A new exhibition, 'The

Snorri Sturluson Saga', can now be visited in Snorrastofa. It tells the story of Snorri's exciting life, addressing issues such as upbringing, education, writing, properties and manors.

Snorri's bath (a geothermally heated pool) can be seen outside along with the tunnel which led from his private manor directly out to the pool.

A statue of Snorri by Gustav Vigeland stands in front of the old district school, which was used between 1931 and 1997. Today the beautiful building, designed by Guðjón Samúelsson, is administrated by Snorrastofa, offering apartments and study facilities for scholars, along with meeting and conference facilities.

The Reykholt Churches

There are two churches in Reykholt: the old church, consecrated in 1887, now beautifully restored by the National Museum of Iceland, and the new church built between 1988 and 1996. The new church is known for its strikingly designed windows (designed by Valgerður Bergsdóttir) and its acoustics. The church is famous for its concerts all year round. A classical music festival of the highest quality, The Reykholt Music Festival is held annually on the last weekend in July.

Snorrastofa's exhibition, "Snorri Sturluson's Saga", can be visited all year round. During the summer season, (1st May – 31st August), the opening hours are from 10 to 18 every day, and during the winter season, from 10 to 17 on weekdays and, if booked in advance, during weekends.

-AMB

Deep in Natural Wonders

Gamli Bærinn Bed & Breakfast at Húsafell

Driving north towards Akureyri in the Spring, I decided to wander off the ring road near the town of Borgarnes to do some exploring. Forty minutes later, I found myself at Húsafell—an area rich in history with several extraordinary waterfalls, two scenic glaciers and some pretty amazing people.

Húsafell is a service village nowadays, but in former times it was a sprawling estate with a farm and rectory under the care of the 18th century Pastor Snorri Björnason. The old farmhouse from 1908, known today as Gamli Bærinn, has been renovated and turned into a quaint bed and breakfast that offers sleeping bag accommodation and made up beds. Owners Steinunn and Sæmundur will be more than happy to point you in the right direction to the natural wonders in the area, among them:

- Surtshellir - a lava tube, the longest cave in Iceland at (1970 m or 6463 ft)
- Hraunfossar - a series of low cascading falls that come up through the lava plain.
- Barnafoss falls
- Langjökull and Eiríksjökull Glaciers

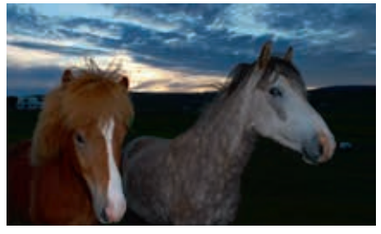
Beautifully sculpted rocks, the work of sculptor and musician Páll Guðmundsson, himself the great, great, great grandson of Pastor Snorri, are scattered around the grounds. A fascinating artist and musician, Páll is also known for his marimba-like instrument made of stones. Páll and the Sigur Rós band did a performance using the steinnharp, as it is called in Icelandic, several years ago in the Surtshellir lava tube cave.

-EMV

Enjoy Icelandic Farm Life

A Superb View of the Dale from Steindórsstaðir

Steindórsstaðir in Reykholtsdalur Valley is a fully functional farm that offers bed and breakfast in a warm and welcoming farmhouse. Just a stone's throw away are some of the most beautiful places in Borgarfjörður. The Icelandic highlands await above the farm with glaciers, lava caves and panoramic views of extraordinary mountains.



The same family has owned the farm since 1828 and the old residential home, where the guest rooms are, was built in 1937 after a fire had destroyed the turf house that had been the homestead for centuries. The fire occurred during a dry spell so it was impossible to control and the family lost nearly all their belongings. They only managed to save some of their better clothing and odds and ends from the living room. The household, a total of eleven people, took up residence in the sheep shed where they lived for three months until they could move into the then new house.

Rising from the ashes

The top floor was added around 1950 and the first floor was enlarged around 1965. Total renovation of the building was conducted from spring 2009 until the opening of the guesthouse in June 2010. A large terrace with a hot tub is situated in front of the house where guests can relax, enjoy the view and languish after a long day of travelling.

In the vicinity are Reykholt, Deildartunghver, the largest hot spring in Europe in terms of volume of water, Barnafoss, Hraunfossar and Húsafell. An interesting hiking route along Rauðsgil offers a wonderful view of the many waterfalls in the canyon and the forest of Steindórsstaðir is peaceful and inviting. It's an ideal base to travel from around the valleys of Borgarfjörður, seeing all the

sights and returning in the evening for some pampering and rest.

Enjoy the comforts of home

Adding to the attraction is the fact that this is a working farm with cows, horses, sheep, forestry and corn growing. The farm animals and the fact that this is a home make it exceptionally interesting and inviting. Staying at such a diverse Icelandic farm is educational as well as comfortable. Enjoy Icelandic hospitality—it's first class.

-AMB

Between Mountains and Sea

Kast Guesthouse offers a Natural Stress-Relieving Break

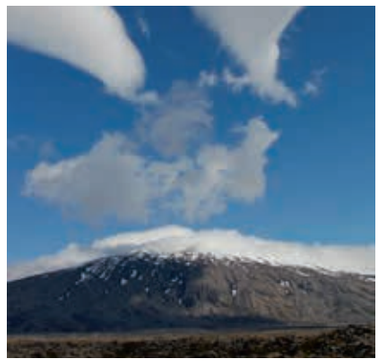
With Snæfellsjökull glacier towering above, steep mountains behind it and the sea before it, Lýsudal farm, on the southern side of the Snæfells peninsula, has the best of all worlds. In 2011, the family opened Kast guesthouse on its land to share its beauty with others.

When we were in the area this year, we wanted to stay there as it is such a beautiful location. Ten of the double rooms have en suite bathrooms and the remaining six are with shared bathrooms. There are two rooms that take up to four people each with sleeping bags. There are toilets and cooking facilities. The rooms have large windows revealing an unobstructed panorama of nature.

Close by, the large camp site has excellent facilities including electricity for campers and caravans. Sheltered by the mountain, it's a peaceful location.

Healthy Attractions of Nature

What draws people to this area, besides the famous volcano and its glacier—which just beg to be climbed—are the ruggedly breathtaking bird cliffs, with thousands of seagulls, fulmars, kittiwakes and arctic terns, swirling around them just minutes away. For those interested in fishing, there are lakes just across the road to enjoy. The streams from spectacular mountain waterfalls are crystal clear and, just 2 minutes away, the swimming pool at Lýsuhóll is renowned for its nutrient rich waters' cleansing and healing effects on the skin.



Travel the Area the Natural Way

With so many beautiful vistas surrounding the Kast guesthouse, this land should be enjoyed the natural way—on horseback. The name Kast actually comes from the meadow behind the guesthouse where the mares go to cast their foals. Horses are a part of the environment here and bring great enjoyment.

There are tours of between one and three hours daily, with longer tours also available for groups. In fact, groups tours in winter are really special, as the guesthouse is open all year round.

Strength for the Day

Whether you are planning vigorous or relaxed activities in the fresh air, you will want a good breakfast to start with. Here, Lydía, the guesthouse manager, has an ace up her sleeve. Her brother is a baker who supplies a wide range of freshly baked foods to the restaurant every day. Seating up to 50 guests the elegant restaurant also provides evening dinners for guests and visitors.

Kast Guesthouse is a tranquil place to stay amidst an area rich in interest. Bookings can be made online. You will not be disappointed.

Kast guesthouse offers 16 double rooms and a restaurant that welcomes up to 50 people. Groups bigger than 10 people get a 15% discount. You can book online or just show up. "Ekkert mál!"

-ASF

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A Dream Come True

Hótel Varmahlíð - from Dream to Reality

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

Owning the Dream

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

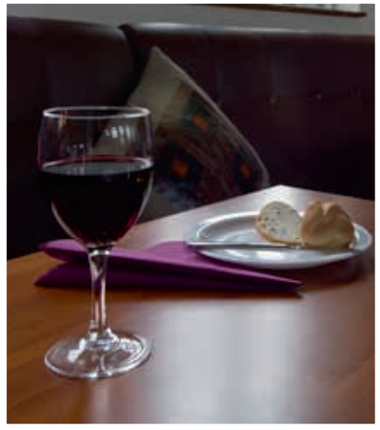
Filled from the Food Chest

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

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

Three-Star Comfort

Each of the nineteen rooms at Hótel Varmahlíð has an en suite bathroom, television, alarm clock, and hair dryer. Its three-star rating ensures that nothing will be lacking and all overnight stays include a breakfast buffet. Hótel Varmahlíð is ideal for conferences and special occasions with the restaurant catering to the unique needs of each group and the hotel comfortably sleeping almost forty people.



An Enchanting Vision for All

Svanhildur’s enthusiasm and knowledge of the area aids guests in discovering hiking paths that lie just up the sloping hills surrounding Hótel Varmahlíð.

Tree-covered paths provide pleasant hiking on windy days, while short, yet rewarding walks are said to reveal nine churches standing tall on Skagafjörður’s horizon on a clear day and will enchant visitors to Hótel Varmahlíð, just as it enchanted its owner years ago.

-KB

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Sauðárkrókur’s Kitchen

Ólafshús Restaurant Feeds the Town

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

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

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

Kaffi Krókur–the Coffeehouse and Pub

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

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

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

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

-KB

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Romance of the North

Dine in the sun in Siglufjörður

Siglufjörður feels like it is as far north as you can go. This former herring centre is set in a beautiful fjord; a very popular place to hike from and enjoy the extraordinary birdlife and nature. The pristine beauty of the landscape is matched only by the atmosphere of the town, where there is much to see and do year round. Following the opening of the tunnel, it is a very quick and easy drive from Akureyri to the inspiring atmosphere of this warm and welcoming fishing town.

The Bright Yellow Restaurant

When you have built up a good appetite in the nature, dine at one of the best restaurants outside Reykjavik and enjoy the romantic setting, sitting in the warm sun on the terrace overlooking the harbour, with the mountains of the fjord behind.

Hannes Boy is the bright yellow building right on the harbour, just a few feet from the boats, landing their fresh fish. Inside, the wood-beamed restaurant, with its lantern wall lights, wooden tables and chairs is bright and cheerful. The menu includes fish and lamb and you're guaranteed a delicious meal in.

The Red Café

If you'd prefer something lighter, Kaffi Rauðka in the equally bright red building next door is your place. This is a lively and fun place - especially on Friday and Saturday nights, with its live bands. It's a great spot for lunch, for getting to know the local people and enjoying their lifestyle.

-ASF

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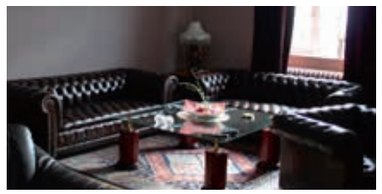
On Top of the World

Experience Siglufjörður's beauty from Hvanneyri Guesthouse

Many visitors looking for the real essence of Iceland find it when visiting the northerly town of Sigulfjörður, 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.

-ASF

Hvanneyri Guesthouse
Aðalgata 10 • 580 Siglufirði
+354 467 1506
order@hvanneyri.com
www.hvanneyri.com

Hear the Singing

All that breaks the stillness is the song of the birds

In early Spring, birds arrive from all parts of the world, dressing in the finery of their summer colours for the mating season as the days grow longer. The lake is as clear as glass in the stillness of the evening twilight, broken only by the birdsong.

We are high in the north, on the Tröllaskagi Peninsula at the Brimnes Hotel and Bungalows, located on the banks of Ólafsfjörður. With the opening of the tunnel, it is just a short drive from Siglufjörður. The hotel offers 11 double rooms with bath and 8 Finnish-style log cabins, accommodating 5 - 6 people each. The self-contained holiday cottages are perfect for families or groups and include a lounge, kitchenette, bath, ground-floor bedroom and sleeping loft for the kids, as well as a cosy, private hot-tub on each veranda, where you can relax over a bottle of wine from the hotel's extensive wine list. The hotel's restaurant offers everything from quick snacks to full course meals.

Manager, Axel Pétur Ásgeirsson, is always on hand to advise and organise sightseeing and activities in the region: boat trips, trout fishing on the lake, whale-watching, mountain hiking, diving, skiing, horse riding, golf, river rafting, snowmobiling, visits to art exhibitions, museums, historical places of interest and, of course, bird watching. Bikes are available to rent as are kayaks for the lake.

-ASF

Brimnes hótel
Bylgjubyggð 2 • 625 Ólafsfirði
+354 466 2400
hotel@brimnes.is
www.brimnes.is

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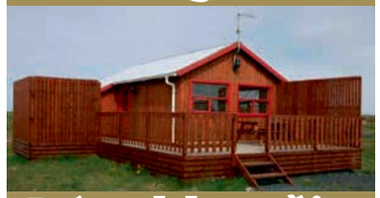
Þóroddstaðir
+354 893 7523 •www.cottage.is

Aðalbakarí
Bakery is by the main square of Siglufjörður
Great variety of freshly baked breads, buns, sandwiches, pastries and cakes along with a lunch menu with soups and pasta.
Aðalgötu 28 • 580 Siglufirði +354 4671720

Allinn restaurant specialises in Icelandic home cooking and pizzas. It is situated in a beautifully restored house overlooking Siglufjörður's main square. It is reasonably priced and suits people of all ages.
Aðalgata 30 • 580 Siglufjörður +354 467 1111

A New Competition

A Bird for a Million – The only competition of its kind in Iceland

The 'Bird for a Million' competition is now being held for the third time. This competition for the best bird photograph taken on Tröllaskagi peninsula is fast becoming established and the number of people who have taken part has grown considerably since its inception. The selection committee therefore faced a difficult task when selecting the best photographs. However, the committee was unanimous concerning the winning picture, an unusual photograph taken by the diver, Erlendur Guðmundsson. The committee's statement said the following: "A very special picture, an unusual angle, and full of life. It is as if the bird at the front of the photograph is expressing itself to the photographer. The mountain in the background also adds to the picture. The selection committee is in agreement that this is the best photograph."

The subjects of the photographs were very diverse as would be expected. The winning pictures differed in one respect from those in the first competition; then, the top three pictures were all taken on the island of Grímsey, but this year, none of the pictures were taken in that location.

The selection committee was composed of the nature photographers Jóhann Óli Hilmarsson (chairman), Daníel Bergmann, and Örlygur Kristfinnsson, artist and director of the Herring Era Museum in Siglufjörður.

The Competition Organisers

The organisers of the contest are, as before, the largest tourism companies in the area, that is, Hotel Brimnes in Ólafsfjörður (www.brimnes.is) and Rauðka in Siglufjörður which operates the Hannes Boy, Kaffi Rauðka and the Blue House restaurants (www.raudka.is)

What is Bird for a Million?

The area

Tröllaskagi is the name of a large and mountainous peninsula between the Skagafjörður and Eyjafjörður fjords. The islands of Drangey, Málmey, Grímsey, and Hrísey are included. The area is home to rich birdlife and diverse habitats: beaches and mudflats, shallow waters, bird cliffs, rivers and streams, ponds and lakes, moors and uplands, as well as woodlands–both cultivated woodlands and natural birch forest. There are bird watching hides in a few locations: at the mouth of Eyjafjarðará river, in Krossanesborgir, in Hrísey, by Þóroddsstaðatjörn pond, and in Siglufjörður.

Islands

Two of the islands have large bird cliffs and rich seabird life. Drangey is a large rocky island in Skagafjörður fjord. Ascending the island has been made easy for all fairly sure-footed people. The main nesting birds are Fulmars, Kittiwakes, Brünnich's Guillemots, Common Guillemots, Razorbills, and Puffins. Drangey has the largest Brünnich's Guillemot colony in Iceland, apart from the large cliffs in the Westfjords.

Grímsey Island on the Arctic Circle is famous for its bird life. All species of auk which nest along the coast of Iceland can be found there, and the last nesting site of Little Auks in Iceland was on the island. A walk along the edge of the bird cliffs in Grímsey will leave a lasting impression on anyone.

The island of Hrísey in Eyjafjörður fjord has a variety of habitats and diverse bird life. Hrísey is best known for Ptarmigans which live there year round, often in large flocks, as they are protected on the island. Gyr Falcons regularly visit Hrísey and prey on the ptarmigans. There is a large Arctic Tern colony and Common Eider colony on the northern part of the island.

Wetlands

Wetlands can be found in various locations. The Friðland Svarfdæla nature reserve was the first wetland nature reserve in Iceland. The area was protected at the initiative of local people. Among the birds which nest at Ólafsfjarðarvatn lake are Great Northern Divers, Whooper Swans, and Horned Grebes. A number of birds nest in the innermost part of Siglufjörður, from Langeyrartjörn to Háeyri. There is, for example, a large Common Eider colony in that area, and Harlequin Ducks are seen regularly. There are lakes all around the Fljót district; for example, Miklavatn and Hópsvatn. Further south in Skagafjörður fjord is Lake Höfðavatn, which is well known for its bird life. In and around the innermost part of Eyjafjörður there are well-known wetlands by the mouth of the river Hörgá, in Krossanesborgir, and by the mouth of Eyjafjarðará by Akureyri Airport.

Beaches and woodlands

Mudflats are found in many places in fjords, coves, and inlets; for example, by Akureyri, Siglufjörður, and in the Fljót district. Large flocks of waders make a stop there during the spring and fall migration. There are substantial woodlands; for example, the Kjarnaskógur forest by Akureyri, in Svarfaðardalur valley, in Siglufjörður, and by Hólar. The main nesting birds are Redwings, Goldcrests, and Redpolls.

Registration and information

The best bird photo is worth one million Icelandic kronur.

Between 14th March and 30th September 2013, visitors to the Tröllaskagi peninsula can participate in a photography competition for the best bird photo taken in the Tröllaskagi area. There is such a rich variety of bird life on Tröllaskagi that there are many different opportunities for photographers to get great bird photos.

Registration Information:
Brimnes Hotel: hotel@brimnes.is
Rauðka: raudka@raudka.is
The entrance fee for participation is 5,000 kronur of which 1,000 kronur is donated to Fuglavernd – BirdLife Iceland. The deadline for submission is 5th September.
Full details are on the website www.birdforamillion.com

Jóhann Óli Hilmarsson

The winning photo, Fulmars by Erlendur Guðmundsson

Passion for Sails and Whales

North Sailing is where whales meet tourists and the romance of sail lives on

When you love something, you spend as much time as you can nurturing a connection with it. You introduce your family and get them involved, too. That's how one family in Húsavík pioneered whale watching in Iceland.

Being a seafaring family, they have a love and respect for the sea and its creatures. They love the boats – and have a special affinity for restoring classic oak vessels to their former glory, with the addition of modern amenities and then inviting others to join them to meet the whales and the birds as they sail the Arctic seas in the north of Iceland.

From the scrapyard to sail to the whales

It all started with the Knörrinn in 1994. This was a 20 ton oak fishing boat that was destined for the scrapyard. With a lot of hard work and loving care, brothers Árni and Hörður spent the winter restoring it to its original polished glory and a new saga began.

Beginning in the small town of Húsavík, they took visitors whale and nature watching on the Knörrinn . Word spread like wildfire and the tours became so popular that more boats were restored to meet the demand for tours. These are not cold, unemotional trips but a family's close relationship with the whales, who seem as drawn to the quiet wooden boats as the visitors are to them. It's a relationship that rubs off on all who take the trips and the sound of singing can often be heard from the boats as they return to harbour.

Striking a chord in the heart

By just their 3rd year, 12,000 visitors were pouring into Húsavík to go on a tour. To date, over 300,000 have taken tours with North Sailing, which is Iceland's most experienced whale- and nature-watching company.

The turn of the sails

The next landmark came just after the turn of the century with a dream coming true. The 19th century, two-masted schooner, the Haukur, was restored and, in 2003, it set sail on whale and puffin tours. What can be a more beautiful experience than to put to sea under the sails of a traditional schooner? The whales seem to like it, too, often coming right up alongside, so a second schooner, the Hildur, was added to the fleet in 2009. These are the only former shark fishing schooners in Iceland. And now, for 2013, a schooner built in Germany in 1952, the Opal, will join the fleet.

Live Under Sail

The Hildur is equipped with comfortable living and sleeping accommodation for longer trips. Now you can sail on a 2-day expedition, catching fish for dinner, cooked by the on-board chef, watching giant whales leap out of the sea beside you, visiting Arctic islands and seeing the puffins and many other species up close, stand on the Arctic Circle – and get a certificate to prove you did, whilst marvelling at the midnight sun that never drops below the horizon in summer.

Greenland is a land rarely visited by tourists but the Hildur will take you on an unforgettable week tour through drifting icebergs, past historic scientific sites, with the chance to hike up to a ridge with a spectacular view and see the wild life like musk oxen or snow hares or a stroll on the beach before a bonfire and barbeque, story telling and singing evening. Try sea swimming in the surprisingly warm, 13° waters or being awed by terrific mountain peaks. This is a trip of a lifetime you will never forget.

Now from Akureyri and Ólafsfjörður, too

Today, with seven boats at their disposal, North Sailing also takes whale-watchers from the towns of Akureyri and Ólafsfjörður out into the longest fjord in Iceland: Eyjafjörður.

Restoring on land and sea

The company rented out part of its ticket office as a restaurant. Set in a beautiful wooden building on the harbourside, Gamli Baukur restaurant was soon to expand for more guests and has become a venue for cultural events. From the beginning, the history of the coastal culture was presented in displays of different objects, adding to the seafaring theme. By 2007, North Sailing was running the restaurant, too.

Not only have the brothers restored these oak vessels but, in 2006, they took a derelict house in Húsavík and rebuilt it above their new head office. It began its new life as Café Skuld, now one of the most popular spots in the town during the summertime. Today, besides the food and drinks, you'll also find a fascinating souvenir shop there, too.

Ride, sightsee and sail

Many people like to combine whale watching with horse riding or sightseeing. North Sailing makes provision for these and tailor-made tours, too.

A trip to Iceland is made complete by a tour with North Sailing and you'll go home with amazing memories and stories to tell.

-ASF

North Sailing
Hafnarsétt 9 • 640 Húsavík
+354 464 7272
info@nordursigling.is
www.nordursigling.is

Taking your breath away

The unsurpassed and unforgettable beauty of Eskifjörður

Surrounded by snowcovered mountains skiable mountains, Mjóeyri looks like the set for a fantasy film. Cabins perch on a strip of land reaching into the glass-smooth fjörd, the light from the mountains and sky reflected on its surface. At night, this is a playground for the Northern Lights, with nothing to obstruct the view as they sweep and dance across the sky.

Skiing holidays don't get better than this or do they? There are slopes to suit every taste but, for the experienced, there is the skidoo tow up the mountain a thrilling trip in both directions, with awesome views to drink in.

Ski to the Sea

This is a ski resort that lives up to its reputation. Whether you've gone up on a ski lift or been towed up the steep mountain side, the slopes will bring you all the way home - to the cabins on the sea's edge.

Eskifjörður is a small community where everyone enjoys company and sharing their lives. Museums are closed at this time of year - but, no problem, the key is right there to open up. The same applies to the other facilities of this picturesque Eastern village, where guests become part of the family and where skiing is in the blood.

Snows last a long time here, and you will be tempted to extend your stay once you get here. It's truly a skier's dream come true with so many slopes to try.

-ASF

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www.mjoeyri.is

A Class from the Past

Seyðisfjörður's Hótel Aldan surrounds Guests with elegance

When arriving at one of the furthest points in East Iceland, surrounded by magnificent views, one can almost feel the sparks of creativity combined with the peacefulness the area has to offer. Known as something of a trendy place, musicians and artists from all over Iceland and abroad have been attracted to Seyðisfjörður's flourishing cultural scene.

Starry Nights and Stellar Food

Seyðisfjörður's Norwegian–style wooden houses, dating from early 20th century, make the village unique in Iceland. Hótel Aldan is located in two of those gems, divided into Hótel Aldan and Hótel Snæfell.

Hótel Aldan is in what used to be the bank of Seyðisfjörður for almost a century. Elegantly furnished with antiques imported from Denmark and soft furnishings from India, the bedrooms are the picture of gentle relaxation, especially when guests can cherish the starry night sky from the skylights above their beds.

Several of the rooms boast adjoining sleeping quarters in a recessed alcove, which are sure to be a popular cosy nook for children. Immaculately clean rooms with quality linens and down duvets add a touch of luxury.

Hótel Aldan also houses the restaurant, a treasure on its own, where traditional lamb and langoustine dishes, as well as fresh fish from the fjord are featured. Many dishes are seasoned with herbs, handpicked from the mountains above the fjord every summer.

Collected specially for the restaurant, these fragrant flowers and herbs give Hótel Aldan's signature dishes their distinctive flair. The classy restaurant is perfect for a romantic autumn evening dinner in elegant surroundings on the edge of the world.

Hótel Snæfell, a more budget option, has total of nine rooms in a charming wooden house from 1908 located at the mouth of the Fjarðará River with views across the fjord.

Recreational highlights include midnight kayaking (in summer only), attempting the challenging 'Seven Peaks Hike', mountain biking, sea angling and bird watching at Skálanes.

-ASF

Hótel Aldan
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hotelaldan@simnet.is
www.hotelaldan.com

Comfortable Hotel Bláfell

Small town charm in an historical setting

At the harbour on one of East Iceland's numerous winding fjords, lies the country Hotel Bláfell in the tiny fishing village of Breiðdalsvik, pop. 139. The family run, log cabin style hotel is imbued with the scent of fresh pine that greets you as you enter. In the lounge, guests can relax on lovely sprawling leather sofas with a nice cup of tea, or make use of the free wi-fi connection. Each of the recently renovated 30 standard, family or deluxe rooms, comes with private bath, tv and telephone.

Hotel Bláfell is known for its down-to-earth home-style cooking, offering its guests a full menu of satisfying traditional Icelandic and international favourites. Owners Friðrik Árnason and Hrafnhildur Hafsteinsdóttir and their staff are more than happy to help with suggestions of what to see and do in the area.

In the summer of 2011, Friðrik and Hrafnhildur opened the Kaupfjelag Café and Tourist Information Centre, just a few metres from the hotel, where guests can browse the well-stocked gift shop, bursting with arts and crafts made by local townspeople, including beautiful hand-knitted sweaters, paintings, decorative items and souvenirs. The café offers a selection of light meals such as sandwiches, salads, soups with fresh bread, as well as a variety of home baked cakes and pastries. Decorated with a collection of vintage memorabilia from the town's residents, Friðrik and Hildur pay tribute to the memory of this historic building which has been a part of life in Breiðdalfjörður since 1956.

The unspoilt beauties of Breiðdalur

Breiðdalur Valley shares in the rich heritage of East Iceland often overlooked by mainstream tourists and, as one of Iceland's hidden treasures, the wide and verdant valley is just begging to be explored. Uncountable waterfalls descend from Breiðdalur's many peaks, and just about every farm in the valley is backed by its very own 'private' waterfall.

Picnic spots abound in the valley, as well as opportunities for horse riding and salmon fishing and you can camp just about anywhere that is not farm land.

A most fascinating museum

The Gamla Kaupfélag is Breiðdalsvík's oldest building (1906), housing the district's Heritage and Geology Museum, where the lives and works of two of Breiðdalur's most famous scholars are showcased: Stefan Einarsson, prolific writer, linguist and grammarian and the world-renowned British volcanologist Dr. George P. Walker who spent many years doing research in and around Breiðdalur Valley. Both are recipients of the distinguished Order of the Falcon, Iceland's highest honour.

-EMV

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Sólvöllum 14 • 760 Breiðdalsvík
+354 475 6770
info@hotelblafell.is
www.hotelblafell.is

Dine in the Langoustine Capital

Humarhöfnin satisfies the hunger for whole langoustine in Höfn

Iceland is known for some of the finest fresh fish in the world and a large share of the country's catch is landed at Höfn í Hornafirði, on the south-east coast. Höfn (which sounds like 'Hup' to our ears and means harbour) is also known as the langoustine capital of Iceland, where several thousand visitors gather in the town for the annual Humarhátið (Langoustine) Festival, to be held on the weekend of 21st - 23rd June.

You would expect the langoustine capital of Iceland to have a fine-dining restaurant that can do justice to the lovely little crustacean. The Humarhöfnin sea-food restaurant, which has been a big success since it was opened over 6 years ago by Anna Þorsteinsdóttir, her brother Ari Þorsteinsson and their spouses, has definitely earned that accolade.

A menu to entice the gastronomic connoisseur

Popular with tourists from the Mediterranean countries, Humarhöfnin is the only restaurant in Iceland that serves whole langoustine. (The concept is still new in Iceland, so each diner who orders langoustine receives illustrated instructions on the finer points of using the lobster cracker and fork that come with the dish.) The menu was created and developed by the French chef Jacques DuPont and his many dishes such as the beautifully presented 'Mix of Whole Langoustine and Tails' and the famous 'Black Magic Sauce' have been very successful. Paired with one of Humarhöfnin's specially selected wines, you are in line for an absolute feast. Also on the menu, the arctic char is a delight. The crème brûlée, made from local eggs and imported Madagascar vanilla will have you swooning and you might want or need to order a double portion.

The casual, bright and lively décor fits Humarhöfnin's harbour location and the friendly wait staff will be happy to point out the very boat that brought in the day's catch, moored at the docks just a short distance away. The building itself was originally the town co-op before it was totally renovated and transformed into this beautiful restaurant. There is an exhibit on the 2nd floor which portrays the history of the house.

If you are a langoustine aficionado, you can fly, drive or take a bus to Höfn where you will find your seafood haven awaiting you.

-EMV

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www.humarhofnin.is

Eating well in Höfn

Kaffi Hornið Hits the Spot

Kaffi Hornið in Höfn í Hornafirði has a friendly, laid back atmosphere that puts you at ease the moment you walk in the door. The Finnish wooden interior and cosy tea lights flickering on each table lend a feeling of warmth to this established restaurant, which has been run by the same couple, Ingólfur Einarsson and Kristin Óladóttir since it opened 13 years ago.

Making use of the celebrated ingredients from the Vatnajökull region as much as possible, Kaffi Hornið puts emphasis on the prized langoustine for which Höfn is known. Not to be confused the North American lobster, langoustine is also called Dublin Bay prawns, Norway lobster or scampi and imparts a more delicate flavour and texture than their larger cousins.

Specialties of the House

Chef Ingólfur offers a variety of absolutely fresh langoustine dishes including pasta with langoustine in a cognac-cream sauce, roasted langoustine with vegetables and garlic sauce, grilled langoustine with salad and even an intriguing langoustine pizza. Many of the seafood dishes come with a fabulously crunchy Swiss rösti which attests to Ingólfur's 2 years of chef training in Zermatt, Switzerland.

A hamburger calling?

In case you are homesick for a hamburger, Kaffi Hornið's thick and juicy hamburgers will fit the bill, easily putting others to shame. Made with 120 g of pure Icelandic beef from nearby farms, Kaffi Hornið's ever popular signature hamburger is topped with mounds of melted cheese, bacon, onions and mushrooms, and comes with a generous portion of french fries. Another filling lunch option is the legendary club sandwich, which is popular among locals.

Craving vegetables

If somewhere along your way you didn't get your daily dose of fresh vegetables, Kaffi Hornið offers a lunchtime soup with homemade bread and your choice of vegetables from the salad bar, available daily until 4 pm. Last, but not least, there is a fine selection of homemade cakes and desserts including organic ice cream from the nearby Árbær dairy farm. The addition of Icelandic liquorice to many of the more ordinary flavours like chocolate and vanilla turns this ice cream into a uniquely Icelandic dairy treat that is hard to resist.

Not to be missed

Located right on the main road that passes through the centre of Höfn, Ingólfur and Kristín welcome you to pop in for a friendly meal whenever you are in town.

-EMV

Kaffi Hornið
Hafnarbraut 42 • 780 Höfn
+354 478 2600
kaffihornid@eldhorn.is
www.kaffihornid.is

VATNAJÖKULSÞJÓÐGARÐUR
NATIONAL PARK

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Vatnajökull National Park is Iceland's newest protected area, established in 2008. With a total area of roughly 13,200 km² it is by far the largest national park in Iceland as well as in Western Europe.

Key features of the park are the ice cap of the Vatnajökull Glacier (8,200 km²) and several highly active volcanic systems within and outside the ice cap. The interplay of ice and fire is the single most important force in shaping the nature of the park. As a result, one can find in one place an unparalleled range of volcanic-, geothermal- and other landscape features.

We offer information at our three Visitor Centres, Gljúfrastofa, Snæfellsstofa and Skaftafellsstofa. Information Centres are situated at Kirkjubæjarklaustur and Höfn.
More information at our website **www.vjp.is**

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Gljúfrastofa

Snæfellsstofa

Skaftafellsstofa

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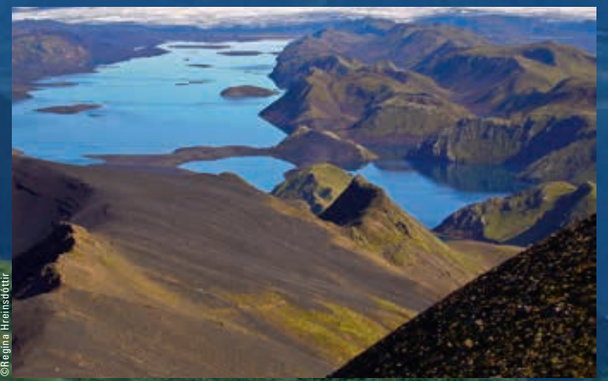
Dettifoss ▲

© Skarphéðinn G. Þórsson
▲ Hiking Geldingafell, Snæfell in the distance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For more information on Vatnajokull National Park, please visit our website **www.vjp.is**

PORT hönnun

On Top of the World

A timid soul's approach to the mighty Vatnajökull

Bed down for the night in the heart of the Vatnajökull district at Vagnsstaðir Youth Hostel, just 28 km east of the Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon. Sleeping bag accommodation, linen rental, a well equipped kitchen, dining and lounge areas, as well as 3 fully equipped cottages are offered. There is a campground with good sanitary facilities. The coast, just 1500 m from Vagnsstaðir provides numerous possibilities for scenic walks and bird watching. Maps of the area are available at the hostel.

The weather report was looking good—a full day of sunshine ahead of me and temperatures above 10°C. I was on my way to a face to face encounter with the world's 3rd largest glacier, the mighty Vatnajökull. This trip would mark a couple of firsts for me—my first time ever to set foot on a glacier, and my first time to travel by snowmobile. Needless to say I was really excited!

I first met Kristján and Bjarney, of Glacier Jeeps, at our pre-arranged meeting place: the crossroads of Route No.1 and F985. This is the official meeting place for all Glacier Jeep summer tours. Glacier Jeeps has years of experience conducting jeep, snowmobile and hiking tours on the glacier since 1994. (Bjarney has been helping run the family business since she was 14 years old.) I parked my car and joined them in their sturdy 4WD which wound its way slowly ever upwards, following the undulating gravel road, which twisted and turned around hairpin bends, past waterfalls and deep canyons. My guides fill me in on the details of the landscape, pointing out how the glacier has crawled across the terrain, devastating everything in its path along with other interesting facts.

Thirty minutes and 830 metres above sea level later, we arrive at Jöklasel, Iceland's highest restaurant and owned by Glacier Jeeps. Jöklasel will serve as our base camp where we suit up with boots, warm overalls and helmets for the snowmobile excursion.

Now it's time to test drive the snowmobiles. I am a little hesitant at first and Kristján shows me the ropes. It looks easy enough but I decide that I prefer to let him drive over the glacier with me sitting safely behind him on this 'skidoo for two', at least until I get a better feel for it. 'Off we go over the wild white yonder, climbing high into the sun' to paraphrase an old song, with cloudless blue skies above us and the wind in our faces. Further along we stop and dismount, to take in the magnificent panoramic views over the glacier, the Atlantic Ocean and the town of Höfn far below in the distance. I felt like I was on top of the world and it was truly a cause for celebration!

Kristján jokes that we cannot go onwards unless I drive. By now I am feeling a little more sure of myself and agree to give it a try. This time we are off to inspect a massive sheer rock face that rises straight up from the glacier at an elevation of 1200 metres. Finally, our one hour snowmobile adventure comes to an end and it is time to return to Jöklasel for a well deserved bite to eat and a hot drink. The view out the restaurant windows is as one would expect: magnificent.

Glacier Jeeps also offers a hiking tour of the glacier that comes with all the equipment such as safety helmets, climbing irons and ice axe, instruction and a guide, included in the price.

In case you just don't think a strenuous hike or a thrilling snowmobile adventure is for you, then Glacier Jeeps offers an alternative to see the glacier in a comfortable, specially equipped 4WD and is available year round, weather permitting. Each tour is only 3 to 4 hours in total, giving you plenty of time to do other things with your day, even though once you are up there you may not want to come down. Although it's best to book one day in advance, you can also just show up at the crossroads (F985) at either 9.30 am or 2.00 pm and join the tour from there.

Vatnajökull Glacier Jeep tours: a must for your bucket list!

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Experiences to Remember

Reykjavik Excursions' tours explore the wealth of South Iceland

When you plan your trip to Iceland, there are so many factors to consider. Where will you go? Unless you are staying a long, long time, the land is reluctant to give up all its secrets easily.

Seeing the South

A tour to the South of Iceland makes a lot of sense. It has glaciers—including Europe's largest, Vatnajökull. It has volcanoes, waterfalls, spectacular nature, bird life, opportunities for adventure, sport, sightseeing, history, culture and beauty.

Of course, you could drive it yourself. However, if it is your first or second visit to Iceland, I would suggest you consider taking a tour. To start with, they know where to go, how to get there easily and what to look for. More than that, however, the guides are all highly trained and knowledgeable. As a result, you will get a lot more out of your time here with less strain or effort. Rental car contracts don't allow travel on the rugged off-road routes to reach some of the more spectacular destinations, so the specialist Reykjavik Excursion tour buses, with their big wheels and specially designed viewing areas, make a lot of sense.

Another reason to take the tour is that everything is already pre-arranged for you, so there is no time wasted trying to find your activity, make sure you have the right clothing and equipment, etc. You can see at a glance what you will need to bring and what will be provided. They also provide basic training, where necessary, for your safety.

Take a Walk on the Ice Side

You remember that volcano that hit the news in 2010—Eyjafjallajökull? Fancy a walk up on the glacier to see its deep crevices, its ridges and its amazing naturally-formed ice sculptures? The tour goes further to the Sólheimajökull glacier tongue. Slipping and sliding on the ice is not funny, so you walk with crampons, which you can master easily with a little help. It makes all the difference and makes walking on the ice much safer. Now you can enjoy the glacier without wondering if you'll end up flat on your back! On the way home, you will visit Skógafoss and Seljalandsfoss—two beautiful, but very different, waterfalls.

Glacier Adventure

Another tour, another glacier. This time, the Mýrdalsjökull, with its spectacular views. What makes it an adventure is the snowmobiling. All the equipment is provided to make this tour memorable—and snowmobiling is certainly that!

Jeep Adventure

Perhaps snowmobiling is not to your taste but you like the idea of the glacier and its photographic possibilities. The luxurious Super Jeeps, with their oversized tyres, take you right up to the edge of the Katla volcanic caldera. The view from the glacier's 1,500 m height offers panoramic views of South Iceland, making this a family day to remember.

The South Shore Adventure

For a nature-lover, this tour takes you all the way down the coast to the picturesque village of Vík, with its black sand beaches, strange rock formations at Reynisdrangur, its beautiful, soaring bird cliffs. The tour also stops at the same two waterfalls as well as the folk museum at Skógar—a fascinating trip back in time, portraying the lives of the local people in past centuries.

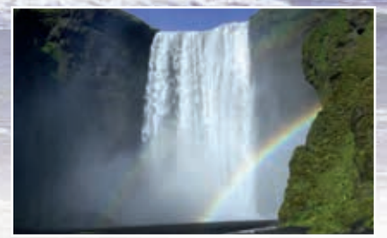
You experience one of Iceland's most scenic regions—including the massive Mýrdalsjökull glacier.

Skaftafell in the Summer

The Skaftafell National Park is best enjoyed in the summer months. Two tours go to this natural wonder, one that includes a two-hour glacier walk. Surrounded on three sides by glaciers, the tour provides a view of the highest mountain in Iceland, Hvannadalshnjúkur, and you can walk up to the picturesque Svartifoss waterfall, with its basalt columns. Even in summer, you should bring warm and rainproof clothing and good hiking boots.

Jökulsárlón Lagoon

Another summer tour takes you all the way down the south coast to the fantasy Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon. It's further than



the other tours so you get to see all their highlights as you go. This is a popular place for photographers and a boat can take you between the icebergs on the lagoon.

Enjoy All Iceland

Summer provides another possibility. Rather than taking a single tour, the 'Iceland On Your Own' programme gives you the chance to plan your stay to include all you want to see, when you want to see it. Jump on, jump off travel around almost the whole country—including routes through the Highlands that are inaccessible in winter. You can either pay as you go or, easier, get a prepaid 'bus passport'.

-ASF

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Discover an Ice-Blue World

Jökulsárlón Boat Tours tours Jökulsárlón Glacial Lagoon

There are few glacial lagoons existing in the world today and certainly none more awe-inspiring and accessible than the renowned Jökulsárlón Glacial Lagoon, situated at the head of Breiðamerkulljökull outlet glacier on the peerless Vatnajökull Glacier.

Sail Among the Icebergs

Jökulsárlón ehf has been operating boat tours on the east side of the lagoon for the last 25 years. Sail among the icebergs in a 40 minute amphibious boat tour, or take an exciting 1 hour Zodiac boat tour that goes further into the lagoon, getting you as close as is safe to the icebergs and the glacier itself.

A Waffle with a View

Enjoy the spectacular view over the lagoon in the small café where traditional Icelandic waffles with rhubarb jam and whipped cream are served throughout the day, as well as homemade soup with bread, sandwiches, cakes with coffee or tea which can be either taken out on the terrace or consumed inside.

The Show of Fire and Ice

The magnificent annual fireworks display over the lagoon can be described without a doubt as one of the most memorable fireworks shows on earth. The event, held annually in late August, starts at 11.30 pm, with proceeds going to Iceland´s volunteer search and rescue organization, ICESAR.

Located within a few hundred metres of Route No. 1, the lagoon is actually much bigger and deeper than it appears. With an area measuring approximately 24 square km (9.2 square miles), you could easily fit the island of Heimaey (in the Westman Islands) into it with room to spare. At over 250 m (820 feet) deep, four Leaning Towers of Pisa, stacked one on top of the other, would fit inside the lagoon with room to spare.

With the ebb and flow of the tides, sea water enters into the lagoon bringing with it krill, capelin, herring and salmon. Curious seals know where the food is plentiful and can often be seen bobbing along with the currents, swimming in and out between the icebergs and appearing to enjoy the attention from onlookers on the shore.

Across the road, near the delta where fresh and salt water converge, you can walk down to the water's edge to witness the rather surreal sight of baby 'bergs' beached on the shoreline.

-EMV

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A Picture of the Past

Experience life as it was at Skógar Museum

Shortly before the Second World War, a 14 year-old boy, seeing the introduction of many new technologies that were changing life around him, also saw the importance of preserving the nation's heritage and began collecting items that would no longer be used.

Now over 90 years of age, Þórður Tómasson still possesses a vivid memory and a keen mind, having spent his life building the museum in his village of Skógar on Iceland's south coast.

The Largest Folk Museum in Iceland

First opened in 1949, the museum began life in the basement of the school but has grown enormously over the years and especially since the year 2,000. Þórður often travelled from farm to farm, writing down the stories and anecdotes told him by the families. He collected household items, farming and fishing implements, ornate wooden chests, decorative items of wood, brass, silver and gold as well as traditional clothing and artifacts dating back to the Viking Age.

In 2012, over the museum received over 52,000 visitors as it became well known as the definitive picture of Iceland's past.

How Did They Manage It?

If you ever wondered how people could have survived in Iceland prior to the mid-20th century, this fascinating folk museum explains it all. From the reconstructed turf farmhouse to the early 20th century school, the church to the early hydroelectric plant, a picture of innovation under difficult circumstances becomes very evident.

Take fishing, for example. The fishery section displays an eight-oar open fishing boat that was used until 1946. Since there is no harbour along the south coast, boats had to be launched into the wild North Atlantic seas from open beaches—a very hazardous operation that took many lives.

Many of the exhibits are from an agricultural background, showing how farming families had to be very resourceful, often making and repairing their own equipment, tools and utensils. The same goes for furniture and clothing, where families showed considerable creativity in putting whatever they had available to the best use.

Museum of Transport and Communication

An important part of the museum complex is the section covering the history of transportation and communication. As horse transport gave way to mechanized vehicles, a modern legacy was created, showing how not only cars but agricultural machinery brought major changes. From the first telephone to the wireless car and ship radios, communication has also played an integral part in the changes in society that are best understood by the exhibits here.

An Archive of the Area

The museum also holds the archives of the region, providing a record for future generations. For anyone interested in the Icelandic culture, a visit to Skógar is a must.

-ASF

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Natural Beauty and History Secrets

The Þjórsá valley reveals its past from beneath the ashes

Iceland is known for its secrets that are only slowly being discovered by visitors. Until recently, the country was known as 'Europe's Best Kept Secret'. Even today, there are places that visitors are discovering as pearls of great beauty and historical interest.

Life was tough in former years and one can only admire the fortitude of the settlers who endured earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, destruction of farms, crops and livestock, ensuing famine, crushing poverty and isolation.

Go back to Settlement Days

A manor farm was founded during the early Settlement Era in Stöng, in the Þjórsá river valley, a spectacularly beautiful area with waterfalls and lush vegetation. You can well understand the choice of location when you see it.

The beauty and serenity was not to last, however, in the shadow of volcanoes such as Hekla and Katla. In 1104, the first recorded eruption of Hekla - known as the 'Gateway to Hell' brought death and destruction to the entire area. The farm was abandoned, buried under ash and pumice, just one of at least twenty farms destroyed in the region.

It was not until some eight centuries later, in 1939 that it was rediscovered - in excellent condition.

To celebrate the 1100th anniversary of the Settlement of Iceland, a replica of the farmhouse was constructed in as accurate a representation as possible to provide visitors with a clear understanding of living conditions in those early days. A great deal of research was done to ensure accuracy, though at times, imagination drawing on ancient literature was used where actual artifacts did not exist elsewhere in the country.

The result shows a sophisticated, imposing structure, not a grass hovel and indicates a high degree of craftsmanship in its construction.

Þjóðveldisbærinn or the Commonwealth farm can be found by driving the Ring Road south past Selfoss, turning on the route 30 to Flúðir and then, just past Brautarholt, turning right onto route 32. This will take you right along the Þjórsá valley, with its rivers, waterfalls, forest and verdant greenery.

Þjórsá Visitor Centre

A short distance from the Flúðir road, you will find Árnes. The community centre, built in 1970 has been expanded into an excellent Visitor Centre that opened last year. It is definitely worth visiting. Not only will you find a lot of information and multimedia displays about the area but you can find out about accommodation and activities such as horse riding, or swimming, enjoy a good meal and find interesting products at the farmers market. Then, when you continue to Stöng, you will be that much better informed –and well fed. It is open from 1st June.

-ASF

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A Taste of Iceland's Wild & Sweet

Laugarvatn's Lindin Restaurant & Café Bistro

Lindin Restaurant & Bistro Café, located on the banks of Lake Laugarvatn, has a firm foundation of culinary excellence that attracts patrons from around the world. Owner, Baldur Öxdal Halldórsson, pastry and master chef, trained at the Hotel and Restaurant School of Iceland between 1980–1984, the Culinary Institute of America, New York in 1986–1987, and received training as a pastry chef at the prestigious Richemont Professional School in Lucerne from 1988–1989, where he developed his interest in the art of chocolate and learnt the secrets behind a great dessert.

After his training abroad was completed, Baldur began something of a culinary revolution in Reykjavik, working at many of the top hotels and restaurants, creating spectacular and sophisticated desserts that were hitherto unknown in the capital.

Mecca of Icelandic Wild Game

Baldur took over Lindin Restaurant in 2002 which has become known as the 'Mecca of Icelandic wild game', its menu featuring only fish, seafood, game and lamb caught in the wild. Exotic dishes like grilled reindeer and cormorant with wild mushroom sauce and arctic char tartare with coconut sauce are featured on the menu. Always on the cutting edge, you can be sure of finding new and exciting additions to his dessert menus such as his delectable chocolate mousse with raspberry sauce, with watermelon pieces and white chocolate foam and his bilberry skyr mousse with crowberries and rhubarb.

Passion for purity and freshness

Passionate about food, Baldur insists on the absolute purity and freshness of all his ingredients. Located in the heart of Iceland's 'greenhouse belt', he can take his pick of the choicest fruits and vegetables grown in the area year round. The restaurant even has its own small kitchen garden, providing a fresh supply of rhubarb, chervil, red and blackcurrants. The lamb and venison come from N.E. Iceland and are known for their delicious flavour, fed on mountain herbs. The Arctic char are caught fresh from either Lake Þingvellir or Lake Apavatn daily.

Take a spin in an early Land Rover with Baldur

In the heart of the Golden Circle

Lindin is located in the village of Laugarvatn, right beside the lovely natural sauna, steam baths and pool at the Fontana Spa. The 45 minute scenic drive from Reykjavik takes you through enchanting landscapes. Laugarvatn is half-way between Þingvellir and Geysir and Gullfoss, making it an excellent choice for a day trip to in one of the most scenic areas of Iceland. You can also now stay at any time of year in Laugarvatn at either the Golden Circle Apartments next to Lindin, the Gallerí Guesthouse or the village hostel to enjoy the Northern Lights in winter and the midnight sun in summer and the spectacular views from Lindin's terrace and garden across the lake to the Hekla and Eyjafjallajökull volcanoes.

-EMV/ASF

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Come for the Ride

Enjoy a horse ride in the countryside and a visit to the best known sites

You want to see it all and experience all that Iceland has to offer when you come. Unless you're planning to live here, though, the country is unlikely to yield all its secrets in a week or so.

Iceland offers sights and experiences that you won't find in southern European beach resorts—but that's why you came here, isn't it? You're looking for something different, apart from the norm. With so much to see and do in a short time, though, you want to make your time in Iceland count.

Horse riding is one of those special treats for which Iceland is famous. The Icelandic horse is renowned for its comfort and friendliness. It is a small, strong animal that has enabled the nation to survive since the Vikings brought them in the 9th century. So, whether you are an experienced rider or have never been on a horse before, you will find the hour or two ride enjoyable.

All protective clothing is supplied and the horse centre ensures you are given a horse to match your skill and experience. The horse ride itself takes you through the beautiful countryside in the morning, after which there is time to relax and enjoy a good drink and lunch.

Iceland Excursions—Gray Line Iceland offers two tours that not only give the chance to ride horses but also take in either the Golden Circle tour or a trip to the famous Blue Lagoon.

The Golden Circle

Without doubt the most popular tour, it takes visitors to the World Heritage site of Þingvellir National Park to see where two of the earth's tectonic plates—the American and European plates—are tearing the rocks apart. This is the site the 9th century Vikings selected as their Alþing (Althing)—destined to become the world's oldest continuously running parliament, though its current location has been moved to Reykjavik.

Driving further up into the interior, the tour's next stop is Geysir, the gigantic steam spout after which all the world's steam eruptions are named. Today, its sibling, Strokkur, is the main attraction. It erupts every few minutes, sending a plume of steam skywards, towering over viewers. The surrounding geothermal area is bubbling with hot water and azure blue pools.

The next spectacle is the powerful Gulfoss waterfall. The water pours down from the Highlands and thunders over this stepped waterfall into the canyon below, creating an awesome sight. Spray creates rainbows in the sunlight as spectators are treated to nature's raw power in action.

The Blue Lagoon

The location of this renowned spa is spectacular in itself. Set in the midst of a lava field on the Reykjanes peninsula, it is a lake of bright blue in the midst of the dark rocks.

After enjoying a lovely ride on the horses in one of the most picturesque spots close to the capital, the tour takes you to the aptly-named Blue Lagoon. Here, you can bathe in the soothing, warm geothermal waters, relax in the steam bath or under the lagoon's waterfall. This is a health spa with a difference: you can take the products home with you and keep getting their benefits.

No matter what the weather, the waters are always warm. They contain minerals that have been shown to help people with skin afflictions and to people with ailments such as arthritis. You can experience your own in-water massage from trained massage specialists while you are here.

You will also find a café, (with free WiFi), a bar that offers a range of drinks without you having to leave the warmth of the water and a restaurant—as well as the shop, where you can find a range of skin care products and gifts for loved ones.

-ASF

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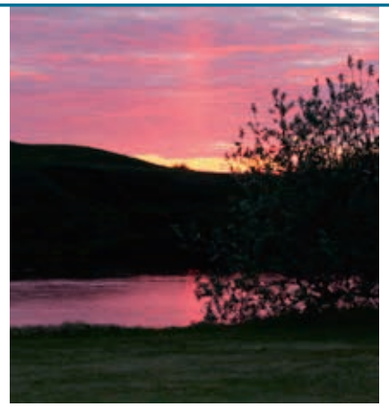

Stay by the Salmon

Árhús is a Beautiful Spot to Stay in South Iceland

Deep in the heart of South Iceland, close to Hella, a beautifully inviting area appears, just off the right side of the road. Surrounded by Icelandic nature, Árhús offers exclusive and peaceful accommodation by the River Rangá, one of the best known salmon rivers in Iceland. Riverfront cottages, alluring yet simple, are the perfect combination with the Café Árhús restaurant, its terrace overlooking the river.

Offering an á la carte menu with an emphasis on high quality Icelandic food, Café Árhús restaurant tempts its guests with both traditional cuisine and specialities such as lobster, shellfish, salmon and the 'catch of the day'.

Abundance of Activities

Arriving at Árhús in winter, just off Iceland's Ring Road, the feeling is like stepping into a world filled with magic. While Árhús is a great location for viewing Northern Lights in the wintertime, this winter wonderland offers just about anything travellers can think off. Well-connected in their community, the staff at Árhús is more than happy to suggest activities: everything from glacier tours, helicopter sightseeing, snowmobiling, Super-Jeep tours, horse riding and dog sledding to golfing, swimming, river rafting and fresh water fishing.

This is a well-priced accommodation in South Iceland, located in a peaceful environment, easy to get around during winter and ideal for you to experience the wonders of Iceland.

-SP

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