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# ICELANDIC TIMES

ISSUE 19 • 2013



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## CINEMA ON FIRE

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### **Eyjaflajökull 2010 Eruption**

This powerful documentary made specially for Volcano House was filmed and directed by the Emmy-nominated Icelandic film maker, Jóhann Sigfússon

### **The Westman Island's 1973 Eruption**

began without warning on the night of January 23rd, 1973 where 400 homes perished under ash and lava

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**English: 10:00 to 21:00** Every hour on the hour

**German: 18:00** From June 1st – September 1st



When the Viking seafarer, Hrafna-Flóki found Iceland, he enjoyed a gloriously hot summer. So he was not prepared for the bitterly cold winter as the weather changed. Climbing the highest mountain he could find, he saw a fjord filled with ice. That, it is said, is how Iceland got its name.

It's a rugged country that has seen its share of disasters over the centuries and, to a modern observer, it seems it must have

been a very tough life before the advent of geothermal heating.

Even today, you have to be fit and well-equipped if you want to face the challenges of travel in the interior or Highlands. While many hikes are easy, there are those that challenge the very spirit of man and which are for the bold, brave, fit and well-prepared.

However, each year, there are a number of visitors who try to travel into the interior, not

realising the hazards that can befall them. It is therefore very prudent that Iceland has such a well organised rescue service.

There are many tours that can take you into these spectacular landscapes — either as hikes or in SuperJeeps with experienced drivers. The trips are worth every moment, as you can read here, but do follow the guidelines and stay safe. Enjoy your Icelandic summer.

—Andrew Scott Fortune

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**FRONT COVER PHOTO BY**  
Brynjár Ágústsson

### 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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# ICELAND'S ART HISTORY

*A Guide to the Heart of Iceland*

Of the many ways to understand a foreign culture, examining its art has to be one of the most pleasing, but grasping the history and tradition of a nation can appear to be a daunting task for newcomers. That's why the Reykjavik Art Museum will be giving weekly guided tours in Kjarvalsstaðir, one of the museum's three locations, where visitors will be guided through over 200 paintings from some of Iceland's most celebrated artists.

The guided tours are included in the regular ticket price and will be given each Friday at 11 am. Kjarvalsstaðir takes its name from one of Iceland's most celebrated artists. (He's the gentleman on the 2000 kr. bill.) It houses a sizable collection of his works. Be sure to linger a while at a painting named Fjallamjólk, as few other paintings have captured Iceland's nature in a more memorable fashion.

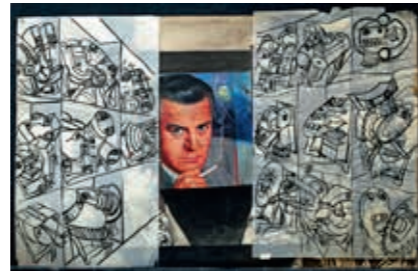


## Kjarvalsstaðir

The exhibition is called Icelandic Art 1900-1950: From Landscape to Abstract Art. Over 200 pieces from 40 artists from the period are on display, divided into four subjects: Romantic and Radical (1900-1930); Landscape (1930-1950); The Human Scale (1930-1950) and New radicalism and the beginning of the abstract (1940-1950). As the subjects imply, there is a lot to take in and the significance of each period and each artist would perhaps be lost for those passing through, although the paintings would be no less striking.

## Ásmundarsafn

Located in a spectacular building on the east side of Reykjavik, Ásmundarsafn used to be the home of Ásmundur Sveinsson, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Icelandic sculptor. He sought inspiration for his works in Icelandic folklore, myth and literature, the last of which is the theme of the 'Tales from the Vault' exhibition that explores the literary motifs that inspired Ásmundur's works. A visit to Ásmundarsafn is an experience in itself as the house design is quite fantastical and the sculptures in the garden around it give its visitors a peek into the world that inspired his art.



## Hafnarhúsið

The Reykjavik Art Museum's third location is also its newest and home to Iceland's vibrant contemporary art scene, along with international exhibitions. It also hosts a large collection of the works of the acclaimed pop-artist, Erró. Among the exhibitions this summer is 'All State' by Theresa Himmer, a sound composition that takes place in the museum's elevator; 'Interval' by Huginn Þór Arason and Andrea Maack, which explores a fragrance of the future and 'The Sound of a Bugle in a Shoebox: Magnús Pálsson — A Performance Retrospective 1980-2013', which is a retrospective of the performance work of one of Iceland's most prolific and influential artists of the last six decades.

-VAG

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- Duration: 5-6 hours (up to 1 hour inside the volcano)
- Minimum age: 12 years
- Fitness level needed: Moderate. No knowledge of hiking or climbing is required.

**Price:** ISK 37,000 per person

Book now at [InsideTheVolcano.com](http://InsideTheVolcano.com) or at your nearest Tourist Information Desk.



Extensive safety procedures are followed at all stages of the tour and visitors are accompanied by specially trained guides at all times. All equipment and processes have been tested extensively and approved by the administration of Occupational Safety and Health in Iceland.





## THE ALL-ICELANDIC WOOL SHOP

The Icelandic Handknitting Assn. sells Icelandic wool and products

Sheep came to Iceland with the Viking settlers and quickly proved their worth, not only for their meat but also their wool and skins. 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 repellent 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.

### From home to market

The Handknitting Association of Iceland was founded in 1977 to help knitters to get their handiwork marketed. A group of women formed the association, establishing standards and guidelines for the production that was - and still is, an important supplement to many family incomes. Shortly thereafter, they opened a shop to sell their members' woollen goods at Skólavörðustígur 19, the main shopping street that descends from Hallgrímskirkja, the cathedral overlooking the city.

### Find the real thing

In today's globalised society, it is increasingly difficult to be sure you are getting a genuine article, rather than one made thousands of miles away, with wool without the characteristics that has made Icelandic wool so special for hundreds of years.

The Handknitting Assn.'s shop only stocks genuine Icelandic wool and clothing made by professional Icelandic knitters, so you can be certain you are getting the true, well-made product. Look for the logo to be sure.

Their 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.

### Traditional and modern styles

The world of knitting has changed dramatically since the association began. A few decades ago, the designs took 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.

Today, 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 is a centre, not only for selling the finished products, but also for supplying the wool and all the accessories required to make woollen items. If knitting is your hobby, there is a world of warm designs just waiting for you.

Icelandic wool wears very well and it is not uncommon for people to wear sweaters many years and for them to still look fresh.

Visitors can have their purchases shipped to them and they can also order from the website. That includes the patterns, wool, needles and accessories, not just the clothing.

**Handprjónasamband Íslands**  
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 handknit@handknit.is  
 www.handknit.is



## THE ULTIMATE FASHION STATEMENT

Huld Design in Reykjavik creates priceless fashion accessories

There used to be a joke in Iceland: How many fish leather shoes would it take to walk a distance. Everyone knew that fish leather just fell apart. It was beautiful - but useless. It was just too weak for anything.

That all changed in 1994 when, after years of experiments and gallons of fish soup, a new tannery in the far northern fishing town of Sauðárkrókur was to specialise in the production of high quality fish leather. From this centre of culture and enterprise has come a steadily growing supply of some of the most beautiful leather known to man.



### Leather from the sea

Have you ever seen a salmon, for example? Its finely textured skin is smooth, shiny and reflects a rainbow of delicate colours. Or the perch from the lakes of Africa, with its rougher skin or the 'leopard of the sea', the wolffish. This is a big, pretty ugly fish, called 'steinbitar' or stone biter in

Icelandic. It's claim to fame, though, is its unusual leopard-patterned, shiny skin that is astonishingly beautiful.

Now the tanners have perfected their skills, and were able to provide a range of different coloured fishskin leathers, the question was, what to do with them?

### Making the new leather an art form

In the late 1990s, Hulda Kristjánsdóttir set up a leather workshop. Taking the new fish leather, she began creating everything from bags to bracelets, from earrings to wallets, from belts to cuffs.

Within weeks, her work was the talk of the town and her high quality workmanship was being seen in all the fashionable places.

Iceland was emerging from being 'Europe's Best Kept Secret' to becoming the location of choice for brave tourists. Not, you might think, the clientele for high fashion.

These are the people used to thinking differently and, seeing Huld's workmanship and fashionable designs, they were quickly to be seen all over Europe and America—and now, as far afield as China and Japan. Their

vibrant colours and fabulous textures and patterns became an instant success.

### The popularity of durability and style

Huld Reykjavik's shop tried to keep pace with demand, but waves of foreign visitors kept clearing the shelves. Rather than sacrifice quality or artistic design, they have been doing the best they can to expand their range and provide something for everyone.

This fish leather is very durable and keeps its beauty for years. Its surface is strong and resistant to scuffing, looking new for generations.

Their shop is easy to find in downtown Reykjavik, right at the junction of the main shopping street, Laugavegur and the road up to the cathedral, Skólavörðustígur.

**Huld Design**  
 Skólavörðustígur 4 • 101 Reykjavík  
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 hulda@huld.is  
 www.huld.is



## LIVING DESIGN MUSEUM

All branches of Icelandic design are represented in Kraum

In the 1700s, Iceland was under harsh Danish rule and was very poor. Skúli Magnússon became the first Icelandic representative for the king of Denmark in the country and set about transforming the economy. He built the first factories, transforming the country. The only building from that time has survived is Aðalstræti 10, right at the end of Reykjavík's main shopping street in the centre of town. This has now become the Mecca of Icelandic Design after it was acquired by Kraum.



In 2007, after a complete refurbishment, Kraum opened to continue Skúli's vision with a group of 30 designers - whose numbers have quickly swelled into the hundreds. Today, Kraum has become the definitive Icelandic design shop, with its designers spanning every area of Icelandic design. The old building has been expanded with a new wing that provides a large display area with natural lighting.



Over the past six years, I have watched as more designers have introduced their concepts to the world through Kraum – and Kraum, itself, also commissioned two of their own: original designs for the famous pancake pan and a laufás bread cutter. (Laufabrauð is a delicious delicacy produced in homes all over the country at Christmas time.)

### Designs for every taste and interest

The traditional items such as jewellery and furniture (which can all be easily packed for shipping) have been supplemented by new styles and types of clothing – and now, both men's and women's shirts that are proving to be best sellers.

Following the breakthroughs with tanning of fish leather, there are handbags, accessories and even shoes. Then there are lights in many shapes and forms, decorative and printed items, designs to fit almost every room in the house.

The list is as long as the list of designers who create them and it's fascinating to browse and see the scope of the different ideas displayed. It is a living museum – but one where you can take home whatever you fancy.

If your choice is too big for your luggage, it's not a problem, as Kraum ships worldwide. Then, of course, visitors also benefit from the tax refund.

-ASF



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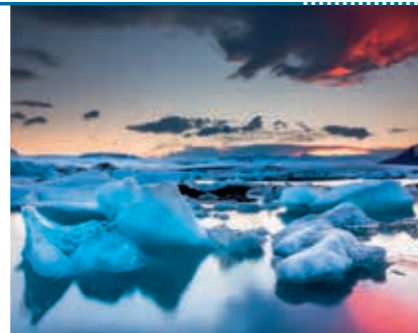
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## PHOTOS, FOOD AND GLACIERS

*Isafold Travel offers Themed Tours in Small Groups*

Travelling in small groups is a great experience, as it gives you the right mixture of camaraderie and intimacy.

Isafold Travel has, for the past couple of years, planned scheduled tours, where individuals and groups can book places on tours with typically 6 to 12 participants.

By planning these tours around a theme, they help group members to bond, while ensuring that the pace is suitable for everyone – e.g. Photo and Bird Watching tours require a flexible schedule, with long stops where conditions are good, whereas Culinary and Saga tours adhere strictly to the timetable.

The themes are quite varied: Culinary tours, where you meet food producers and chefs; Photo tours with professional photographers; Saga tours with history experts; and Bird Watching with ornithologists, etc.

### 4x4 Self-drive tours

Isafold Travel started using modified Land Rover Defenders for tours to hard-to-reach places in the Icelandic Highlands. However, now the experience of driving these iconic 4x4 vehicles has become a theme in itself.

The Self-drive tours are operated in both Winter and Summer, and one can choose

between the Adventure (1 night), Safari (2 nights) or Trophy (4 nights) tours, all of which include shared accommodation in mountain huts, and the brand new Highland Challenge and Comfort, with hotel accommodation.

In Spring 2014 Isafold Travel will start a truly unique Self-drive tour: the Vatnajökull Glacier Trophy. On this 5 day tour customers will spend 3 days exploring the hidden gems of Vatnajökull, Europe's largest glacier. This will be an extremely challenging tour that is only recommended for experienced drivers.

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## RENT YOUR OWN SUPER-DEFENDER

*The Icelandic 4x4 Culture Revealed*

Because of the often-harsh landscapes of Iceland, ordinary vehicles can't always take you to the places you want to go. This is why ISAK 4x4 Rental rents specially modified 4x4 Land Rover Defenders that open up new territories for adventurous travellers.

Icelanders have skillfully modified 4x4 vehicles and maneuver them in extreme conditions. This has sprouted a whole new culture, where conquering the hardest-to-reach places of Iceland is the ultimate goal.

The 4x4 vehicles are Land Rover Defenders, specially modified with 38"

tyres and equipped with air compressors (to inflate or deflate the tires according to surface density); ice bumper; snorkel; GPS; a radio to communicate between vehicles, and all other necessary equipment – including, of course, a shovel! They also provide the necessary training. But don't worry, getting into rough terrain is all part of the adventure.

All you need is a valid driving license, maybe just a bit of courage, and you'll be crossing the un-bridged Icelandic highland rivers in no time—and enjoying every moment of it.

### New for Summer 2014

Recognising that not everyone wants to push the limits with a Super Defender on glaciers and over rivers, ISAK has introduced a more economical alternative.

Travellers who would like to drive the popular Land Rover on all the Icelandic paved and unpaved roads, can now reserve an unmodified ÍSEY at unbeatable prices.

-VAG/ASF

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## THE BRAVE GET THE BEST

*The Sea Baron's Fish Meals attract visitors from all over the world*

Iceland has many 'different' foods which have their roots in seafaring history. The Vikings came up with many novel ways of preserving their foods and their traditions continue to this day.

Some of these foods sound unappealing, to say the least, and it takes the adventurous soul to step out and try them. Iceland is for the adventurous and they reap the benefits of the brave. The timid stick to burgers!

### A True Fisherman

A former fisherman and Coast Guard chef, Kjartan Halldórsson, also known as the Sea Baron, is the master of unusual fish dishes. His lobster soup, for example, has gained

fame around the world, earning it the title of 'the world's greatest lobster soup'. While he doesn't reveal the secrets of his recipe, that doesn't stop his restaurant from being filled every day with aficionados.

He entered the restaurant business by chance. One day, when standing by his boxes of fish, some foreign visitors asked if he could prepare some fish for them. Spotting an opportunity, he ran to the nearest hardware store to buy a grill—and was in business! His visitors were invited to dine in his shop in this improbable restaurant. Word quickly spread and soon he was shifting his boxes out of the way to make room for tables and chairs.

He took the unusual and created delicious meals that no-one else had thought of trying. He took old recipes, some of which sounded revolting, and from them, made meals that have established his reputation around the world.

Kjartan's restaurant is popular with the fishermen who sailed for many years from Reykjavik. It is filled with memorabilia donated by old sea captains and their families, that fill it with a character all its own. Handmade model sailing boats, pictures of ships of the past and stuffed birds fill the second floor's walls, where groups of up to 35 can celebrate together and where the fishermen used to sleep when coming to land.

### Dining as a Seafaring Experience

Eating at the polished tables, sitting on cushioned fish barrels, surrounded by paraphernalia of the sea, is an experience that will leave you with both good memories, a satisfied appetite—and perhaps, a rather shocked mind that you would actually have eaten fermented fish and that it tasted so, so good.

### Smoked in Succulence

A true pioneer, Kjartan is always coming up new ideas. Besides the smoked eel, Kjartan has taken to smoking mackerel and the special grey halibut, the delicious flat fish with both eyes on top. His technique imbues the fish with a delicious flavour that has to be tasted to be believed.

-ASF



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 Geirsgata 8 • 101 Reykjavík  
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## A DOWNTOWN VILLAGE

*Reykjavik Hostel Village offers Budget Travellers the Best*

In the centre of Reykjavik, surrounded by the main shopping street, a major art gallery, a park, and a short distance from the local and up-country bus stations, Hótel Flóki has been transformed into a small village of pleasant houses for budget-conscious visitors, families, groups and travellers who are touring the country.

Each of its 5 houses has a suburban feel to it, with its own garden—great for sunbathing and barbecues. Visitors feel almost as if they are living in an Icelander's house—except for the friendly, multinational clientele, many of whom are returning to explore more of the country.

### Your Reykjavik base

The Village makes an ideal spot to base from. It's within easy reach of every kind of restaurant, café and eating place—not to mention shops of all types, too. The local bus, or stræto, passes right in front of the main building and a large bus station is only a short walk. When coming from the airport, the transit buses will drop you off right at the door. When planning an



up-country trip or tour, both the Reykjavik airport and the BSÍ bus station are close by.

The Reykjavik Hostel Village can supply rental cars and book tours for you and will also take care of luggage, bikes, etc., while you head out on a trip and you can pick them up on your return. So the more adventurous can try different areas to explore without having to lug everything with them.

### Enjoy the Reykjavik Scene

In recent years, Iceland has become famous world-wide for its dynamic music and cultural scene like Iceland Airwaves, for example. Many want to come to enjoy the concerts but find hotel costs somewhat off-putting. The conversion of Hótel Flóki to a Hostel Village means that nobody should feel excluded as there is now a reasonably-priced option in a very good location, with all the concert locations in easy reach.

### Conference accommodation

Increasingly, Reykjavik has also been the centre for conferences, so it's valuable to know there's a clean and comfortable room in a nice house within easy reach of the major conference centres.

Laugavegur, the main shopping street, is a hub of restaurants and eateries of all kinds, of art and cultural shops, clothing shops and places of interest. It leads to the centre of town and the nightclub scene. Friday and Saturdays, things get started late, so there's plenty of time to eat before enjoying events that go on right through the bright summer nights. When you want to get home, the Hostel Village is right there.

### Book ahead for the best

It's wise to book in advance to secure your place to enjoy Iceland.

-ASF

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www.hostelvillage.is



## REYKJAVIK DINNER CRUISE

*Dine with Special Tours on the Andrea sailing the coast of Reykjavik*

You can see the beautiful blue and white boat down at Reykjavik's Old Harbour. Every Friday evening through the summer, it slips its moorings to sail around the Faxaflói Bay, filled with diners enjoying a full 5-course meal, courtesy of Kopar, one of Reykjavik's top restaurants.

You are greeted with a welcome drink as the ship sets sail, surrounded by the

luxurious surroundings of the Andrea, listening to the strains of live instrumental music in the background.

The view, with the sun starting to sink toward the western horizon, turning the sky a flaming red and gold, is outstanding. On one side of the boat, you see Reykjavik's skyline and the Harpa concert hall in a new light while, on the other side, the Snæfells



glacier gleams in the evening sunshine.

As you eat, the Andrea cruises around the historic Viðey and Engey islands in the bay. As it sails, you'll probably see the puffins caring for their fledglings or relaxing after a day's food gathering.

The dinner, as you would expect, is mouth-watering and full of flavour. Here, you can eat in comfort, unrushed, being served by diligent waiters and waitresses with a top class meal. A full complement of wines and spirits are available to go with the dinner and a decadent dessert rounds off the beautiful evening.

-ASF

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## THE JOYFUL WONDERLAND

*The little Christmas shop that is festive all year round*

Anne Helen, owner of 'The Little Christmas Shop' on Reykjavik's main shopping street, Laugavegur, is what you might call a 'one woman wonder'. When she lost her job in tourism ten years ago, she decided it was time for a change and turned to doing what she does better than most of us; making the world a prettier place, one Christmas ball at a time.

all over Europe, her ambition is to specialise in Icelandic handiwork and ornaments. She already has an extensive collection for sale, most made exclusively for her by artists, each having a distinctive approach and working in materials as different as wool, glass and clay. In addition to customary Christmas ornaments, she includes local folklore figures, like the thirteen Santas and the Christmas Cat.



### In the Land of Eternal Christmas

Anne Helen, a genuine aesthete, says she has always had somewhat of a Christmas frenzy and an intense passion for things of beauty. She never goes for anything average but hunts for things of quality that truly stand out. Though she imports merchandise from



Anne Helen loves to tell customers about Icelandic Christmas traditions. Visitors often stop by simply because they've heard of her hospitality and the shop's friendly atmosphere. They rarely leave empty handed. After all, placing an Icelandic Santa on your Christmas tree every year is a great way to remember your visit to Iceland. *-HP*



**Litla Jólábúðin**  
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 none  
 none





## THE TREASURE CHEST

*A Master Craftsman Creates Works of Art in Precious Metals*

Dóra Guðbjört Jónsdóttir is one of Iceland's finest and most productive goldsmiths using, with great understanding, the ways of Icelandic masters before her time.

Dóra took over her father's workshop in 1970 and relocated it, opening her company called Gullkistan, on Frakkastígur street in Reykjavík. Her expertise is national costume jewellery, or filigree, a delicate kind of jewellery metalwork, usually of gold and silver. Outstanding skills can be seen in her superb work, honouring Icelandic tradition. Dóra likes to work with very old jewellery templates, often well over 100 years old.

Between 1949-53, Dóra started learning the trade at her father's workshop, gaining her Master's degree in 1953. Additionally, she studied at Tärna folk high school in Sweden, Konstfackskolan in Stockholm around 1950, graduating with honours and at Vereinigte Goldschmiede-, Kunst- und Werkschule in Pforzheim, Germany in 1954.

She has always actively participated in exhibitions, both nationally and internationally, and served as a chairman of



the FIG (Icelandic Goldsmiths Foundation) from 1974-75, being the first Nordic woman to take that position. A true artist, she has always striven to put national crafts in a new context and associate her designs with modern trends which combine the artist's desire to experiment with a thorough knowledge of templates and patterns of the past. *-SP*



**Gullkistan**  
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 gullkistan@vortex.is  
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## AN ICELANDIC ICON

*Café Paris is the Heart of Reykjavik City*

The spacious but intimate Café Paris is a café and a restaurant known for first-class service and bistro-style meals, primarily made using fresh local produce, in the heart of the city centre, Austurvöllur.

Austurvöllur is Iceland's Champ du Mars, where locals relax on warm summer afternoons, overlooked by the Icelandic House of Parliament, and the Cathedral Church, Dómkirkjan.

Its long history and esteemed reputation has contributed to it being one of the most successful restaurants and cafés in all of Iceland. Last year, Café Paris celebrated its twentieth anniversary and guests were asked for their feedback to help the management continue to offer the highest standards.

Café Paris has a professional staff providing great service, knowledgeable about the menu, wine, cocktail and coffee selections and its mouth-watering desserts.



### A Landmark for all

Café Paris is a city landmark meaning different things to different people. It's a place where artists contemplate in solitude, where writers busily document their thoughts on a laptop, where politicians escape heated debates and share a quiet moment together, where young adults giggle and smile over Mocha and sweetened Latte, where young mothers share a slice of a homemade chocolate cake and creamy coffee, where students gather to celebrate and where hungry travellers come to experience the Icelandic bistro culture.

In summer, the tables outdoors facing the Parliament are always packed. Sheltered from the North Atlantic breeze, days of sunshine in the very heart of the city are hard to resist, and the well-trained and experienced staff make sure no one goes hungry or thirsty.

### Eat in style

There is nothing like the house white wine boiled mussels and a glass of Pinot Grigio on a beautiful summer's day, or a succulent burger with a bun fresh out of the oven and ice-cold beer.

For dessert, the house speciality is a French chocolate cake—freshly baked in house—and best served with deluxe coffee. The well kept secret recipe is legendary in Reykjavik.



### A Weekend Hotspot

Come the weekend, Café Paris turns into a sophisticated bar with live jazz music playing from 11 pm. The atmosphere is a unique fusion of a Parisian jazz club and a sophisticated Icelandic wine bar. The wide variety of imaginative cocktails is the creation of ambitious bartenders who aim to impress with their blend of rich flavours.



Café Paris caters to all ages and nationalities. Café Paris may seem to be a Parisian café in Reykjavik but local culinary traditions and fresh Icelandic produce are at the heart of this Reykjavik bistro. *-JB*



**Café Paris**  
 Austurstræti 14 • 101 Reykjavík  
 +354 551 1020  
 cafeparis@cafeparis.is  
 www.cafeparis.is





## SAILORS AND STORMS

*Immerse yourself in Maritime History*

The Icelandic people have experienced the sea for centuries as both a nourishing mother and a cruel predator. Rich fishing grounds helped them survive on this rough island, but countless fishermen also lost their lives in the unpredictable oceans. Families

left behind continued the hard fisherman's life. Even women, out of sheer necessity, went fishing at times and formed the backbone of the fish processing industry for many decades.

### Experience the life of the past

The Icelandic Maritime Museum tells a story of struggle with the elements. A permanent exhibition stocked by a large number of original items from the seafarers' lives can be experienced. Standing on the reconstructed quay, immersed in the life of the old Reykjavik harbour, or watching movies about fishing 100 years ago is as impressive as trying out the old equipment in order to get a feeling for how a fisherman's life might have been.

### A heroic rescuer and defender

A more modern seafaring flavour is set by the Óðinn, Iceland's first Coast Guard vessel, now retired on the museum's wharf that can be explored on guided tours daily. Óðinn's 46-year history tells about spectacular rescues as well as about her role in the so-called Cod Wars, when the ship expelled British trawlers from Icelandic fishing grounds.

In the hall next to the museum café you will find current exhibitions. End your stay in the inspiring museum's café with its spacious terrace and enjoy the view over Reykjavik's beautiful harbour.

-DT

**Reykjavik Maritime Museum**  
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+354 517 9400  
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## SPREADING THE TASTE

*You Can Enjoy Authentic Thai Food In Reykjavik or Akureyri*

The discovery of the wonderful flavours in genuine Thai food only reached Iceland in 2001 when, down by the Old Harbour in a cosy, small white building, Krua Thai first started the taste revolution. For hundreds of

years, Icelanders had grown accustomed to a rather bland diet, so the introduction of Thai cuisine had a major impact.

Icelanders have a reputation for pioneering and they plunged into this new taste sensation with gusto. A second restaurant opened in Bæjarlind, near the Smáralind shopping centre, also providing home deliveries. Take away also gained great popularity and now you can find the same delicious menu in Krua Siam in Akureyri, close to the harbour. With prices set so that a whole family can eat for less than a single person would pay in fancy restaurant, you can understand its popularity.



Krua Thai's cuisine is unique as it blends authentic Thai cooking with all its special spices and ingredients imported directly from Thailand with Icelandic meats and vegetables.

As the food is prepared to order, it reaches you with all the flavour as fresh as possible. It has proven a popular spot for visiting Thai tourists for good reason. The Thai-Icelandic blend is truly a delicious experience and one that any Thai food aficionado should savour while here.

-ASF

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# PREPARE TO BE AMAZED

*Helo flies you into panoramas only visible from the air*

**T**hrough windows that stretch from floor to ceiling, you can view the spectacular sights that Iceland is so famous for from an entirely different perspective. While the people on the ground run around like ants, with only a limited view, soaring above them, you can truly take in the magnificent panoramas.

**Time is short**  
Visiting Iceland, your time is necessarily limited and you want to make the most of it. Trips that might take all day in a coach can be accomplished in a matter of hours with time at more sites.

**Specialists in photography**  
Since you are not restricted to following the roads when flying in a helicopter, a whole new world of sights is opened up to you. You go places that even off-road jeeps never reach.  
Taking to the air offers a realm of unique photo opportunities that those on the ground would never even dream of. Different perspectives and angles, the play of light and shadow all take on a new dimension never seen by the earth-bound cameraman.

**The Big Bell**  
Flying in a helicopter today is an experience in comfort travel. The new Bell 407 has a spacious cabin, comfortable seating and those big windows onto the world below. Seating up to six passengers, it's a great opportunity for a family or incentive group. Helo has two other helicopters and all three can provide either group or exclusive flights.

**Tours of a lifetime**  
There are four tours that are especially popular. The Reykjavik Panorama is a half-hour view of the capital from the air in which passengers can see everything from fishermen's houses to the mountains of Esja. The Geothermal Wilderness tour takes you further to Hvalfjörður fjord, where Allied ships prepared for the dangerous Atlantic crossing in the 1940s, before taking in the beautiful Glymur waterfall, the tallest in Iceland. On to Þingvellir, where the world's longest running parliament first met. From the air, the view of the earth's surface, as the American and European tectonic plates pull apart is unique. On

the south side of Þingvallavatn lake lie the geothermal plants providing eco-friendly heat and hot water to Reykjavik from the hot volcanic rocks deep under the surface.

**The Golden Experience**  
This flight takes in the sights of the Golden Circle—and a lot more. Spectacular from the air, you see the same fjord and waterfall before landing on Langjökull glacier, from which you can see both the Arctic Sea to the north and the Atlantic to the south on a clear day. Then, it's on to see the mighty Gullfoss waterfall, lunching at Geysir before heading back to Þingvellir, the lake and geothermal areas. In about 3 hours, you get to take in more than road-based tours do in 12, with more flexibility and certainly, amazing views.



## Fulfilling a Dream

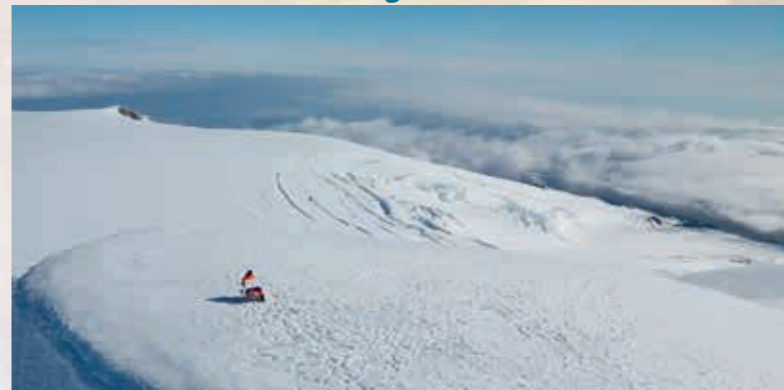


Image by © Ingi R. Ingason

**S**ometimes, people have 'impossible dreams'. Take, for instance, the 'Bucket List' wish of one man to take in the view from the top of Iceland's highest peak, Hvannadalshnúkur, rising up from the midst of Vatnajökull's vast ice sheet. For a fit person, it would be a challenge but, for this man, crippled by a devastating disease and now bound to a wheelchair,

it could have seemed an impossibility. However, his colleagues decided that, with help from Helo, it would happen.  
The dream came true as, one brilliantly sunny day, Helo's helicopter lifted off with this courageous man and, about half an hour later, he was on top of the mountain, his dream fulfilled, surveying a view only few get to see.

**The Volcanic Adventure**  
This flies you to the notorious volcanos in South Iceland that brought air travel to a halt. Landing close to the Fimmvörðuháls volcano, you'll feel the ground, still hot from the eruptions.

**The Exclusive Flights**  
Offering both freedom and flexibility, you can go where and for as long as you like, creating your own experience. You could have lunch on a glacier, for example, or swim in a hot pool or dine at a fine country restaurant, as the sun sinks low on the horizon. It's your choice—and the experienced staff will not only make it possible but will give you background information, too.

**Book ahead**  
You can imagine, the trips are very popular—especially in summer, so it's wise to contact Helo in advance to book the tour of your choice. —ASF



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## LIVING IN THE LAVA

*The town where they live with Hidden People and boiling pools*

Visitors to Iceland expect something different. They've heard about the volcanos. Then, there are the stranger stories...

Take Hafnarfjörður, the small town you reach first when you come from the airport. It has a colourful history, being one of the oldest communities. It's a fishing town, but that's only part of the story.

Built literally in and on the lava that flowed from the Búrfell volcano, you'll quickly notice the huge, black rocks, craters and caves out of which houses peek. The whole area is a massive lava and geothermal area.

### Home for the Huldafólk, too

Exploring the town, you'll come to a quiet street and Hellisgerði Park. It's a magical place, known for its elves, dwarves and other mystical beings. It's easy to imagine these 'huldafólk' living here amidst the lava rocks that fold and twist, forming tiny caves and strange shapes. Beside the pond winds a pathway past the rocks, many coloured

with bright emerald or contrasting olive coloured moss. But, for many people, this is not the place of myth but of another world that occasionally reveals itself. A number of these people have recounted meetings these beings. There are two tours that explain more about this park that is celebrating its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013.

### Art, Culture and a Living Past

The town is a vibrant centre. Besides the sports and the geothermally heated swimming pools, it has a rich cultural life. Its museums are spread in different buildings across the town, adding authenticity to the history they portray. Take the Pakkhúsið or warehouse, for example. A typical Icelandic building, it displays two permanent exhibitions, the history of the town and one of classic children's toys and lifestyle items from the past and a third exhibition whose theme changes throughout the year. You'll also find a Tourist Information Office here that will explain where all the



other museums, art and cultural centres are, as well as all that can be enjoyed and experienced during your stay in the town. And it is a town you will want to stay in.

### On fire in the basement

Geothermal means heat from the ground —and there's plenty of evidence of it here, along with where it came from. At Krýsuvík, a little outside the town, are steaming mud pools, bubbling hot springs, brilliantly coloured lakes - all surrounded by equally brilliantly coloured hills. Hikers who climb up to the top of the hill are rewarded by the sight of the spectacular steaming vent and the view of ocean, fields and lakes. Well-maintained boardwalks wind through the area - but don't try to touch the pools. Remember where they're coming from!

These lava fields make for a marvellous hiking area, with mountains like Helgafell, with its panoramic view of the peninsula or the Krýsuvíkurborg cliffs, teaming with birdlife.

-ASF

**Hafnarfjarðarbær**

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Image by © Þorsteinn Guðmar Kristjánsson



## THE WARMTH OF ICELAND

*All-Icelandic wool products from Varma*

One might wonder how Icelanders have kept warm through the years on a seemingly barren arctic island. 'Varma – the warmth of Iceland' has the answer with its brand of wool products made entirely in Iceland and based on the traditional skills and craftsmanship that kept Icelanders warm during the hardships of past winters.

The main focus of Varma is on Icelandic wool, but other types of wool like angora

and lambs' wool are also used in production. Varma offers a wide range of woollen goods, from socks, gloves, shawls and hats to sweaters and cardigans. Being the only manufacturer in Iceland using Icelandic sheepskin, you can also find items like vests, mittens, hats, collars and bags in the collection. Varma also offers a little home collection with woollen blankets, pillows and cushions from sheepskin and a traditional Icelandic guestbook coated in sheepskin.

Varma is produced by Glófi, one of the leading manufacturers of woollen goods and traditional sheepskin products in Iceland with production facilities in three different locations in Iceland.

Varma's products are produced in a sustainable and eco-friendly manner and at the same time with an emphasis on classic virtues of traditional quality and style. Varma is thus committed to continuous improvement and development in design and usage of material with respect for its heritage and tradition.

-VAG

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## Fjörúkráin

A Viking village, set in the heart of Hafnarfjörður, Fjörúkráin 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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-ASF



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## Folk Museum in Eyrarbakki

### The Southcoast Museum

Árnessýsla folk museum is the historical home that the Danish merchants built in 1765, called Húsið, the House. Húsið is one of the oldest houses in Iceland and a beautiful monument of Eyrarbakki's time as the biggest trading centre on the south coast.

Today, one can enjoy exhibitions about the story and culture of the region. A famous piano, a shawl made out of human hair and the king's pot, are among items on view. Húsið prides itself on its warm and homelike atmosphere.



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## A WISH COME TRUE

*Your Wishlist at Óskalist*

For the mother-and-daughter run gallery Óskalist, creating personal art from their immediate surroundings is a wish come true. Their delightfully whimsical painted rock houses are a result of them scouring nearby beaches for uniquely shaped

rocks, which they transform into one-of-a-kind decorative statuettes.

Valdís Ósk, co-founder of Óskalist, says that they almost always manage to see some form in the rocks they come across and take great joy in working the original natural shape into the final piece. "We usually let the shape itself define how we work on each piece. We don't even mind if the stones are a bit odd or uneven, just as long as they stand on their own. That way each piece has its own character and we can safely say that no two pieces are even remotely alike," says Valdís Ósk.

Valdís Ósk and daughter Karen Ósk reside in Kjalarnes, overlooking the bay toward Reykjavik. They always wished to intertwine

their love for their home and their artistic talents. Valdís jokingly explains that the name of the company reflects that combination; as "ósk" literally means "wish" and "list" means "art" in Icelandic – both mother and daughter even have "wish" as their middle name.

Their gallery in Grundarhverfi is a perfect stop, just north of Reykjavík, on your way to or from the city.

Valdís Ósk and Karen Ósk welcome visitors into their gallery, and are more than happy to show them around the area. It might be safer to call ahead. They only accept cash, as they like to keep things simple and cosy.

-VAG

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## FROM HUNTERS TO HOME

*Palli now makes knives and forks for the kitchen and dining room*

Long known for his beautifully crafted hunting knives of various sizes, each with its own handmade handle, Palli is now creating works of art for the kitchen—and soon for the dining room—that any cook or hostess will be proud to own.



### Made with rare materials

Ornately engraved knives and forks—including kitchen and carving knives are now receiving Palli's unique craftsmanship. What makes his knives special is that he diligently sources his materials, researches the best methods for making long-lasting handles that are comfortable and safe to use—often from rare materials sourced from all over the world. Frequently, he blends different materials such as reindeer antler, goat horn, a hippo's tooth or a horse's hoof with wood such as ebony, elm or even fossilized wood that has been carefully dried over a period of years to harden it for a handle.

### Created for Connoisseurs

As a result of his passion for excellence and enthusiasm for creating a work of art from a tempered steel blade and these different handles, his knives are now to be found in over 85 countries, in use by hunters who appreciate these qualities.

When he creates a special knife, there is often a lot of bidding for it on the internet, such is the demand for them.

### Now for cooks and diners

Recently, Palli worked with one of the best Damascus steel blade makers to bring their crafts first to the kitchen and soon, also to the dining room.

With typical care and research, he is producing a range of initially, 4 kitchen knives, to be followed by a full dining cutlery set, using his 66 year-old dentist drill that he brought out of retirement for carving the handles and creating both individual pieces and sets that will be a conversation piece in dining rooms around the world.

### Inspired by a waterfall

You can find Palli in his studio in Mosfellsbær, right beside the Álafoss waterfall and the famous mill of the same name, just a 15 minute drive from the centre of Reykjavik. He is open from 11:30 am to 11 pm. His knives can also be found at the Brynja hardware store at Laugavegur 29, on the main shopping street in downtown Reykjavik or ordered online.

### Custom made for years of use

If you have specific materials you would like your hunting, kitchen or carving knife to be made from—or the dining cutlery, you can always let him know. Many knives are made to order and every one is individual and unique.

-ASF



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# DUTY FREE THE ICELANDIC WAY

*Start your Icelandic journey in the unique Duty Free Arrival Store*



**F**requent flyers know the ropes. They get through Passport Control and Customs and head to the Duty Free stores. They need to think. Are they entitled to it or not? Then, laden with bags, they struggle to the plane, shoving their precious cargo into already-stuffed overhead lockers. At the end of their flight, they lug the same bags down miles of walkways, stairs and escalators, before picking up their luggage and struggling to the taxis, coaches or trains, hoping they don't drop or break the bottles on the way.

## Iceland—a Different Way

The Vikings do things differently. At the International Airport at Keflavik, you will find a rare opportunity: a Duty Free Store in the Arrivals section right at the luggage pick-up point, where there are trolleys available. Mere feet from the luggage carousels, passengers

can shop at huge discounts compared to city prices, especially on wines, spirits and tobacco products. Before their luggage arrives, they have done their shopping and saved a lot of money.

## Don't lug it with you—get it here

Opened in 1970, the Arrivals Duty Free Shop was an instant success with passengers. With the airport expansion in 2008, it was enlarged to accommodate a much larger range of international and Icelandic brands, providing an opportunity to offer a very good selection of products. New changes this June bring a new buying experience, with the wines and spirits easily visible at the front of the shop and branded gondolas so it's easier to make your choice.

Today, the Duty Free shop has the largest range of wines, spirits and beers in the country—larger, even, than many other

countries' airports—and it includes the international award-winning Egils Gull beer—and all at a much reduced price.

Cosmetics, confectionery, tobacco products, toys and electronic products – including the latest DVD titles—are all available at discounted prices, so it is a good time to take advantage of the opportunity to get low prices on things you want to use during your visit. Here you will find all the top brands at knock-down prices. Think of it as a holiday discount!

## No Discrimination—Duty Free for all

Icelanders don't mind which country you're coming from or going to: the Duty Free discount applies equally to all travellers.

You don't need to worry about buying Icelandic currency first, either, as all major cards are accepted at the checkout.

## Go Home well stocked

Of course, most of the things you buy in the Arrivals Duty Free will probably be finished by the end of your visit and you will be looking for something special to remember your trip and for gifts to loved ones and children.

There is a large Duty Free Store in the Departures Lounge for those uniquely Icelandic items and a wide range of international brands that make perfect gifts and souvenirs that is worth paying a visit. Duty Free fashion clothing by Burberry, Mulberry and Boss and a special range of clothing by Icelandic designers are on sale. Unlike most other modern airports, the walk to the plane is short and trolleys can carry the load almost to the planes. Passengers from non-Schengen countries do not even have to carry their goods from the Departure Lounge as there is a shop close to their planes with the same products and prices.



**Duty Free**  
 Keflavik Airport • 235 Reykjanesbæ  
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## KVIKAN HAS THE ANSWERS

*A House of Culture and Natural Resources*

When visitors come to Iceland they are usually first greeted by the lunar-like landscape of the Reykjanes peninsula as they make their way from the airport. The feeling of having landed on the moon is quite understandable, but these first impressions often leave visitors with a handful of questions about life in such foreign conditions – questions that are all answered in Kvikan – House of Culture and Natural Resources in Grindavík.

Kvikan houses exhibitions about two of Iceland's more important natural resources, the salted cod and geothermal energy, which give a unique insight into how life started and developed on the volcanic peninsula. As the name implies, it will additionally serve as a centre to preserve and develop the area's resources and culture, ranging from fully utilizing their fish to celebrating their first honorary citizen – celebrated author Guðbergur Bergsson.

### A Battle of Sea and Fire

The Earth Energy exhibition answers many of first-time visitors' questions about the very beginning, as it details how Iceland came into being through the battle between the sea and fire. It demonstrates interactively how the plates on the earth's crust affect the



country with volcanic activity and powerful earthquakes and takes you all the way up to when man started harnessing this immense power. The area's geothermal energy has become a substantial part of Grindavík's daily life, as it supplies them with hot

water and laid the foundation for the now world famous Blue Lagoon, all of which is explained in the exhibition.



### Life is Cod

Before the Blue Lagoon was built, life on the peninsula was quite different, as you will see in the Salfisksetrið exhibition that takes you through the history of Iceland's salted cod industry. Cod was the backbone of Iceland's development, as it proved to be one of the country's most valuable exports and life seemed to revolve only around this seemingly simple product. To understand the inseparable ties of salted cod to the Icelandic psyche, the exhibition takes you through the entire history and process of cod fishing, processing and selling, from the sea, to the docks and all the way to Portuguese markets, as it were.

-VAG

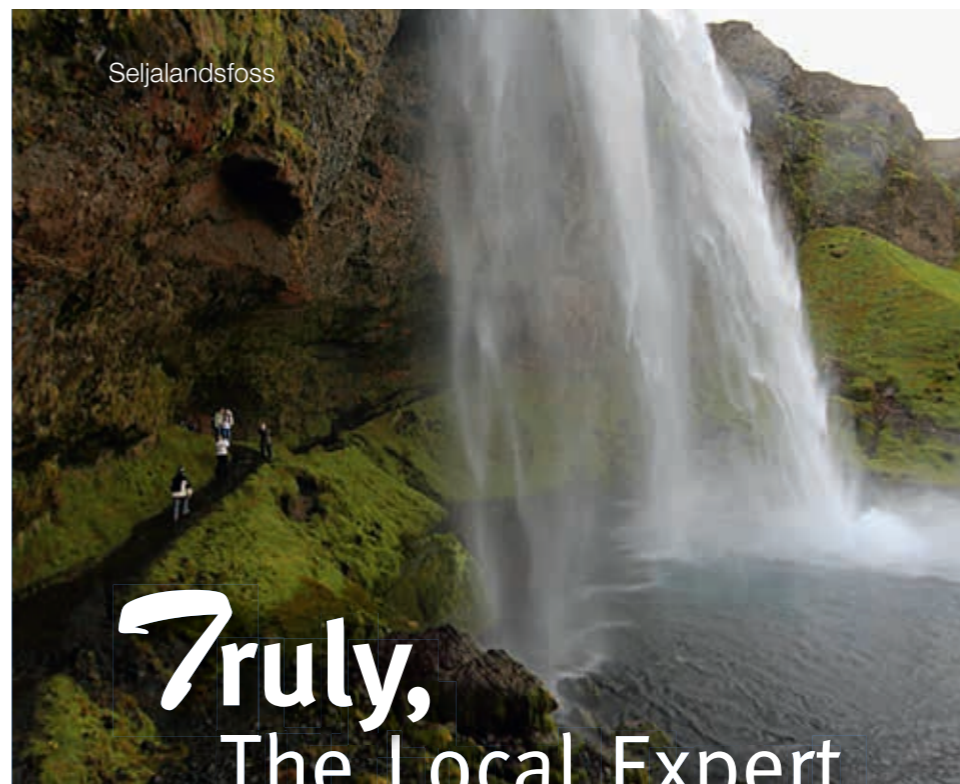
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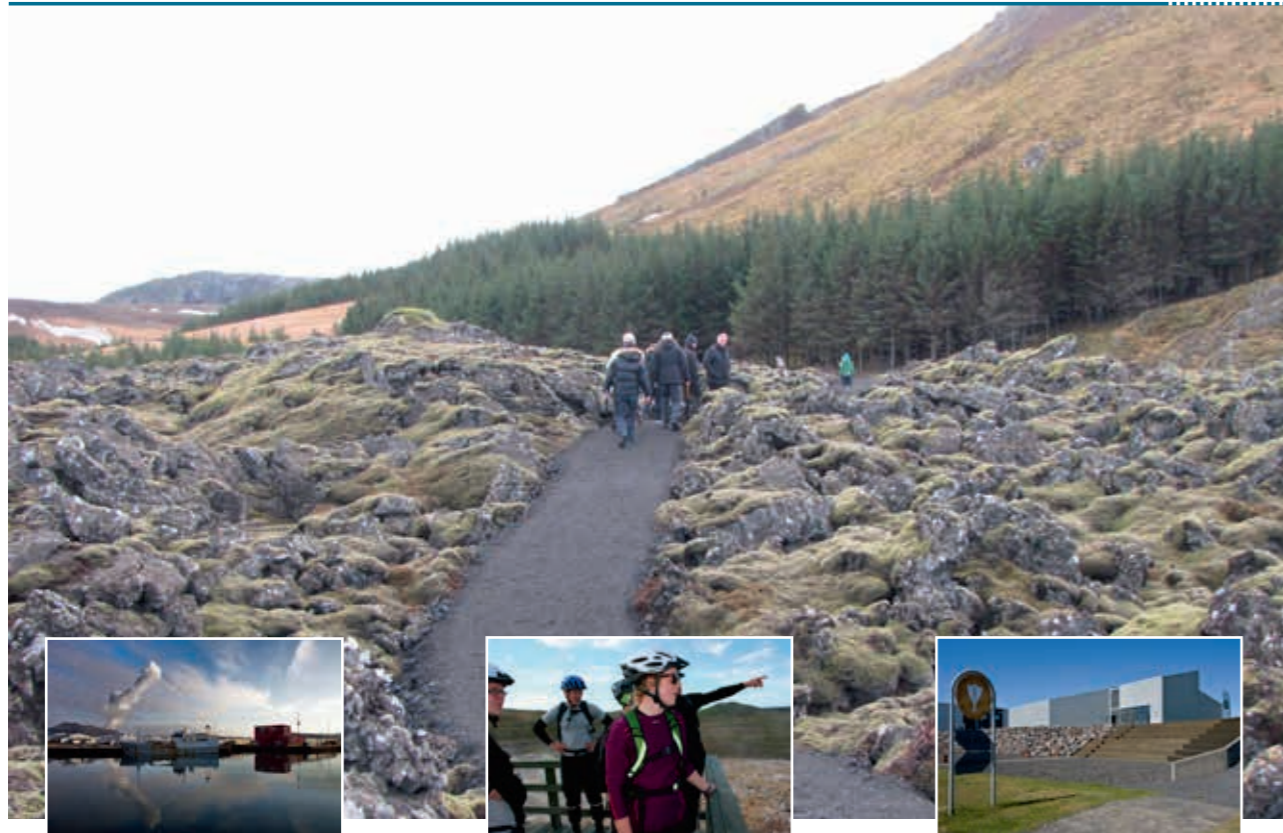
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## CONNECTED BY ENERGY AND HISTORY

*A New Path Between The Blue Lagoon and Grindavík village officially opened*

The fishing town of Grindavík and the world famous Blue Lagoon have been linked together by geography, geology and history from the beginning, but it wasn't until earlier this year that they were connected by an actual path. Last May, the five kilometre-long two-part path was officially named, giving visitors and locals a chance to travel between the two locations, while enjoying the fantastic surrounding scenery.

### The Contest

The township of Grindavík put up a contest to find the best names for the paths and the winning suggestions are well fitting. The path from the Blue Lagoon right up to the Selskógur forest is aptly named Energy Lane, due to the harnessing of the rich geothermal energy in the area on which the Blue Lagoon is based.

From Selskógur to Grindavík village, the path was given the name Ingibjörg Lane. Ingibjörg was a local woman and a community leader who, at the age of sixty, decided to utilize a fund dedicated to her to plant a forest at the foothills of Þorbjörn Mountain. In 1957 she planted the first tree

in an area she called Selskógur. The area has since become a cherished nature resort for the local people and leads up to several hiking paths on Þorbjörn Mountain.

### What makes Grindavík interesting

Grindavík is one of the true Icelandic fishing towns, where the harbour area is the life of the town and worth a visit in its own right. Around the harbour area you'll find cafés, museums and a chance to see the everyday work of Icelandic fishermen as they bring in the day's catch. For the gourmands, there is no lack of exciting culinary experiences to be found and, as is to be expected, the fish doesn't get any fresher than in the quality restaurants of Grindavík.



In addition, there are plenty of exhilarating activities available in Grindavík, such as Quad-bike tours, cave exploring and horseback riding tours in the nearby lava fields. Then, there is the informative House of Culture and Natural Resources named Kvikán where you can learn all about how the Blue Lagoon came into being and the area's rich cultural history.

With Ingibjörg Lane and Energy Lane, the Blue Lagoon has now become a part of a much bigger journey that takes you closer to the heart of the area's immense energy, history and culture.

-VAG



**Grindavíkurbær**

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 www.visitgrindavik.is





## GRINDAVÍK'S HARBOUR CAFÉ

*The reputation of Bryggjan netmakers' café is spreading fast*

Walk down by Grindavík's harbour and you may see the nets. Then you know you're there. Bryggjan's main work is repairing fishing nets and lines - nets that would completely cover the nearby mountain and lines that would stretch beyond Reykjavík, over 50 km away.

This is a fishing town and the café is a fisherman's café - though, with the growing number of visitors from all over the world finding it, it is quickly becoming the café of choice in the area. Little wonder, as the help and friendliness of the owners is only matched by the delicious food they offer.

-ASF



**Café Bryggjan**

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## COD AT ITS FRESHEST 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, bacalao has been a celebrated ingredient in

Mediterranean, African, and Caribbean cuisine for many centuries.

Benefiting from its proximity to the sea, Salthúsið'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.

-EMV



**Salthúsið cactus**

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My suggestion: don't leave without having a bowl of their soup. It's really good.

While I was there, one of the owners was spending time with visiting tourists, explaining the area and showing them on a map the best places to visit.

It's in the evenings and on weekends that things really take off. It's a small place but packed with character. A piano in the corner is often pressed into use, making it a fun and inspiring evening. Whether you are a local or just visiting, you'll feel at home.

Images © Gabriel Rutenberg

# THE RAW EARTH

*Ghosts, caves, cracks in the Earth, boiling pools, a spa and volcano safaris*



**R**eykjanes, where the Keflavik International Airport is situated, is one of the most overlooked areas when it comes to visitors. The drive into Reykjavik doesn't reveal much, except a column of steam rising from the lava fields in the distance from the famous Blue Lagoon spa. However, Iceland is the land of hidden secrets that are being revealed step by step. Iceland Excursions helps you discover some of them yourself on their different Reykjanes tours.

## Iceland in a Day

A typical visitor to Iceland spends a week or two in the country. When they return home, it is usually with the vision to get back to see more. There is just so much to see, it is physically impossible to see all you would like to in a short time.

I have found that Reykjanes encapsulates the key elements that make Iceland such a popular destination. You can see history, culture, nature, unusual geological features and enjoy life-changing experiences - while having a lot of fun at the same time. If you're a photographer, you'll be in your element.

One of the first settlers came to Sandgerði, where he found the fishing plentiful. Despite the violent, rough winter storms, this is still one of the most fruitful fishing grounds today and it's the first stop of this tour, which then continues over Miðnesheiði moor to the old stone Hvalneskirkja church, where Hallgrímur Pétursson first became known as both a powerful preacher and poet. It's history will give you a poignant and sympathetic insight into the rigours of life in 19<sup>th</sup> century Iceland.

## Torn between continents

The tour then takes you to the rugged tear in the earth that is the rift between the European and American tectonic plates. Here you can stand on the bridge spanning two continents, which are pulling apart from each other. There are few places on Earth where you can see something like this.

## Salvation for sailors and a ghost's demise

One of the oldest lighthouses stands at Reykjanesviti, from where the isle of Eldey can be seen rising from the waves on a clear day. The home of thousands of birds, it's a popular place to visit but, today, we are off to see a legend: Gunnhver. This boiling hot pool, surrounded by an array startlingly coloured rocks and sediment, also has a history. A troublesome ghost was causing havoc in the area until a priest laid a trap for her and she fell into the bubbling hot spring.

## Choice at the Blue Lagoon

After the morning's activities, it's time for a break at the Blue Lagoon. If you want to just go to the Blue Lagoon first, there are trips leaving Reykjavik straight there. While you buy your lunch or ticket to soak in the spa, you can think about the afternoon. Iceland Excursions offers a range of options.

You could simply return to Reykjavik - boring! You could spend the afternoon in the Blue Lagoon and take a later coach back - relaxing! Or you could take a trip to the lunar landscape of Krýsuvík and the Kleifarvatn Lake with their boiling mud pools and dramatic landscape after a stop

in the fishing village of Grindavík. Or, you could go underground into the amazing lava tube caves and craters, with their amazing formations and colours, natural phenomena and sights. Alternatively, you could take a thrilling ride on an ATV on a volcanic safari through the lava fields and mountains above ground. Those both offer quite a thrilling experience!

## The Golden Circle

Lastly, leaving Reykjanes, you could take an afternoon tour around the Golden Circle to see the famous UNESCO World Heritage site of Þingvellir, where the world's longest running parliament, Iceland's Alþing, was originally held and where, again, you can see the splitting tectonic plates before moving on to the spectacular geothermal area of Geysir. Here you can see a dramatically coloured landscape, dotted with pools of iridescent blue water and the famous Geysir steam spout. It is not very active currently but its neighbour, Strokkur, more than makes up for it, in towering eruptions every few minutes.

The tour then moves on to the powerful, stepped Gullfoss waterfall, where the waters from the Highland glaciers form the Hvítá - the White River which plunges down over the rocks into a steep ravine, sending up a spray that creates rainbows in the afternoon sunshine. It's a stirring sight of nature's raw power.

If you're short on time and want to take in as much as possible in one day, these tours from Iceland Excursions offer a lot. *-ASF*



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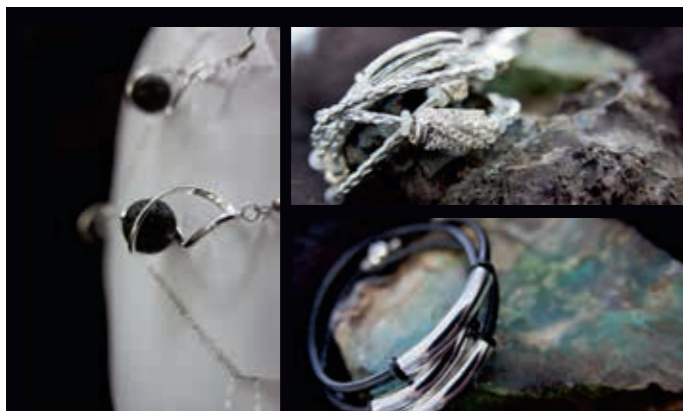


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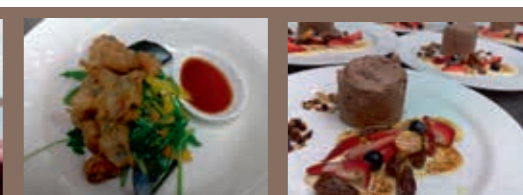
The open-air museum in Garðskagi is located in a natural garden, which blends the beauty of the landscape with its rich animal and bird life. The museum has both a Folk and Maritime Museum and has an outstanding collection of machines. Open daily from 1 pm to 5 pm.

From the terrace of the restaurant you can watch whales in their natural environment. One of the two lighthouses in the region is open to visitors.

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## FOUR STAR COMFORT IN KEFLAVÍK

*Hotel Keflavik has been transformed to meet travellers' needs today*

Hotel Keflavik opened in 1986 and was the first 4 star hotel to open in Keflavik. It predominantly served the traveller who was just staying one night on arrival or before flying out. Since then, however, Iceland has gone from Iceland's Best Kept Secret" to the "Destination of Choice".

With its proximity to the airport, Keflavik is naturally a handy place to stay but it is its proximity to a wide range of sights and experiences that is making it so popular that many visitors now use it as their base.

### Complete renovations

The hotel was renovated, both inside and out, this last winter to accommodate the burgeoning influx of visitors coming for a

### Great for Groups

Incentive groups find the hotel especially convenient, as it can host meetings for up to 60 with its separate dining room for groups

in addition to the restaurant and bar. Its breakfasts, known to be among the best in Iceland, are served from 5 am especially for travellers leaving or arriving on a flight.

The hotel offers a free transfer service by taxi to or from the airport. It's only a 5 minute drive, which is a real relief when you're tired or rushed.

-ASF

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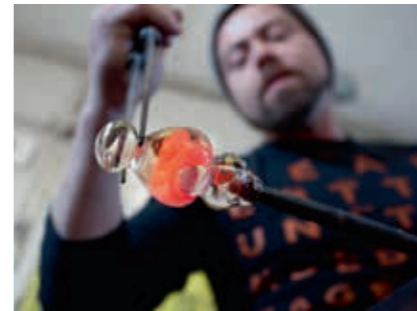
## BURNING HOT AS THE SUN

*In their Keflavik studio, Ice Glass creates art in glass*

With over 20 years experience working together, mother and son team of Gulla and Lárus are producing awesome works of art in glass in their small glass foundry, next to Kaffi Duus in Keflavik.

### Playing with fire - skillfully

Glass making is highly technical science and art combined. With ovens burning as hot as the sun or a cooler 500°C, this is not work for the timid. Much of the skill of the glass maker lies in intuition and experience, in knowing at exactly what moment to work it. Not only that, but knowing what elements to add and how to add them and at exactly what moment is what marks the



artist as a master in his or her field. Gulla and Lárus are not shy about trying new ideas and experimenting with different materials –such as volcanic ash from the notorious Eyjafjallajökull eruption.

Ice Glass is experimenting with recycling glass products rather than sending them to a landfill and creating beautiful and decorative works of art from them.

### A gallery of light

The gallery offers a glimpse into the prodigious creative abilities of the artists—and you're more than likely to find a use for a lot of the items in your home! Being glass, there is a special interplay of light and shadow.

Knowing that most visitors return home heavy-laden, Ice Glass will ship anything that catches your fancy so it arrives safely.

There's nothing worse than buying a hand-made work of art and to find it in pieces when you get it home.



### Making it personal

The glass factory is open from 12-6pm weekdays and visitors are welcome. Not only do you get to look around at the wide range of creations but, if you have something in mind, they'll try to make it for you on the spot. That makes it all the more personal and provides you with a meaningful memory of your visit.

-ASF

**Ice Glass**  
 Grúfm 2 • 230 Reykjanesbær  
 +354 857 0850  
 gulla@iceglass.is  
 www.iceglass.is

Images © Gabriel Rutenberg



fishing boats deliver their catch only a few metres away from the restaurant itself, so you can see why. For those with a preference for meat, the roasted fillet of Icelandic lamb is highly recommended.

Flights often arrive and depart early in Iceland, so Vitinn opens at 7 am to offer groups delicious breakfasts that will sustain them for hours to come. Here, again, the food is freshly cooked.

Dining at Vitinn is a very inspiring introduction to Iceland. The restaurant interior, with its richly coloured wooden walls and beams, is adorned with mementos from both Sandgerði's agricultural and seafaring past. In summer months, diners can enjoy their meals outside with a view over the harbour and sea, the clean and fresh air adding to the experience.

-ASF

## DINE 10 MIN FROM THE AIRPORT

*Vitinn, at Sandgerði's harbour makes dining a delight*

After a long flight, getting your luggage and getting out of the airport at Keflavík, that gnawing feeling in your stomach needs to be satisfied but you still have the trip to your hotel, checking in and so on—possibly an hour or more, at least.

Less than 10 minutes drive away, however, is one of the most famous restaurants in Iceland. It is probably the only restaurant in all Europe to cook the delicious rock crab. Lunches and dinners here feature really fresh seafood. The





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## GK Ceramics

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GK Ceramics is an open pottery and ceramics workshop close to Sandgerði harbour where you can see the artist at work and buy beautiful handmade pottery direct from the potter.

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## DINE AT KEFLAVÍK'S HARBOUR

Try Kaffi Duus' rib safari boat tour followed by dinner with a view

You could take a walk by the seaside and harbour of Keflavík, following a great meal in Kaffi Duus at either the very start or end of your journey to Iceland. Perhaps the unique element of visiting Iceland is the interrelation of everything; here, you're only five minutes from the international airport yet you can find an authentic seaside experience.

This warm restaurant is located by Keflavík's small boat harbour, the very heart of the town. Thus, the view from Duus is inspiring, even hypnotizing; while eating

your meal and enjoying your drink, the sea outside will grab your full attention.

Originally a small restaurant, it now hosts over 200 people and is a favourite with locals. The owner, Sigurbjörn built the house and all its interiors by himself, little by little over the past fifteen years. Sigurbjörn, like many other Icelanders, does not limit himself to one profession; apart from running a restaurant, he is educated as a carpenter. That certainly comes in handy when one wants to built a restaurant using wood!

Such is the variety of food at Duus that everybody will find something to their liking. But the speciality is, of course, the fish. Whether you fancy a buttery lobster or the national dish, cod, Duus makes sure to produce a fairy-tale for your taste buds!

This spring, Duus not only provides you with great food and fantastic view of the harbour, they also offer a rib safari tour. If you would like to watch some jumping whales, dolphins or the Northern Gannets living on the island of Eldey, such a tour might be the very adventure you seek. Going out on those fast, open speed-boats gives the tour a thrill you do not experience in the more traditional whale-watching tours.

The setting of Duus couldn't be more picturesque—a lovely wooden building, in the post-card perfect location, overlooking the deep blue waters of Faxaflói Bay. Whether you're in town during lunch or dinner-time you will be able to choose from a wide variety of dishes. The combination of a cosy environment, good food, a great stroll by the seaside and a lively tour on the sea sounds like a great day in Keflavík.

-ST.S



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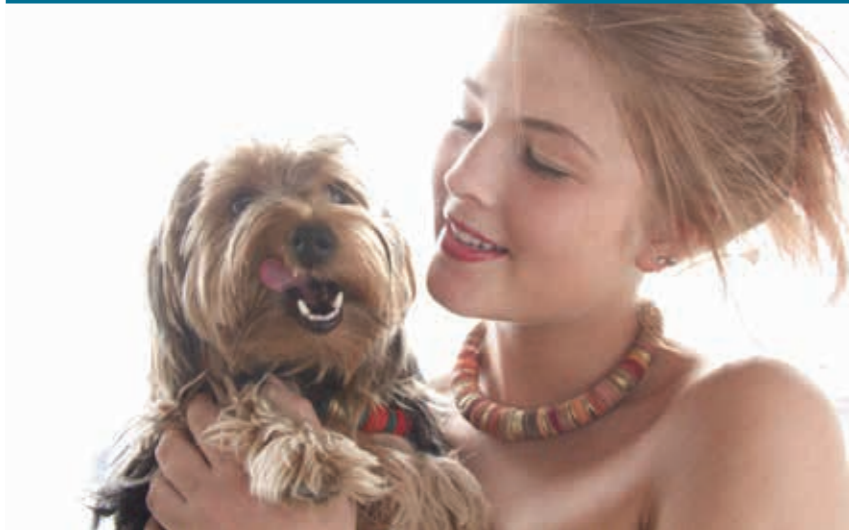
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## LEATHER DESIGNER

*Ladies handbags, earrings and necklaces*

Quality Icelandic design and leather handcraft is much sought after. “My first leather design was a handbag painted with colourful artwork and patterns,” says Guðrún Stefánsdóttir, a successful independent architect who found a second career in creative leather designs. Guðrún designs leather handbags and now she’s added necklaces and earrings to her Ark Art accessory collection. “I wanted to use the leather cut-offs for something useful, when I came up with the idea to use them to make jewellery—earrings and necklaces.”

Guðrún’s Ark Art leather jewellery is recognisable by her use of thin leather rings or squares and use of colours. It is a sophisticated yet simple design, skilfully using geometric shapes and colours.

Guðrún graduated from the Royal School of Architecture in Denmark in 1986. After working at an architect’s office, she started her own business.

“I’ve worked on some amazing projects, ranging from large buildings to single family homes. My favourite projects are those where I design everything from A-Z for private homes. Those projects would typically involve the house and interior design, the landscaping around the house and the furniture inside.”

The Ark Art collection is available at the National Art Gallery, Sæðis jewellery shop at Reykjavik’s Old Harbour, Snorrastofa in Reykholt and directly from Guðrún.

More information can be found on Facebook: Ark.art leather design.

-NNH



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\*Admission January 2013. Price is subject to change



## HISTORY BROUGHT TO LIFE

*The Snorrastofa Cultural and Medieval Centre is in Reykholt*

**S**norri 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 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1241.

### Snorrastofa

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, 'The Snorri Sturluson Saga', can be visited all year round. During the summer season, (1<sup>st</sup> May —31<sup>st</sup> 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



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## BETWEEN MOUNTAINS AND SEA

*Kast Guesthouse offers a Natural Stress-Relieving Break*

**W**ith 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.

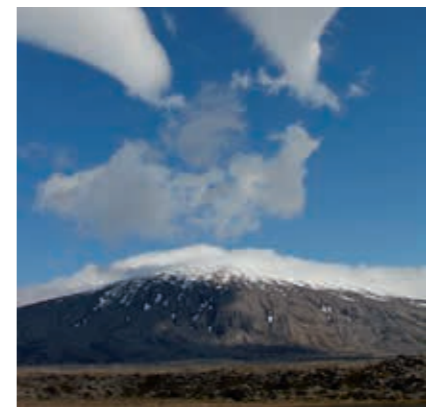
When we were in the area this year, we wanted to stay there as it is such a beautiful location. Ten of the double rooms have en suite bathrooms and the remaining six are with shared bathrooms. There are two rooms that take up to four people each with sleeping bags. There are toilets and cooking facilities.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



**Kast guesthouse**

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# A SETTING FOR EVERY MOOD

*Gamla Kaupfélagið Extends its Selection*

On a tranquil peninsula in Akranes you'll be pleasantly surprised to find Gamla Kaupfélagið, a high quality restaurant, well-known for its menu's wide range and popular with the locals and visitors alike.

## Indian in Akranes

Gamla Kaupfélagið has recently added a tandoori oven to its repertoire, offering a variety of exciting Indian dishes. Gísli Sigurjón Práinsson, restaurant manager, says that the Indian addition is another reflection of Gamla Kaupfélagið's ambition to satisfy every customer. "We're always looking for something new and exciting to keep things interesting and our customers seem to appreciate that," says Gísli.

## Catering to all customers

Gamla Kaupfélagið can cater to almost all of their customers' tastes, whether it be road-weary travellers looking for a quick snack, gourmards looking for something fresh and inspiring, romantic couples looking for a cozy night out or larger families looking for a complete package. "The pizzas and pastas are always popular, as well as our plentiful salads, for those who know they want those. But for those looking for a more unique culinary experience, our lobster dishes never fail to satisfy," says Gísli.



Gamla Kaupfélagið is located in a spacious house that was formerly a general store, providing each customer with an experience to suit their personal taste. After 10 o'clock on the weekends, the restaurant changes to a bar, where the friendly locals tend to gather after the working week.

-VAG

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# HOT FROM THE OVEN

*Geiri's Bakery and Coffee Shop in Borgarnes*

Travellers coming from Reykjavik spot the bakery from the Borgarnes bridge. There's plenty of parking right outside the shop. Geiri's customers immediately feel welcome the moment they step into the bakery, where delicious pastries and breads are made on the spot.

Geiri is an affable man who takes pride in what he knows best, which is baking breads and pastries of all sorts. His personal favourites are the 'love balls', which are oil fried balls of pastry a little larger than a golf ball, and a cinnamon bun commonly called snúður in Icelandic. His special version



on this popular theme comes with a thick chocolate crust and a large glass of fresh milk. They can all be enjoyed sitting at the comfortable seats and sturdy wooden tables of the coffee shop.

The view is so extraordinary that visitors should be charged an entrance fee! Right outside the window, there is a tidal plain filled with birds at low tide and the second longest bridge in Iceland. Beyond the bridge one sees the impressive local mountains, snow-capped in winter. In the distance lie the Eiríksjökull and Langjökull glaciers.

*Geiri's bakery is the perfect spot to stop for refreshments on your travels on the Ring Road.*

-SV

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# WORLDS OF MAGIC & MYTHOLOGY

*Take a trip into other worlds at the Edduveröld Exhibition in Borgarnes*

Norse mythology is one of the most fantastic legacies of the ancient Nordic heritage of which Iceland is an integral part. Edduveröld – Edda's World – offers local and foreign visitors alike an accessible glimpse into this hitherto largely hidden heritage with a model and a professionally made audio guide available in a number of languages.

Kristjánsdóttir from Borgarnes. "I love the Norse mythology," says Erla, "The more I read about it, the more I enjoy it. It is

## Norse Mythology in Borgarnes

Several large size wall hangings with images from the Norse mythology make up this unique exhibition. The centre piece is a 25m<sup>2</sup> model of the ancient world designed by artist and visionary Haukur Halldórsson, whose ambition is to build a life-size amusement park like the one seen in the model. Visitors can enjoy a 20 minute audio guide commentary in English, German, Norwegian or Icelandic for adults and in Icelandic for children.

Edduveröld Exhibition is owned and operated by Erla Jónsdóttir and Guðrún



Edduveröld in Borgarnes, and later at Reykholt which is about 30 minutes from Borgarnes.

## Homely restaurant and Coffee House

Edduveröld restaurant offers home-style lunch at an affordable price and an à-la-carte menu in the evening. "We make everything from scratch, so we know exactly what goes into our food and pastries," says Erla. Mythology plays a big role in the naming of the dishes on the à-la-carte menu. There's a lamb dish named Óðin and the fish catch-of-the-day is called Miðgarðsfiskur. More information about the restaurant and its special lunch and dinner offers of the day is available on their website and Facebook.

The restaurant is open from 10 in the morning until 11 at night every night except Fridays and Saturdays when it stays open until 1 am.

-SV

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 www.edduverold.is



possible to view the stories in so many ways and I guess everyone will picture it in his or her own way."

The source of the Norse heathen mythology was recorded by Christian chieftain and scholar, Snorri Sturluson in the manuscript Snorra Edda in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Sturluson happened to live at the Borg farm in Borgarfjörður, only 10 minute drive from the

# WHERE BIRDS & PHOTOGRAPHERS MEET

*Akranes is for people who enjoy nature, culture, and life*

The town you can see gleaming in the sunshine across the bay from Reykjavik harbour is Akranes, a haven for photographers, campers, hikers, nature, bird and beach lovers and history buffs.

It's only a bus ride away, with the regular bus service no. 57 or 58 taking you past picturesque farms, setting the stage for the variety of nature and bird life as you approach it. Once in town, the local bus service is free.

Akranes is a very popular place for camping and caravans. The sites are well set up with all the facilities easily available. Shops and the two swimming pools are close by. There is also the golden sand beach, which is unusual for Iceland. There are changing facilities and a sun veranda right next to it. Hot showers and a jacuzzi make it a relaxing place to enjoy the long summer evenings.



The geography of the area is inspiring for hikers, who have all levels of hiking open to them—including Akrafjall mountain that forms the backdrop to the town and, to a large extent, its protection from the northerly winds. From its peak, the view in every direction is absolutely spectacular, and provides the best view over Faxaflói Bay to be found anywhere. There are planned hikes twice a week or hikers and walkers can follow the different marked routes.

The town is surrounded on three sides by the sea—which gives plenty of scope for some good fishing. Since the camp site is right next to one of these fishing spots, catching your dinner is all the easier, if you're a fisherman. There are a range of good restaurants available for those who aren't up to catching their meals!



## Lighthouses with a view

The summers are usually warm and pleasant but the same cannot be said for the winters!

At Breiðin, on the westernmost part of the Akranes peninsula, stand two lighthouses. The smaller is one of the oldest concrete lighthouses in the country, built in 1918. It is a little closer to the sea than the newer one and has been abandoned now. The rough winter's seas pound it and send spray right over it.

The taller lighthouse is open to visitors from 10 am till noon daily throughout the summer and provides a beautiful panoramic view of the Akranes area and all the way to Keflavík, making it a spot for photographers to take full advantage of, as the birdlife around it is also very diverse all year round, offering many photo opportunities.

## Art, culture and sport combine

The town is known for its culture. The Music School is right in the centre; art and crafts are found everywhere, as is writing, singing and poetry.

Akranes is a family town with plenty of activities and sports. The 18-hole golf course is one of the country's best and you can rent a set of clubs and enjoy it yourself. Football is very popular and their top team boasts several stars who have gone to famous international clubs. There is a great bar-b-que area in the park, surrounded by trees, with games and crazy golf. Walking and cycling are popular pastimes, with bikes available to rent and paths of different lengths to enjoy. Swimming is popular - either in the pools with their hot tubs or in the sea, where the bathing club invites guests to swim with them three days a week.

## A dramatic picture of the past

The museum area is really worth visiting. Besides examples of fishing vessels down the years displayed outside, including the only example of a 3-masted cutter, the indoor section has samples of practically every aspect of the fisherman's life. Next to it is another unusual museum: The Icelandic Sport Museum. Check out the footsteps on the floor. A Geological museum is housed in the same building with a large collection of stones which show just how colourful Iceland is. There is always an exhibit on display.

-ASF

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## STEP BACK IN TIME

*A stay in Hótel Flatey is a trip into the life of the past*

It seems that time stopped sometime about a century ago when you get off the Baldur ferry in Flatey. Life is slow here, far from the frenetic pace of most of the world's cities. You feel a wave of peace and calm flow over your spirit as you walk past small coloured cottages, with the sheep grazing just outside their doors.

### Life goes on without the Internet

Was there life before the Internet? Here, there is freedom from the tyranny of email and the web—and it's a real relief. The world goes on and you really miss very little of it. It seems out of place to even have a laptop or mobile phone here.

### A rich history and culture

The island of Flatey is the largest of the thousands of islands in the mystical Breiðafjörður Bay. It has been inhabited since the days of the Settlement.

This small community has a rich history. It had its own church and doctor and its library held a treasury of old manuscripts. The library still stands today behind the church and has been an inspiration for authors, musicians and artists for centuries.



### The Hótel with a History

Hótel Flatey started life as a 'pakkhús', or warehouse for the goods brought by large sailing ships that moored in the natural harbour. Today, it has 11 rooms, consisting of 1 large family room, 3 suites and 7 double rooms for the many visitors who want to spend a little more time on the island. The rooms retain the style of the past, complete with magazines from the early 1960s.

It's popular with photographers for the island's rich birdlife and interesting landscapes and birds unafraid to approach the house.

The restaurant has been used for many purposes: It began life as a warehouse, then a meeting house, a radio communication house, young people's association, gym and theatre. It is still used for music concerts of every genre, especially on the weekends.

Downstairs, there used to be a salt storage and a place for tanning sheep skins. Now converted to a bar—the Salt Bar, you'll be reminded of your childhood with seats from the old school, the wooden vaulting box and benches from the old church. It's full of character and good drinks.

### A Summertime Special

The Hótel is open from the end of May and closes at the end of August. Nowadays, only the two farming families stay on the island throughout the year. They still raise the sheep to be seen wandering on the island.

-ASF

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 www.hotelflatey.is



## MEET THE OCEAN'S BIG FIVE

*Láki Tours takes you to meet the whales and more*

Anyone who has met them will agree that whales are amazing animals—especially seen close up. Whether they be orcas, humpbacks, minke or pilot whales—or dolphins, for that matter, meeting them is a real experience.

### Basking in the Bay

Grundarfjörður and Ólafsvík lie on the mystical Breiðafjörður Bay—a fantasy world of countless islands, birds, fish, dolphins and whales. They are sighted almost daily through the year here. Recently, for instance, 100 pilot whales put on a show for visitors aboard Láki's boat. Such a high rate of sighting a range of these maritime creatures makes this area tops for both experience and photo opportunities. The tour to the whales leaves from Ólafsvík.

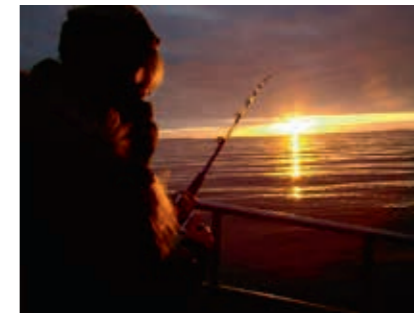
### Fins and Feathers

While the whales are very popular, the tour to the islands to see the birdlife and catch some fish is not to be missed. Sea angling is a lot of fun, if you haven't tried it—and if you catch your dinner yourself you can certainly

guarantee its freshness. You're in the perfect position to spot any whales or dolphins who are curious enough to see what you're up to and if you're taking their dinner!

The photographers on this tour will have a feast of their own, with so many photo opportunities including, of course, the elusive little puffin.

This 3–4 hour tour from Grundarfjörður on the Láki is an experience that many want to repeat. During the summer months, as the evening sun paints the sky red, the bay takes on a wholly different, romantic character. Sea angling in this setting is quite special, too.



There is wildlife in the area that you won't want to miss from killer whales and diving gannets to the fox and the white-tailed eagle.



Staying at the Hótel Framnes, situated right by the bay, is a very good choice, as it perfectly located for whale watching. It is a comfortable, homey hotel that provides very friendly and personal service. You can watch the sky changing over the bay in the evening as you relax in the hot pot. Its restaurant offers delicious freshly-caught fish on its gourmet menu.

Open all year round, the hotel makes a very good base for all your activities on and around the peninsula.

-ASF

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### Stay by the Bay

Tours on the Láki are not all that this area has to offer. It is very popular for hikers, photographers, bird watchers and horse riders, as all these activities are available—not to mention tours up onto the famous Snæfells glacier. No one has yet replicated Jules Verne's 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth' but the glacier is spectacular.

# THE DRAW OF THE WEST

*Reykjavik Excursions tour the fantasy world of West Iceland*



Who would ever believe that such a small island could have such diversity? Its geology, geography, bird and animal life, culture, history and even its weather all contribute to a land that is so much larger than just the sum of its parts.

Most visitors land at Keflavik international airport and take the FlyBus into Reykjavik. But the capital is not the country, so many take the famous Golden Circle Tour to Pingvellir, Geysir and Gullfoss - but neither is even the Golden Circle the country.

### Four Ways to the West

Reykjavik Excursions offers an ever broader range of tours and here, we are going west on their four different tours to the Snæfellsnes peninsula, made famous by Jules Verne's 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth'. Its snow-capped volcanic mountain with its glacier glistens in the sunlight, clearly visible from Reykjavik on clear days.

Breiðafjörður Bay, on the north side, looks as it has been taken from a fantasy film. Dotted with thousands of islands, the flat calm may be broken at any time by a school of dolphins or a family of whales after the many fish that call the bay their home.

### The Wonders of Snæfellsnes

This is a full day tour all the way around the Snæfellsnes peninsula. I took this trip and learnt more in one day than in all the ten years I had been visiting the area. The views are absolutely stunning. From mountain ranges to green plains, dotted with picturesque farms, to cliffs, packed with screaming birdlife to placid rock-strewn beaches where curious seals observe you as much as you enjoy them and seascapes, where dolphins and whales may be seen just offshore, to awesome rock formations and the massive Snæfellsjökull - the volcano and glacier towering over all, with its impressive lava field reaching down to the sea, scarring the land. There are waterfalls, fishing villages, quaint restaurants and historical sites that make this a very inspiring tour.

### Three choices to Stykkishólmur

#### The Ocean Tour

For those who are keen to see the bird and sea life, this new tour specialises in getting up close and personal with nature. To see the rare White-tailed eagle, once almost extinct, in its natural habitat is just one of the experiences this tour offers. The new 12-seater boat is compact enough to really

get close to the islands where gray seals sunbathe on the rocky outcroppings, the colourful puffin has his home - when he is not diving for fish to feed his fast-growing family and the multitudes of varieties of other seabirds and waterfowl nest. The boat offers unparalleled photographic possibilities and an adventure to remember.

### Wonders at Sea

This tour also takes you to a number of the islands where you can also see the birdlife in a larger vessel. A unique and very popular meal is provided: Viking Sushi. A special net is cast over the stern of the boat and brings up a variety of scallops, sea urchin roe and other delicacies that you can eat straight out of the sea. You can't get fresher than that! You get to see a lot on this two-and-a-half-hour cruise of this mystical bay.

### The Fisherman's Village

Many people enjoy exploring a traditional fishing village, this tour gives that opportunity. Stykkishólmur is a fascinating place, with many classic wooden houses from the 19th and early 20th centuries; restaurants - including one that has hosted several kings, queens and presidents over the years; a museum at the Norwegian house and the fascinating new Volcano museum, including the collections of world-renowned vulcanologist, Prof. Haraldur Sigurðsson. The views from the village vantage points are spectacular. I'm planning a return trip this summer, as there's a lot more to see.

### Take the scenic route through history

These three tours return to Reykjavik by a route that takes in the coastline before turning into the beautiful farming valleys. There's a possibility to stop at one of the farms that produces the most delicious ice cream. Don't miss it! This area was often cut off during winter months as the road climbs high into the mountain range before descending to the historical town of Borgarnes, where the tours stop for a visit to the Settlement Centre, the award winning exhibition of life in Settlement times, with recorded iPod tours in numerous languages.

While Reykjavik Excursions offers many tours to different parts of the country, the tour to the West is one of my favourites.

ASF



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## MYSTIC HISTORY

*Reykhólahreppur: Overlooking Breiðafjörður from the Westfjords*

The Westfjords' south coast holds one of Iceland's hidden pearls. It's a small, peaceful community with both natural phenomena and a grand landscape. Over a dozen fjords surround the island-dotted mystical Breiðafjörður Bay with its beautiful scenery, historical and poetic references and exceptional birdlife.

### A Service Centre with a History

Two and a half hours' drive from Reykjavik on paved roads, Reykhólar village is the county's centre, providing a full range of services,

including a campsite, stores, museums, a unique seaweed spa at Sjávarsmiðjan and a geothermal swimming pool. The oldest summer hotel in Iceland, Hótel Bjarkalundur, provides quality accommodation, dining and picturesque views. Throughout history Reykhólar has been home to many of Iceland's most prominent chieftains and is frequently mentioned in the Icelandic sagas.

Flatey Island is an important cultural site. A visit takes you back to the year 1900. Reminders of past times include a monastery built in 1172 and Iceland's first library built in 1864.



### Birdwatchers' Paradise

A wide variety of species nest around both the coastline of Reykhólahreppur and on the islands of Breiðafjörður Bay. One of the most impressive are the majestic and elusive whitetailed eagles (*haliaeetus albicilla*), that both nest in the area and can be seen flying over Reykhólar.

### Uncountable Islands

Some say Breiðafjörður Bay's islands are uncountable though cartographers estimate there are around 3,000. Eyjasigling at Reykhólar offers cruises to inhabited islands and those uninhabited except for the plethora of birds.

-VAG

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## SOFT AS SILK SPA

*Sjávarsmiðjan's Seaweed therapy brings health and relief*

If just the word 'spa' evokes feelings of comfort and well-being, you should try the real thing—especially after a day's hiking in the beautiful Reykhólar area, with its birds, seals and whales—not to mention the spectacular countryside. Soaking in Sjávarsmiðjan's hot pots, with its natural hot water, is both relaxing and invigorating.

Add to this the wonderful proven health benefits of seaweed gel and you will come out rejuvenated, with your skin as soft as silk, strengthened and with improved elasticity.

Seaweed detoxifies the body by stimulating the release of excess body fluids. Toxins are replaced by minerals. Scientists report that Seaweeds are rich in vitamins A,



B<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>2</sub>, B<sub>6</sub>, B<sub>12</sub>, C, E, K, pantothenic acid, folic acid, and niacin. They are an important supply of 60 trace elements and an excellent source of over 12 minerals, especially sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, iron, zinc and manganese.

Other health benefits of seaweed baths include reduction of tension, muscle pain and fatigue, improved circulation, aiding weight loss and cellulite control and easing menopausal discomforts. Those with asthma, arthritis, insomnia, inflammation, dermatitis and psoriasis find great improvements.

-ASF

**Sjávarsmiðjan**  
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 sjavarsmidjan@sjavarsmidjan.is  
 www.sjavarsmidjan.is



## ICELAND'S OLDEST COUNTRY HOTEL

*Hotel Bjarkalundur is at the entrance to the West Fjords*

Under the majestic Vaðalfjöll mountain, with its two distinctive tops of volcanic basalt plugs, nestles Bjarkalundur, the oldest country hotel in Iceland. Surrounded by an ancient birch wood, the hotel's immediate environment is friendly and welcoming. This historic and popular resting spot has served Icelanders and foreign guests for sixty-six years.

### A World Apart

Bjarkalundur is conveniently located to stop for a breather before entering Iceland's most remote region, the West Fjords. The hotel has, throughout its history, welcomed guests and made them comfortable. In the past, dances were held during the summer months and still the Midsummer Night bonfire is an event enjoyed by local people and travellers alike.



### Trolls and the Hidden People

The Western Fjords are a world apart, as reflected in the folk tale of the trolls who tried to dig this mountainous peninsula away from the mainland to establish a troll colony, free of men and their meddling. The landscape is a mixture of deep narrow fjords, high mountains and luscious green plants. Tall cliffs, teeming with birdlife rise sharply from the deep blue sea.

Enjoy a respite at Bjarkalundur before and after experiencing the amazing charm of the West Fjords and their people. You will find it just off Road 60.

-SS

**Hótel Bjarkalundur**  
 Bjarkalundi • 380 Reykhólahreppi  
 +354 434 7762  
 bjarkalundur@bjarkalundur.is  
 www.bjarkalundur.is



## PEACE WITH NATURE AND BIRDS

*Hótel Látrabjarg brings back the simple joys of life*

On Europe's western-most tip, Hótel Látrabjarg is set amidst a photographer's and birdwatcher's paradise at the furthestmost point of the Westfjords. It's a rugged countryside here, with sheer cliffs rising high above the fjords. Although the road is paved from the ferry terminal to Patreksfjörður, the nearest town, from the end of the fjord,

a gravel road takes you to the beaches of Rauðasandur, the bird cliffs of Látrabjarg and the hotel. The route is studded with spectacular vistas, ending in a bay that, with its curved white sand beach and clear blue waters looks as if it belongs in a travel brochure for the Caribbean.

The hotel has a commanding view of the fjord, where whales can sometimes be seen,

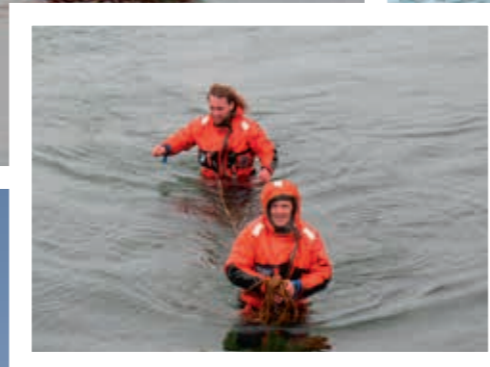
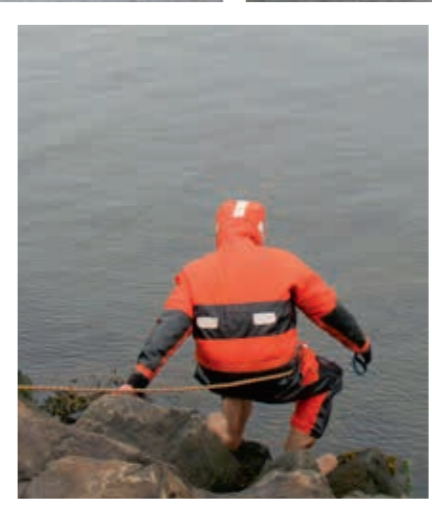


and of the bay and valley below, where sheep graze peacefully. It's an almost idyllic situation during the summer months, when it is open from 15<sup>th</sup> May to 20<sup>th</sup> September. It was originally built as a boarding school for local children.

Although it can handle up to 40 guests, owners Karl and Sigríður like to maintain a close, homely atmosphere and therefore do not take groups during the high season. This has made it popular with individuals who appreciate its simple style, delicious meals and tranquil surroundings, with their constantly changing colours.

-ASF

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# INTERVIEW WITH A WHALE

*An incredible story from the Westfjords by Magnús Kristjánsson*

On the first weekend of August in 2009, which is a national holiday in Iceland, I had an experience that has changed my life. I was staying with my family on the Hella farm in Steingrímsfjörður in the Westfjords. It's a wonderful place where you can immerse yourself in nature, and listen to the grass growing.

On the far side of the fjord you'll find Hólmavík, a fishing village with a few hundred inhabitants. At the mouth of the fjord there is Drangsnæs with a similar population, and finally, the island of Grimsey, which is only inhabited by puffins.

## Adventure in the morning

On this morning, our kids had made their way to the beach early, looking for adventure. Usually nothing happens when you are looking for adventure. But this morning was very different. Our kids found a whale on the Hveravík beach. A real blue whale that was still alive, blowing water fountains into the air. We all rushed to the beach and gazed at one of the largest living animals in the world, right in front of us. It must have been hunting for mackerel and got too close to the beach and became stranded in the shallow water. Mackerel have previously not been so far north,

but marine scientists believe that the increased temperature of the oceans is responsible for this new development.

## With the whale in the water

I dressed in my wetsuit, my friends tied a rope around my waist to secure me and I started wading through the water to the colossus. What an incredible feeling to touch him, to sit on his back, to feel its gurgling and bubbling, while little fountains of water escaped from its blowholes! It seemed like the whale knew exactly that we wanted to help. That was not easy, as it must have weighed 200 tons.

## To the rescue!

The 20-ton MS Sundhani from Drangsnæs came to our aid and, with the help of the approaching high tide we would try to drag the whale into deeper water. We tied a rope around its tail and succeeded, using all the machinery to the full, to actually move the colossus. It responded initially with some panic movements, which is understandable, but then it calmed down and followed the ship out into the fjord. Half of the rescue of this magnificent creature was done!

## Magic between whale and human

In the end, the removal of the rope was rather a larger problem, and we finally decided to

just cut it. This was the start of the second incredible story, as the whale remained close to the ship. Not only that but it swam around it several times and picked up the rope with its head, as if it wanted us to understand that the loose, hanging rope would cause its death. So I went into the water one last time—this time on my own and in full confidence that the whale would trust me. And the miracle happened—the whale lay calmly in the water and waited, until I had removed the rope. Only then did it swim quietly away.

Later, from the beach, I could watch my friend for a long time, breaking through the waters of the fjord, on his way to freedom. We both learned a lot that day.

## Focus on French

Magnús company, Aðalsendibílar focusses on the needs of French visitors, with all the guides being graduates in French.

## Tours for groups large and small

Tours run throughout the year, with vehicles to suit the conditions and the groups' needs. Whether a coach for large groups or SuperJeeps for smaller groups, the tours visit all the main sites and custom tours are a speciality.

-DT/ASF



Islande.is—Aðalsendibílar  
Víkurbær 2 • 112 Reykjavík  
+354 778 8600  
magnus@islande.is  
www.islande.is



## WHERE MONSTERS RULE

*Sea Monster Museum of Bíldudalur*

Tales of sea monsters have played an important and colourful role in Icelandic folk culture for centuries, and several written accounts of them can be found in all parts of the country.

These elusive creatures have been given a worthy home at the Iceland Sea Monster Museum, located in the village of Bíldudalur, which nestles on the shores of Arnarfjörður fjord.

This fjord is reputed to be one of the most prolific centres of monster activity in the country.

Visitors to the Sea Monster Museum watch these remarkable creatures brought to life through a lively mix of words, images and videos as well as an action-packed multimedia display that culminates in a spectacular interactive map, the first of its kind in Iceland.

First-hand accounts from eye-witnesses are

joined on-screen by academic theories on the nature of sea monsters, while a variety of relics and artefacts relating to this mysterious branch of zoology appear throughout the museum as tangible evidence for their existence.

Those with monster appetite will appreciate the museum's cafeteria which offers a range of light refreshments and snacks.

-SV

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## WESTFJORDS REVEALED

*Let EagleFjord Tours in Bíldudalur be your guide*

Would you like to take a bath in a natural hot spring in the Westfjords only the locals know? Jón at EagleFjord Tours in the village Bíldudalur is the local guide for Arnarfjörður and Tálknafjörður fjords – and he's not just an average local guide.

Jón loves showing visitors his part of the world. He has been submerged in the local

culture and business life of the area his whole life but turned his full attention to tourism in 2007. Before, he used to be a commercial trawler fisherman, fish factory owner and shopkeeper. Jón takes great interest in his surroundings, the nature, history and culture for some time and visitors help him appreciate it even more. "I used to sail back and forth



in and out of Arnarfjörður fjord for decades as a professional trawler fisherman without recognising the scenic beauty. Showing people the amazing things we have here has helped me 'see' what I never saw before and to appreciate the things I used to take for granted," he says.

### The One-Stop Shop

EagleFjord Tours offer an amazing range of activities which truly makes it a one-stop shop for visitors. Whether you like exploring Viking Age burial sites, sea angling, whale watching, hiking or great food – Jón at EagleFjord Tours offers it all. Visit his website for details.

-SV

**EagleFjord Travel Service**  
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 www.eaglefjord.is



## ACCOMMODATION FOR ALL

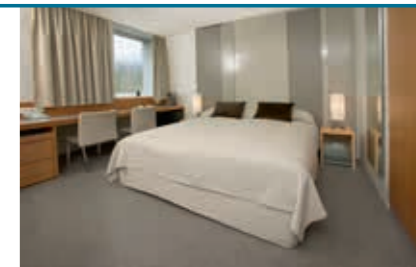
*A Platform for Your Westfjord Excursions*

Being one of the most remote regions you're likely to find, one might suspect that it could prove to be a challenge to find suitable accommodation deep in the Westfjords of Iceland.

Quite to the contrary, the village of Ísafjörður now boasts of three different options, each suited to different needs and tastes, which make for the perfect base from which to explore the winding fjords and extreme landscapes visitors are likely to enjoy to the fullest.

### The Old Guesthouse

Gamla gistiúsið, or the Old Guesthouse, is aptly named, as it is located in a house dating all the way back to 1896, which is quite old according to Icelandic standards. The rustic atmosphere makes for a cosy and affordable stay for weary travellers, singles and families alike, but even though the house is over a century old, it is up to modern standards and has free Wi-Fi. Backpackers and those travelling on a shoestring would be well advised to check out their sleeping bag option.



### Hótel Ísafjörður

Hótel Ísafjörður is all about comfort – a three star hotel with splendid views, a quality restaurant, lift, airport bus, fully equipped rooms with showers and a 24-hour reception. For those who want to go all out, the deluxe room is the way to go.

### Hótel Horn

Hótel Horn is a brand new hotel opening its doors this summer. It offers a total of 24 fully equipped rooms, including family rooms with small kitchen areas.

No visitor should feel left out in the cold in Ísafjörður and the Westfjords await.

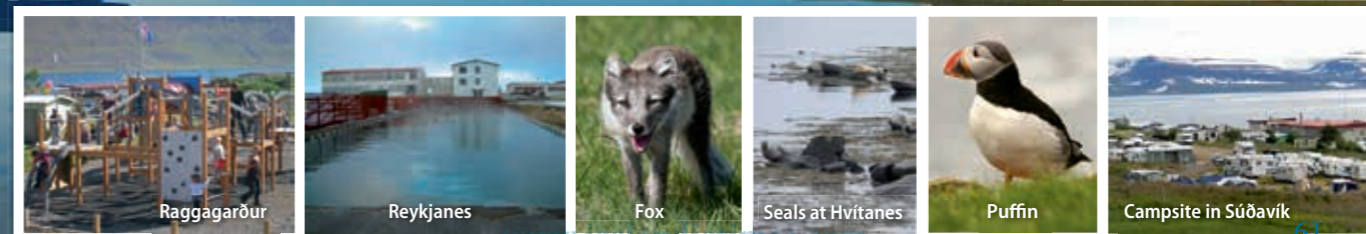
-VAG

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## A beautiful area to visit

- A wide range of wildlife
- Many hiking trails
- Helpful tourist services
- Arctic Fox Centre celebrates its 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary on 9<sup>th</sup> June
- 'Deep Fjord Day' on the 3<sup>rd</sup> August.
- Blueberry Days will be held from 16 – 18<sup>th</sup> August





## ICELAND'S FIRST SETTLER

*The furtive little arctic fox is found in the Westfjords in Súðavík*

The arctic fox is an enchanting creature. At some point in the distant past, it travelled across the frozen sea and, in spite of the inhospitable climate, found a home on this small, isolated island. The arctic fox is Iceland's only native terrestrial land mammal and has been the subject of curiosity by scholars and lay people alike. For this reason, The Arctic Fox Centre was established in the village of Súðavík in 2010, since the fox is commonly found in the area.

### Exhibition of the first native

The Centre is located in the oldest house in Súðavík, a 120 year-old farm that was renovated by the local authorities and is situated between what locals call the 'old village', destroyed in a devastating avalanche in 1995, and the 'new village', built in its stead at a safe distance from the mountain.



The Centre serves as an educational and cultural hub and offers an extensive exhibition on the arctic fox as well as regularly exhibiting local arts and crafts. Its main aim however, is to collect and preserve everything of importance regarding the arctic fox and its long-lasting relationship with man as surprisingly, fox hunting is the oldest paid occupation in Iceland.

The exhibition is divided into three sections: the biology of the fox, the hunting



Vesturof the fox and the hunters themselves, this last mentioned containing, for example, objects and personal accounts from fox hunters. Other material is presented through written text or video and, of course, there are quite a few stuffed animals. Visitors are guided through the exhibition, which is one of a kind in Iceland and open all year round. The Centre is a non-profit business, involved in research and studies on the population of the fox. They also offer guidance on arctic fox tours in collaboration with tourist offices as well as believing in and supporting ecotourism in Iceland.

A nice little café at the Centre sells home-baked pastries, light courses and wonderful coffee, which guests can enjoy out on the patio overlooking the beautiful mountains and the sea. The café has open Internet access. On Friday nights, live music is performed in the loft, where it's nice to sit down for a drink in the cosy atmosphere. The Centre also has a small boutique selling specially made souvenirs and craftwork.

-HP



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www.meirakki.is



Images by © Þórunn Sigurðsson



## A NATURE PARADISE

*Hótel Djúpavík, comfort and care at the edge of the world*

Untouched nature and interesting history are among the attractions of Djúpavík at Strandir. In this remote part of Iceland, a special breed of people found a

way to live off the land and, when all the fjords were filled with herring, it became an important player in the hunt for the 'silver of the sea'. Now it is a paradise for walkers and nature lovers who come to Hotel Djúpavík from early spring till autumn.



### Old factory and dormitory

Hótel Djúpavík was established in 1985 when Eva Sigurbjörnsdóttir and her husband Ásbjörn Þorgilsson decided to cultivate guests rather than fish. "We had planned to start a fish farm but were unable to get a loan," says Eva. "We had bought



the women's dormitory along with the old herring factory and the hotel started there."

Most guests stay at Hótel Djúpavík in search of a nature experience. Many walk from one fjord to another but others use cars, kayaks or boats to get from place to place. Eva and Ásbjörn provide guidance and advice on what to see and how to get there along with comfort and rest after a long day's exploration.

### A Historical Exhibition

The Herring Factory is now the site of Djúpavík's Historical Exhibition, where old photographs and texts lead viewers through the life and times of people in this quiet cove at the edge of the world. There are guided tours provided daily at 10 am and 2pm.

-JB



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## WESTFJORDS WONDERS

*West Tours help you get the most from this amazing area*

The Westfjords are an amazing peninsula characterized by steep, flat and also peaked mountains between deep blue fjords, beautiful colourful beaches with inhabitants who make travellers feel warmly welcome.

West Tours is the most experienced travel agency and tour operator in the region, celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013. The West Tours office is based in Ísafjörður and small booking offices are planned to operate

in Hólmavík and in one of the villages in the southern part of the region during summer.

West Tours' objective is the presentation, marketing and selling of all tourism-related services that are offered all over the peninsula. West Tours is now owned by about 60 tourism-related companies and individuals that all, in some way, are connected to the Westfjords. Good co-operation between the companies is seen as the key for a positive outcome.



West Tours' clients can choose between many services. If you plan a day trip, a weekend or a longer trip in the Westfjords during summer or winter, West Tours will be happy to make an unforgettable experience happen.

### Activities offered in 2013

ATV tours, bike rentals, bird watching, horseback riding, hikes and walks, various kayaking tours, local food tastings, RIB-boat safaris, scooter rentals, sea angling, sightseeing tours by car or boat, whale watching, winter activities, Northern Lights tours and many kinds of package services.

*We look forward to seeing you in the Westfjords!*



**West Tours**  
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westtours@westtours.is  
www.westtours.is







## Kjörbúðin Óspakseyri

Open for almost a year, Kjörbúðin Óspakseyri offers traditional goods in the spirit of the old Co-ops. A store like in the old days where advice and assistance is easily available, whether it is regarding a bicycle repair or the nearest internet access. As for merchandise, one can simply find everything from shoelaces, books, coffee & cake, antiques or vinyl records to old shirts. The most romantic shopping opportunity in Iceland!

*Let your eyes wander!*

📍 Bræðrabrekka • 500 Staður 📞 +354 451 3360 / +354 857 4800 🌐 www.facebook.com/kjorbudin

## Tangahús Guesthouse

Borðeyri is one of Iceland's smallest villages with a population of just 25 on the southern part of Strandir, 8 km from the N1 Services on Route 1. The Guesthouse can sleep 23 people, with extra mattresses available for children, if needed. A kitchen, dining room, library, Internet access and laundry are all available. Set very close to the sea, the views are of birds, seals and the fjord.

Borðeyri • 500 Staður • +354 451 0011



## A HIDDEN GEM IN VIÐIDALUR

*Horse-riding and breeding in Stóra-Ásgeirsá*

If a horse-breeder is situated between a mountain called Hrossakambur (horse hill crest) and a valley named Hrossadalur (horse valley), you can expect something special. Magnús Ásgeir Eliásson in Stóra-Ásgeirsá is deeply into horses. Most of the family business' 60 Icelandic horses have received first prize breeding honours. The new breeder generation now comes with fresh energy – and sparkling new ideas.

The farm is situated in the beautiful Viðidalur, just outside Hvammstangi, a short drive from the Ring road No.1, and close to the extensive fluvial valley of the Viðidalsá river with its rich green pastures and impressive mountain backdrop.

### The grey stallion

Flocks of fine horses are grazing on the farmland. Many of them are the offspring

of Eldfari frá Stóra-Ásgeirsá, a grey stallion owned by Magnús' father Elías. Eldfari is impressive, with high breeding scores and an excellent Skagafjörður pedigree. He displays an elegant high-quality tölt (or running walk). Around 10 foals are born each year, and visitors are welcome to have a closer look at them – and of course, at Eldfari, while he's doing his job as a sire on the breeding meadow.

### Bred for a smooth ride

Icelandic horses are known, not only for their friendly character, but for their additional tölt gait, that guarantees a smooth and comfortable riding experience over long distances.

The focus in Magnús' breeding lies on an easy-going and flowing tölt and on good riding qualities – for sport horses as well as for family horses. Horse-enthusiasts who appreciate the

horse types of northern Iceland will find the horse of their dreams either among Magnús' own stock or with his assistance, as he knows exactly where to find the right horse.

### Horseback tours

First and foremost, Magnús likes to have a good time. You should really share this desire – and join him on horseback in his brand new horse rental company, on trips around the lovely Viðidalur. Here he will help you experience not only the amazing tölt of his horses, but also the beautiful landscape in every direction you look. Do you have some dream about riding? Let Magnús know. His horses are friendly and willing, and he will offer a custom-made riding tour, following your wishes. Accommodation can be provided on farms in the neighbourhood and, in the evenings, you will be amazed as Magnús grabs his guitar and starts to sing Icelandic folk songs or country music. That's Iceland: hidden talents in remote valleys, and Magnús is no exception.

Explore Iceland the way you want to see it—on horseback in Stóra-Ásgeirsá.

-DT

## The Folk Museum of Reykir

On display are a number of famous old boats and ships, amongst them the famous shark ship Ófeigur from Ófeigsfjörður. We also show how Icelanders used to live by displaying the living arrangements of an old house named Syðsti-Hvammur, which used to be near Hvammstangi.

Many spectacular 19th - 20th Century pieces are found inside the museum. New & exciting crafts from the local community will be on sale at the museum. On-site restaurant.

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## Hlaðan Café & Restaurant & Bar

Hlaðan is a cosy café, restaurant and bar specialising in Icelandic home cooking. It's novel location is in an old restored house that used to be stables and a cow shed, in the centre of Hvammstangi overlooking the harbour and the seashore.

📍 Brekkugata 2 • 530 Hvammstangi  
📞 +354 451 1110 📧 hladan@simnet.is



## Spes Farmers Market

A fascinating market with local foods eg. fresh, smoked and dried fish, cheese and jams, handicrafts and special crafts created using ancient Viking methods and materials gleaned from the area.

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📧 spes.sveitmarkadur@gmail.com 🌐 www.northwest.is/spes.asp



**Stóra-Ásgeirsá Horse Rental**  
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# HORSES, HISTORY & NATURE

*Skagafjörður – Diverse Nature, Great Adventures and Historical Experiences*

When the Icelandic traveller thinks of Skagafjörður, what undoubtedly comes to mind is the steep, picturesque cliff of Drangey, which towers majestically in the midst of the big fjord from which the district derives its name. Resulting from countless references to Drangey both in history and culture, this small island is firmly embedded in the Icelandic psyche.

Secondly, what comes to mind is the Icelandic horse. Skagafjörður is an important breeding place for this beautiful, humble servant that enabled people to survive throughout the centuries in harsh conditions. These two distinctive features frame the different possibilities Skagafjörður has to offer; an area of natural wonders and an abundance of cultural and recreational activities.

## An important historical area

Skagafjörður is a municipality in the North of Iceland which covers the area from most of the peninsulas creating the fjord itself to the broad valley that bears the name of the fjord and goes all the way to

the highlands. Thus, it is an area of great natural variety with steep mountains, fertile inlands and a varied coastal environment. The biggest town the area of Skagafjörður is Sauðakrökur after which come the village of Hofsóss and other smaller villages.

Skagafjörður could also be said to be the centre of a historic circle ranging from Blönduós, west of Skagafjörður to Siglufjörður in the north and Akureyri in the east. Hólar í Hjaltadal, the old bishopric of the North, in fact used to be the most important in the North. Many who served as bishops of the North are arguably some of Iceland's most important figures.

## Sites of Interest

The battle of Örlygsstaðir, the biggest battle in the history of Iceland, also took place in Skagafjörður, when the great families in the age of Sturlungs fought. Historic facts such as these can be learned in Skagafjörður through various museums and places of historic importance. For example, the turf farmhouse at Glaumbær shows clearly how life used to be in rural Iceland; the

Minjahúsið museum in Sauðarkrökur is unique for showing how artisans' workshops used to be and the Icelandic Emigration Centre in Hofsóss focuses on the mass emigration from Iceland to North-America in the 19th century.

## The Bad need Somewhere to Be

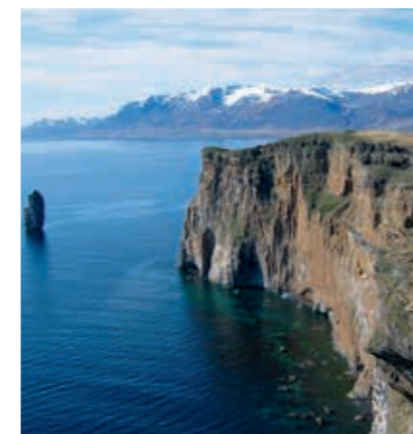
This cliff in Skagafjörður certainly has a mystic character to it. According to old folktales, the cliff itself is an old female troll who turned to stone at daybreak while traversing the fjord, as trolls can't handle sunlight. Grettir, in the famous Icelandic saga bearing his name, was an extremely strong but ill-tempered man, who ended his days in Drangey as an outlaw.

One of the historic bishops at Hólar, Guðmundur the Good decided he was going to bless all of Iceland by ridding the land of vile beings. But once, as he hung from the cliffs of Drangey, to expedite this work, the story says that a big hand came out of the cliff and grabbed him. He heard a voice say, "the bad ones need somewhere to be." The bishop decided not to bless Drangey.

This story does not frighten the locals, who go every Spring to collect eggs and birds on the cliffs of Drangey.

## An inspiring way to enjoy water

By Hofsóss, you can find a great way to enjoy the view of Drangey. The new swimming pool is a masterpiece of design. Once you are in the pool you get the impression that you are swimming to the sea and to



Drangey while swimming in the warm water of the pool.

Skagafjörður has, in total, seven pools across the area as well as various hot springs to bathe in, the most famous one being Grettislaug at Reykir.

## Being in Nature among Horses and Birds

Skagafjörður is a fitting place to enjoy horses. Not only do the various horse-riding companies in the area provide a variety of trips but you can also visit a breeding farm, see horse shows and even experience a horse corral if you are in Skagafjörður at the right time of year!

Skagafjörður is a nice area to explore on horseback. There are many uninhabited places not too far from town providing you with the tranquility to enjoy nature. Whether you like a short trip, or a multi-day excursion to the highlands, you will be able to experience it here.

There are various other ways to enjoy the nature of Skagafjörður; watching and listening to the rich birdlife, pumping some adrenaline in your body by river rafting in



the glacial rivers, hike the various trails in the area or sail on a boat to Drangey and Málmei.

At the end of a day, you can visit one of the many restaurants in the area serving high-quality food made under the Food Chest concept, which encourages the eating of local produce.

Whether you are travelling with the whole family, by yourself or with your partner or friends, Skagafjörður has something for everybody!

-NNH

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 skagafjordur@skagafjordur.is  
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# THE ARCTIC BOW MYSTIC BEAUTY

The beauty of the northern towns with their vibrant lifestyle



## The Herring Museum

The Herring Era Museum in Siglufjörður is an award-winning museum bringing to life the 'glory days' of Iceland's herring fishing industry in three different buildings.

Snorrögötu 16 • 580 Siglufirði ☎ +354 467 1604 ✉ safn@sild.is 🌐 www.sild.is



## Allinn

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



## The Folkmusic Centre

Traditional Icelandic music and folk dance.  
Folk Music Festival 3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> July  
Open daily,  
June- August from 12-18

Norðurgötu 1 • 580 Siglufirði ☎ +354 467 2300 🌐 www.folkmusik.is



Hannes Boy and Kaffi Rauka  
Among the top restaurants in the north of  
Iceland offer traditional specialities.  
Relax by the harbourside  
Rauðka restaurant—food—live music

Gránugata 5 • 580 Siglufjörður ☎ +354 467 1550 ✉ raudka@raudka.is 🌐 www.raudka.is



far from the madding crowd of cities and smog. The pristine beauty restores the soul and provides a different perspective on life.

Of course, the world is out there and, if you need it, there is free WiFi in all the rooms. The hotel's restaurant provides delicious meals with ingredients from the area and has a great wine selection to go with them.

## SINGING IN THE SILENCE

On the Troll Peninsula, Hotel Brimnes surrounds you with nature

It's as if the birds know the photographers and nature lovers are coming. They put on their most colourful attire and their singing can be heard all around the lake and surrounding mountains at this time of year. We're up in the north of Iceland, on the banks of Ólafsfjörður lake. The view is stunning, like a picture postcard - but it's real.

Hotel Brimnes has recently refurbished its 11 hotel rooms. Its 8 popular log cabins

on the lake's edge, each with its own private hot tub fed by a nearby geothermal source, accommodate families or groups of up to six, who love to go trout fishing, kayaking, diving, horse riding, hiking or cycling around this beauty spot.

### A picture of tranquility and beauty

On a still day, the lake is like a mirror, reflecting the surrounding mountains on its surface. It's a place to come to be refilled,

### The Arctic Bow

This part of North Iceland, known as the Arctic Bow, is also known for its spectacular scenery. With the opening of the new tunnels, access to the whole Troll Peninsula is easy.

Spring, Summer, Autumn or Winter, you will find plenty to enjoy here.

-ASF



## Niels Whale watching

Daily from Hauganes in North Iceland from 25 May - 5 Sept. at 09:30 and from 25 June - 20 August at 18:00

Sailing on the beautiful, long and narrow fjord of Eyjafjörður in search of whales. A unique opportunity to enjoy witnessing whales, fish and birds in their natural habitat on board a traditional Icelandic oak boat. On every tour we also offer our guests to try catching some fish, if interested. This is a fully guided tour and includes coffee and homemade pastries.

Hauganesi • 621 Dalvík ☎ +354 867 0000 ✉ niels@niels.is 🌐 www.niels.is





## THE ARCTIC BOW

Amazing range of scenes, history and nature

The Arctic Bow is the name of the remarkable 184 km scenic and historic route along Tröllaskagi (Troll Peninsula) on the north coast of Iceland, stretching from Varmahlíð in the west to Akureyri in the east, passing through the recently built 11 km long tunnels between the towns of Siglufjörður and Ólafsfjörður. Along this route, there's beautiful nature, excellent accommodation, fresh local food and a variety of activities to enjoy.

### Hólar

A small university community and episcopal see started in the early 12th century. The current cathedral dates back to 1763 and those interested in Icelandic horses will surely enjoy the Icelandic Horse History Centre. The nearby village of Hofsós hosts the Icelandic Emigration Centre and an award-winning swimming pool, neatly located on the seaboard.

### Siglufjörður

Best known for its 'Herring Era' in the 40's and 50's. Visitors can watch local boats bringing in the catch of the day from

the comfort of one of Rauðka's excellent harbour-side restaurants with stunning views of nature.

### Ólafsfjörður

Also known for its stunningly beautiful surroundings, it is best enjoyed on foot. Visitors can choose to hike with a map and a compass, or make use of one of the sign-posted hiking routes. Scheduled whale watching trips are available in summer and kayaks and bikes can be rented at the quiet Brimnes hotel and bungalows by the town's beautiful lake.

### Dalvík

In Eyjafjörður, Dalvík's annual August event, The Great Fish Soup Day, is attended by thousands who enjoy the free seafood soup and entertainment for the whole family.

Dalvík's Hvoll Folk Museum provides insight into the life and work of the local people. Amongst other things, it commemorates 'Jói the Giant', the tallest Icelander ever, thought to have been 231 cm. Sea angling and whale watching tours are available from Dalvík's pier; horseriding tours



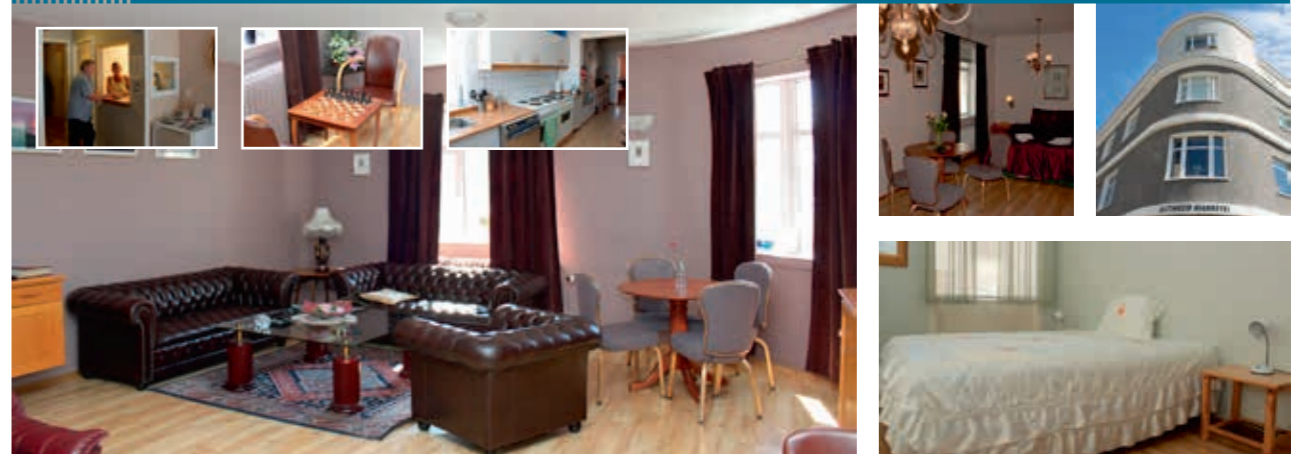
can be taken in the Svarfadaralur nature reserve and a ferry sails from Árskógssandur to the beautiful island of Hrísey.

### Gímsey

Gímsey Island is the northernmost settlement of Iceland. The Arctic Circle crosses this small island whose 90 inhabitants depend on the fishing industry. The island can be reached by ferry from Dalvík and by air from Akureyri.

### The Photographers' dream

The Tröllaskagi peninsula, and its islands of Hrísey, Gímsey, Málmei and Drangey are renowned for an amazing birdlife. Photographers interested in photographing the birds should register and participate in the 'Bird for a million' photo contest. There is a ISK 1 million cash prize for the winner. Visit [www.birdforamillion.com](http://www.birdforamillion.com) for more information about the contest. -SHV



## ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Siglufjörður Hostel provides great accommodation for travellers

Formerly one of the most glamorous hotels in Iceland in the hey-day of the herring bonanza in the 1930s, Hvanneyri guesthouse and hostel is still, today, the place to stay when you are far north of Iceland in Siglufjörður on the Troll peninsula.

Today, it is a family-owned and run hostel and it has that feeling of staying in a warm, comfortable family home with helpful family members who take an interest in you.

Whether you are travelling alone, with a family or in a group, you will find a friendly welcome and comfortable stay for budget-conscious travellers with all the facilities one expects in a modern guesthouse and hostel. That includes free Wi-Fi, parking, a barbecue grill, a guest kitchen—and free coffee, too.

This has been an international centre since it was built. Its reputation has spread across the

continents and it is a hub for travellers of all nations, some of whom return year after year.

Located on the main street, it is surrounded by the town's bakery, restaurants and shops, making it a perfect place to set up base for hiking or photography—or just simply enjoying the spectacularly beautiful countryside with its mountains and fjord.

-ASF

**Hvanneyri Guesthouse**  
 Adalgata 10 • 580 Siglufjörður  
 +354 467 1506  
[order@hvanneyri.com](mailto:order@hvanneyri.com)  
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## JUST OPENED

Siglunes Guesthouse offers a comfortable stay with an old world charm

A new guesthouse just opened in the very north of Iceland, in Siglufjörður. The building has been totally renovated and yet, with the wood panelling in the bar and lounge and the old style furniture, you feel you have stepped back in time.

The beds are all new, high quality and very comfortable - something you'll appreciate after travelling or hiking in the mountains. The second and third floor bedrooms all have private bathrooms and

a mountain view. The six rooms on the ground floor have shared bathrooms. All have Wi-Fi access.

Siglunes Guesthouse provides healthy choices for breakfasts throughout the year. For a day out hiking or other outdoor activities, they can provide food packs and from mid-June until the end of August, the restaurant will be open for dinners in the evenings. Where possible, locally grown food is offered.

Siglufjörður is a good base for hiking and bird photography. The views are nothing short of spectacular at any time of the year and the birdlife is amazingly varied. It is a popular place for sport, culture and history and my personal favourite town for its beauty and friendliness. The trip alone is worth it and it's a perfect place to stop when taking the scenic 'Arctic Bow' route around the north.

-ASF

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from being the main catering service of the town, organising all sorts of events, to being a restaurant serving a wide range delicious food at fair prices, such as fish, steaks, hamburgers and pizzas.

This spring, this happy hard working family opened the bakery and coffee house, to add to the restaurant. This enables them to be open all day as a bakery and coffee house (from 9 am to 5 pm during the week and 10 am till 4 pm on weekends—including Sunday) and then to be open as a restaurant at lunch time and in the evening or from 6 pm to 9pm or later.



## DINING WITH A HARBOUR VIEW

*Harbour view restaurant, coffee house and bakery*

If you are driving around the Trollskagi peninsula, following the Arctic Bow route around this northern beauty spot, you will naturally want to stop for a break en route and stock up for your travels with delicious snacks. If you have children with you, it's practically a requirement!

overlooking the lively harbour of Dalvík. In many ways, it is the centre of the action, as it is a popular gathering place for the local community. So, if you are travelling and would like to combine meeting the local people while enjoying a good snack or meal, this is the obvious choice.

### Eating and meeting with a view

Við höfnina, meaning by the harbour, is a cosy family run restaurant, coffee house and a bakery, right in the centre of the action,

### Dinner, snack or drink

It is run by the cheerful school teacher and cook, Gústaf Adólf Þórarinnsson and his family. The restaurant has been developing



### Try the cumin coffee

In the bakery, a wide variety of freshly baked, healthy breads, buns, sandwiches, pastries and cakes are available.

It's an ideal place to take a break, and stock up for your onward journey or just to relax and enjoy a delicious cake and real hot chocolate, tea or cumin coffee that is traditional in the area.

On warm days it is possible to sit outside in a sheltered outdoor area, taking in the sun. Here you are likely to be joined by others and it's amazing how a friendly place like this can lead to new friendships, forged over something as simple as a cup of coffee.

-AMB/ASF

**Við höfnina**  
 Hafnarbraut 5 • 620 Dalvík  
 +354 466 2040  
 dallas@dallas.is  
 www.dallas.is



## THE OLD POST OFFICE

*Jóa Guesthouse connects people and places*

In Ólafsfjörður, on the Troll peninsula, a cherry-red heart is beating for guests and travellers. Jóa Guesthouse, in the middle of this beautiful North Iceland town, can easily be found, due to its bright red colour. Once having stepped inside, you don't want to leave.

The town's old post office has been renovated brilliantly by a young couple, Bjarkey and Helgi. They offer six elegant rooms on the first floor, all of which are furnished with a different type of wooden

floor, that refer back to the old times and which have gained much attention.

You will find brand new comfortable beds, basins, closets, and, of course, free WiFi. Dark curtains in front of every window will guarantee a good sleep even through bright Icelandic summer nights. The two bathrooms on the floor are fully equipped.

### A Breakfast for exploring

When you wake in the morning and open your curtains, you will enjoy the amazing

panorama across the bay. Then, to start the day off right, you head downstairs into Kaffi Klara, the just recently opened book-café, where guests are served a delicious buffet breakfast to get ready for their day.

If you need any help with your plans or directions, you can find any assistance you need at the desk.

It is like the old post office has come to a pulsating new life as a place for connecting people and places.

-DT

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 Strandgata 2 • 625 Ólafsfjörður  
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 gisthusjoea@gmail.com  
 www.joesguesthouse.is

## 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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 islandtreasures@gmx.com  
 www.islandtreasures.biz



# THE NORTHERN PLAYGROUND

*Akureyri, the Base to Reach All the Northern Sights and Highlights*

The dozen inhabitants in 1786, clinging to the side of Iceland's longest fjord, Eyjaförður, probably never imagined their brave struggle would ultimately produce a town of 18,000 people with all the services of a major city.

Akureyri is not as big as any of the world's cities but it provides all the features and services expected of a big city in a very compact form, so that everything is within a short distance.

Take, for instance, winter activities like skiing. The family-friendly slopes are under 10 minutes from the airport and the hotels. Likewise the horseriding tours, boat trips, bird watching, shopping—to name a few—are all so close, you can almost touch them. You name it, it's close-by.

The weather, with its combination of crisp, dry snow and Northern Lights—at the peak of their cycle this winter—makes a holiday here memorable.

### Cultural Centre of the North

When it comes to culture, Akureyri has it all: museums, art galleries, international exhibitions, conference facilities, music concerts of all genres, opera, theatres and cinemas showing the latest films.

It has well over 20 restaurants, covering both Icelandic and international cuisine, with top chefs who create their own innovative cuisine. Cafés, each with their individual speciality abound, while local micro-breweries and farms offering food tasting are a fascinating addition to the food scene.

For groups and incentive tours, Akureyri offers such a wide range of activities, events and opportunities, maximising the time available. There are a multitude of tours covering every interest from flying to caving, from fishing to the Hidden People, walking to whale-watching.

### Sports of all kinds

Sport activities are very popular in the North and many sports are represented in this dynamic community.

The geothermally-heated swimming pools, with their hot pots and jacuzzi are open—and very popular—all year round.

The Arctic Open Golf championship is played on the most northerly 18-hole course in the world, just outside the city under snow-covered mountains and the midnight sun. You can hire clubs if you

need them and relax in the club house afterwards.

### See the Sights

Akureyri is also a service base for many of the most important tourist destinations in North Iceland. From here, you can visit Mývatn, Dettifoss—the most powerful waterfall in Europe, the islands of Hrisey, with its powerful healing energy and Grímsey, straddling the Arctic Circle, see volcanos and boiling mud pools and, in fact, reach all the pearls of the north in under 2 hours.



### Easy Access

Flights from both Keflavik international and Reykjavik airports take just 40 min. Scheduled buses leave from Reykjavik Bus Station. There are numerous tours, some of which go through the highlands during summer months. The bus service is free in town.

Naturally, every common form of transport is available: car, bike, boat, horse, ATV, plane rentals. Every type of accommodation is also on hand, from 4-star hotels to camp sites.

*Akureyri has it all and an outgoing friendly welcome, too.*

-ASF



**Akureyristofa**

Strandgata 12 - 600 Akureyri  
 +354 450 1050  
 akureyristofa@akureyri.is  
 www.visitakureyri.is





## AMBASSADOR TO THE WHALES

See the whales from Akureyri's specialised whale watching ship

This is the first year of scheduled tours from Akureyri with the 'Ambassador' whale-watching ship. The beautiful town of Akureyri itself, full of old historic houses, is simply captivating.

### The Whales' home

The North of Iceland is home to all the species of whales found around the country. Eyjafjörður, particularly, is home to Humpback Whales—gigantic animals who love singing and slapping their fins and tails! It is beautiful to watch these magnificent creatures jump up out of the ocean!

Additionally, Minke Whales, Dolphins, Harbour Porpoises and Blue Whales are seen in the fjord.

### Sailing with the 'Ambassador'

The name 'Ambassador' refers to its function of connecting whales and humans and it has great viewing facilities to do that. It sails three times a day during summer from Akureyri's central harbour, next to the Hof cultural house. Tours take from three to four hours, during which you get guidance about the nature of the whales, the sea, the fjord, the mountains—the whole eco-system! Being protected from winds

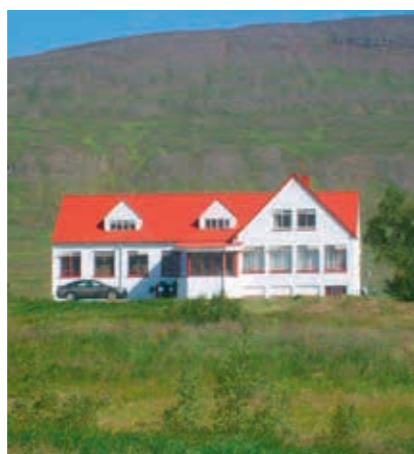
and weather by the mountains ensures that it's calmer than the open sea.

### The sailing schedule

Morning tours leave at 8.30, afternoon tours at 13.00—and an evening tour at 20.30, giving you the opportunity to watch the whales and enjoy the bright and beautiful colours of northern evening sun simultaneously!

-NNH/ASF

**Ambassador**  
 Torfunestryggja • 600 Akureyri  
 +354 462 6800  
 info@ambassador.is  
 www.ambassador.is



## EAT VEGAN IN EYJAFJÖRÐUR

Silva is the only vegan restaurant outside Reykjavik

The beautiful valley that extends from Akureyri into the countryside is watered by clear mountain streams and so unpolluted, the rich farming land is ideal for growing organic vegetables.

Just outside Hrafnagil, in the old school house on the hill, a new vegan and raw food restaurant has opened. All the food is made fresh there from Icelandic vegetables. Besides full meals, they make delicious smoothies and

snacks—cakes, cookies and gluten-free bread, all without wheat, sugar, dairy or yeast.

This is just what a health-conscious family is looking for: healthy food at a reasonable price. So if you're travelling around Iceland, Silva is just 12 km from Akureyri. There is easy access for disabled guests and a children's play area, too.

They make take-away meals and can have them ready for you if you give them a call before leaving town—even outside normal opening

hours. Although, if you are there at lunch or dinner time, it makes sense to relax and let the spectacular tranquil views of the valley and fjord bring peace to your spirit.

### Learn to make it raw

Kristín also runs a series of short courses, teaching how to create raw food meals yourself.

-ASF

**Silva**  
 Syðra Laugaland Efra • 601 Eyjafjarbærsvit  
 +354 851 1360  
 silva@silva.is  
 www.silva.is



## WHERE FITNESS FOLK EAT

Besti bitinn's fresh food is a hit with health-loving people

Close to Akureyri's walking street and the harbour is a good location for people who want to get their meal quickly but eat something fresh and healthy.

Besti bitinn is well known for its fish and chips, so I decided to try, too. It surpassed what I'd heard about it - fresh, firm but soft and full of flavour. My partner tried the chicken salad and I saw why so many people in the health and fitness community in Akureyri come to eat here.

### Healthy food and prices don't compete

Of course, some people are not so concerned about their health but just want to eat something that tastes good and isn't expensive, so the usual carbonated drinks are also available with their meals. Whether they realise it or not, though, they are eating fish fresh from the boats that just landed or the chicken that's never been frozen or lost its food value in the cooking.



The nice thing about this restaurant is that you can sit in a friendly, comfortable atmosphere and mix and match the ingredients to your own taste when ordering. We liked that and will be joining the regulars whenever we're in Akureyri.

-ASF

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 Skípögata 2 • 600 Akureyri  
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 fskistjarnan@internet.is  
 on Facebook



## THE NORTH EATS THAI

The Popular Krua Siam Restaurant Feeds Folk in Akureyri

What inspired experienced Thai cooks and kitchen assistants to leave the exotic lands of South East Asia to venture to the Land of the Vikings, I cannot imagine. But I'm very glad they did. After opening the Reykjavik food scene to their unique blend of Thai ingredients and Icelandic meats and vegetables, the intrepid cooks continued north to Akureyri.

Established in 2007 and now under the same management as Reykjavik's Krua

Thai, it is easy to find Krua Siam opposite the famous Hof concert hall by the harbour.

### Set Apart

Besides the experienced Thai staff, what sets these restaurants apart is that all the spices, rice and noodles that are uniquely Thai are brought in directly from Thailand. However, the meat and vegetables are pure Icelandic and this is what contributes to the delicious flavour in every meal. Each meal is freshly

prepared and cooked to order on the spot to get the most flavour.

### Eat What You Like for Less

Both Krua Siam and Krua Thai are known for their reasonable prices. In addition, Krua Siam offers a full five course lunch buffet every day between 11:30 and 13:30. Here, you can eat all you like for the same good price.

With a large range of dishes to choose from, you can eat like a Thai—taking a piece from a number of different dishes. It's a great way to eat as a family or a group of friends.

### Drinks to go with the meal

A number of wines and spirits go well with Thai food, so Krua Siam has a bar and stocks alcoholic beverages—along with juices and soft drinks.

### Catering to the Need

The restaurant also provides Take Away and Home Delivery options, but to get the most flavour, eat it right away.

-ASF

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 www.kruasiam.is



## THE COUNTRY EXPERIENCE

*A Family-friendly stay at Hrafnagil Farm Guesthouse*

You'll find the village of Hrafnagil just 12 km south of Akureyri in Eyjafjörður. The valley is protected on either side by steep mountains and provides rich farmland and lovely views all the way to the Arctic Sea.

### A farm for families

You feel you're in the depths of the countryside. It's a beautiful place to stay and the guesthouse has the added benefit of being part of a working farm, so you'll see horses outside the windows, sheep on the

hills above, chickens in the yard and cows in the fields across the road, not to mention the cat and dogs. It's a great opportunity for children to learn about and enjoy farm life. There are cots, changing tables and safety gates in the house for the babies.

### A traveller's rest

The guesthouse is warm and spacious with comfortable beds and a delicious breakfast every morning. The 5 rooms are spacious and the largest bedroom, with 4 beds has



plenty of room for families. There is a large lounge where you can read, write or watch the TV or surf the Internet.

Travellers of all ages we met here spoke very highly of their stay and of the thought and care that went into making them both welcome and comfortable. It's a very convenient place to base from when travelling the North.

-ASF

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## A GUESTHOUSE IN THE COUNTRY

*The Farm at Ytra Laugaland offers an invigorating stay*

In the unspoiled valley of Eyjafjörður, some 12 km from Akureyri, the Ytra Laugaland farm has been opening its doors to families and independent travellers for the last five years. The house has large, comfortable

rooms: one suite for a family and three twin bedrooms. One of the bathrooms has a jacuzzi—so relaxing after a long day out.

The farm was built in 1927 and is beautifully decorated. Owners Óttar and



Vilborg have created a cosy, family-friendly home. The beds have health mattresses for a comfortable sleep and breakfasts are wholesome and healthy for a good start to the day. There are facilities for self-catering and there is a health-food restaurant just a minute's drive away. Also close by is the swimming pool, less than 5 min away.

A TV lounge and Internet access provide access to the outside world, should you need it while the farm is in a most beautiful valley, with a view clear up the fjord to the Arctic Sea.

-ASF

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## GUARDED BY A FIREY DRAGON

*The Otherworldly Landscape of Vopnafjörður*

Imagine discovering a new land in the north in medieval days where you are met by a mighty flying dragon, protecting it. This was the sight that greeted a Nordic seafarer, according to Heimskringla, an Old Norse kings' saga.

Today, Vopnafjörður stands as a spectacular example of the grand, harsh, but beautiful, Icelandic landscape. It was first settled by Viking seafarers 1100 years ago. The name, meaning, 'Weapon Fjord' comes from a settler called Eyvindur vopni. It also boasts of its own Saga, Vopnfirðinga saga, written around a dispute between local chieftains.

The dragon is Vopnafjörður's symbol and one of the four 'landvættir' – guardians of Iceland pictured on Iceland's coat of arms.

The wide sandy coastline hosts a myriad of marine life forms and the magnificent

cliffs and rocky islets of Vopnafjörður are superb. They culminate in natural wonders such as Skjölfjörur, accessible by driving the old highway east of the village, before it becomes the high pass of Hellisheiði between Fljótsdalshérað and Vopnafjörður and provides a spectacular view.

Vopnafjörður village, picturesque with its colourful old houses surrounded by rocky cliffs and islets, lies on the small Kolbeinstangi peninsula. It was one of Iceland's major commercial harbours in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the last half century, the fishing industry grew considerably and is the largest business sector in the area today.

### Remembering the past

The Kaupvangur museum is located in a large old wooden house down by the

harbour. It remembers the thousands of emigrants who fled the region to America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries following the devastating Askja volcanic eruption of 1875. It also commemorates brothers Jón Múli Árnason and Jónas Árnason, who wrote several jazzy musicals in the fifties and sixties, which have become classics of Icelandic popular culture.

The historical Bustarfell farm is a regional museum where history comes alive through storytelling and workshops each summer. The same family lived here in a large turf farmhouse from 1532 until 1966. Only a few such farmhouses are preserved today.

### A Literary inspiration

One of Iceland's most renowned novels, 'Independent People', by the Nobel Laureate Halldór Laxness, was greatly influenced by the struggle of poor farmers in the countryside surrounding Vopnafjörður.

The area is the childhood home of another great figure of 20<sup>th</sup> century Icelandic literature, Gunnar Gunnarsson, who grew up on Ljótstaðir. This famous writer wrote about the country life of Iceland, influenced by the people, nature and culture of Vopnafjörður.

Two great salmon rivers flow through the untouched landscape surrounding Vopnafjörður Bay. A cosy geothermal swimming pool with a nice view over the river sits on the banks of the Selá.

-NNH/ASF



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Local food delicacies from Austfirskar Krásir (East Iceland Delicacies), are also featured. East Iceland Delicacies was founded in 2009 to reinforce the East Iceland food heritage and to combine the forces of those involved in local food production. Food souvenirs are a relatively new feature in Iceland. Hús Handanna has quite a few East Icelandic delicacies meant to tickle your taste buds.

Every month sees a special emphasis on one particular artist and designer—with special focus on their work and often special offers on their creations.

**Introducing local designers**

Ríkey graduated in 2003 from the Haandarbejdes Fremmes Seminarium in Copenhagen, majoring in textile and embroidery. Since graduation she has been designing and working on projects under her own name as well as co-designing a successful clothing line for boys, Húnihún.

Ríkey started creating collars in 2006. Her beautiful designs can embellish and completely change an outfit, combining both fashion and functionality. Inspired by lace and embroidered collars from the Romantic era, Ríkey believes that such mystic femininity adds a great touch to modern fashion. Handmade from wool, sometimes mixed with mohair, silk or kashmir, the collars are often decorated with jewellery. The main source is recycled vintage lace doilies—usually crocheted or tatted, that are dyed, arranged and mixed with embroidery and gems, giving each collar a unique feel.

**Enter partners Rósa & Zdenek**

The longing to make a significant positive difference, combined with an interest in design, led partners Rósa Valtingoer and Zdenek Patak to get together in 2006.

Rósa, a textile and ceramic designer, originally from East Iceland, introduced graphic designer, Zdenek, to her hometown in Stöðvarfjörður, where they now live and envision future locations for sustainable communities.

Designing for, and running Mupimup! Recycled by Design, the couple's design approach is focused on post-consumerism and recycling industrial waste.

-SP/ASF

**Hús Handanna**  
 Miðvangur 1 • 700 Egilsstaðir  
 +354 471 2433  
 info@hushandanna.is  
 On Facebook

**ENTRANCED BY THE EAST**

*Quality handcraft at the East Iceland Crossroads*

Egilsstaðir was founded by a farmer who built a house at the start of the 20th century. He was confident in his choice of land and predicted 'the crossroads will be here', which later proved true.

**Magic Happens at the Crossroads**

According to Icelandic folklore, when coming to a crossroads, one should stop and envision what greatness lies ahead and by magic it will come true.

At East Iceland's busiest crossroad in Egilsstaðir sits the enchanting Hús Handanna in a building shared with the Tourist Information Centre.

The gallery specialises in promoting and selling East Icelandic design. Filled with some of the most intriguing designs the region has to offer, there is a wide selection of paintings, beautiful ceramic products, quality handcrafts made of reindeer skin, antlers and local woodwork.



**A FRESH PLACE TO STAY**

*Egilsstaðir's Lyngás Guesthouse offers simple, clean rooms to stay.*

Opened in 2010, Lyngás Guesthouse gives guests in Egilsstaðir good quality accommodation at an affordable price in a modern house.

It has six bedrooms ranging from those suited for individuals, to rooms for couples or groups of up to seven people. Being a new guesthouse, all the furnishing are also new and carry that fresh feeling.

Guests on a budget can bring their sleeping bag for a reduced price or pay a small fee for the convenience of a made up bed.

**Good quality in a minimalist style**

White walls, accented with bright photos of plant life emphasise clean cut minimalism.



It gives a fresh atmosphere to the guesthouse, as all the comfortable furniture also carries a fresh feel to it. The large picture windows offer attractive views.

All rooms share bathrooms, kitchen, and the living room and there is free wireless Internet access throughout the guesthouse.

**Egilsstaðir—centre of the East**

Egilsstaðir is the service hub for the entire East and is an ideal location from which to base while exploring the region.

The guesthouse is just a few minutes walk from the swimming pool and art museum. Lyngás is also very conveniently located for all services in the centre of town.

-VAG

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 Lyngási 5-7 • 700 Egilsstaðir  
 +354 471 1310  
 lyngas@lyngas.is  
 www.lyngas.is



## AT THE EASTERN CROSSROADS

*Egilsstaðir Guest House*

**E**gilsstaðir Guest House, on the shores of Lake Logurinn in the town of Egilsstaðir is a remarkable old world hotel that has been accommodating guests since 1884. Eighteen renovated double rooms, all with en suite bathroom, plus a fine dining restaurant, complete with white linen tablecloths and views overlooking the garden and lake, make this a cosy and romantic choice for an overnight stay or longer.



### A Bit of History

The guest house shares sprawling estate grounds with Egilsstaðir Farm, which has been operating continuously for centuries. The town of Egilsstaðir grew up around the farm and eventually became the site of the major crossroads of East Iceland. Today, the farm continues its operations with 70 cows that provide the hotel with all its dairy products, such as milk, skyr, yogurt and cheese, as well as some of the highest quality beef products in Iceland.

The kitchen is overseen by Hulda Danielsdóttir who is fast gaining a reputation for her creative cooking skills and blending of traditional and progressive cuisine, sourcing most of the ingredients either locally or from around East Iceland.

The restaurant prides itself on its beef tenderloin from Egilsstaðir Farm as well as its delectable handmade ice cream and sorbets, both of which come highly recommended.

-EMV

**Egilsstaðir Guesthouse**  
 700 Egilsstaðir  
 +354 471 1114  
 egilsstadir@egilsstadir.is  
 www.egilsstadir.com



## THE MYSTERY OF RANDULFF'S SEA HOUSE

*Mjóeyri Travel Service reveals Eskifjörður, past and present*

**T**he saga of Randulff's Sea House is one of the most unusual and remarkable stories in Iceland today. Built in 1890 by the Norwegian fisherman Peter Randulff, the building was used for landing and processing herring, as well as providing fishermen with lodging in the upstairs quarters.

After the demise of the herring era in 1930, the Sea House sat unused and abandoned for almost 90 years. When it was finally opened in 2008, the interior was found untouched and perfectly preserved as if frozen in time. Upstairs, trousers were still hanging on hooks, several pairs of boots were left under the bunk beds and a large collection of letters to loved ones on the continent were discovered. Curiously, no Icelander had ever seen the inside of the building until it was opened in 2008.

### Dine back in Time

Mjóeyri Travel Service organises tours and events at Randulff's Sea House, now operating as a restaurant within a museum. Visitors can tour this fascinating building and afterwards enjoy a traditional meal with starters such as fermented shark, dried fish and herring on rye bread, chased by a shot of brennivín. The menu includes dishes made with ingredients from around the fjord. Try the reindeer sausages with rice and chili sauce or the smoked and cured reindeer with salad and blueberry sauce. Traditional fish, meat soups, and roast East Iceland lamb can also be provided for group lunches or dinners with advanced booking.

As a travel service, Mjóeyri offers a wide variety of activities in the area, including boat

rental, reindeer watching and/or hunting, nature hikes and bird watching tours and skiing in winter. Tailor made tours according to your wishes, can be arranged.

### Iceland Spar

It has been speculated that the 'sunstone' mentioned in medieval Icelandic texts was Iceland spar and that Vikings used its light-polarizing property to tell the direction of the sun on cloudy days, for navigational purposes. The mineral, known formerly as Iceland Crystal, is noteworthy for its extraordinary properties of double refraction, which was studied at length by prominent scholars such as Christiaan Huygens and Sir Isaac Newton. Intriguing visits to Helgustaðir Cave, where Icelandic spar was mined from the 17<sup>th</sup>—20<sup>th</sup> centuries are made possible with Mjóeyri Travel Service, guidance and equipment included.

Mjóeyri Travel's striking summer houses stand tall against the jaw-droppingly beautiful background of the setting sun beyond the mountains. Owners Berglind and Sævar welcome you to spend a day, a week, a month on the blissfully tranquil shores of Eskifjörður in East Iceland.

-EMV



**Mjóeyri Guesthouse**  
 Strandgötu 120-735 Eskifjörður  
 +354 477 1247  
 mjoeyri@vortex.is  
 www.mjoeyri.is



from 14.00 to 18.00, visitors are welcome to pop in for the reasonably-priced variety of traditional skyr desserts, pancakes, waffles and other sweet treats.

All Egilsstaðir Farm products are sold retail to consumers. Mince, fillet, prime rib and rib-eye steaks can all be bought at the shop in precut frozen form.

Dairy products include plain and blueberry skyr, skyr desserts, feta cheese, yogurt and milk—all packaged and labelled with the attractive Fjóshornið logo on the containers.

-EMV

**Fjóshornið**  
 Egilsstöðum 1 - 700 Egilsstaðum  
 +354 471 1508  
 none  
 none

## COWSHED CORNER

*Straight from Fjóshornið farm in Egilsstaðir*

**P**ractically everyone has heard of the curds and whey that Little Miss Muffet made famous. But not many people know that the skyr that is so popular in Iceland is, in fact, a variation of those curds (minus the whey).

Because of the growing demand for

pure Icelandic dairy and beef products, Egilsstaðir Farm recently opened a farmer's market on its premises, offering pure Icelandic dairy products, straight from their own milk production as well as a variety of cuts of beef from their own cattle herds. Open in summer only, weekdays



## THE NATURAL PEARL OF THE EAST

*Seyðisfjarðarkaupstaður is both beautiful and challenging*

The road to Seyðisfjörður crosses Fjarðarheiði, a mountain range which has, over the centuries, presented a huge obstacle to travel, but is now reduced to a mere 30 minutes. Commanding views from Fjarðarheiði and the road leading down to the fjord is one of Iceland's most spectacular.

### Charm and History

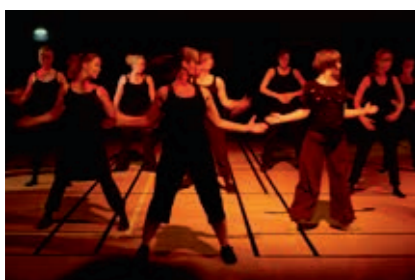
The small, but charming village of around 700 inhabitants, is distinguished by its collection of well preserved and colourful timber houses from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Seyðisfjörður is considered by many to be one of the most picturesque towns in Iceland, also known for its thriving art scene.

### Art in Action

In the centre of town rises the pretty 'Blue Church', which serves as the local centre for music, while the Skaftfell Art Centre is dedicated to the visual arts, with its focus on contemporary arts.

Artists, art lovers and visitors from all over Iceland and abroad convene at the annual



LungA art festival in July. Mostly aimed at the upcoming generation of young artists, the festival has become one of the main art events of the year in Iceland.

### Alive in the Past

Seyðisfjörður also has its own historical museum with lively exhibitions that seek



to recreate the atmosphere of the times they portray; from 1880 to 1950 technical innovations in areas such as mechanics, electricity, communications, telephony, commerce and architecture changed forever the dynamics of the Icelandic way of life, bringing it swiftly into the modern era.

### Linked to the Outside World

It was here that the first telephone line linking Iceland to the outside world was built. Other historical links include the



Norræna ferry, a North Atlantic ferry that connects Iceland to the Faroe Islands and Denmark, which docks at Seyðisfjörður, making it the only place in Iceland where you can travel abroad with a car.

### Challenging the Outdoors

Recreational highlights include midnight kayaking on the fjord (in summer only), attempting the challenging "Seven Peaks Hike", mountain biking, sea angling and bird watching at Skálnes. Guided tours of historic Seyðisfjörður can also be arranged.

### Shortlisted for Capital

In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Iceland still didn't have a proper capital. The intellectual elite were aware of the problem and much back-and-forth discussion took place before it was decided that Reykjavík would be the best spot for the capital of the future. Along with Akureyri, Seyðisfjörður was one of the candidates, since it was easier to sail to Europe from Seyðisfjörður than from any other of the towns in question.

**Seyðisfjörður**  
Hafnargata 44 • 710 Seyðisfjörður  
+354 470 2300  
ferdamening@stf.is  
www.seydisfjordur.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 20<sup>th</sup> 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**  
Norðurgötu 2 • 710 Seyðisfjörður  
+354 472 1277  
hotelaldan@simnet.is  
www.hotelaldan.com



## Guesthouse Ola

Situated in a beautiful quiet spot with a panoramic view over Seyðisfjörður fjord and town, which is considered by many to be one of the most beautiful towns in Iceland, only about 5 min walk from the town centre. A perfect place for individuals, small families or couples.

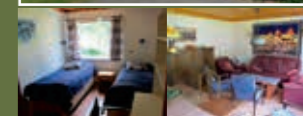
🏠 Botnahlið 13 • 710 Seyðisfjörður  
☎ +354 862 2990  
✉ info@guesthouseola.com  
🌐 www.guesthouseola.com

## SILLU GUESTHOUSE

We offer three double rooms located on the ground floor in a house in a peaceful neighbourhood. All rooms include made up beds and wireless Internet access. Extra mattresses available. All our guests have access to a fully equipped kitchen, bathroom with bath and shower. TV-room and living room.

See website for information on prices, bookings etc.

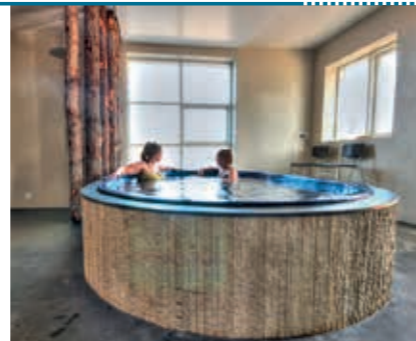
🏠 Botnahlið 10 • 710 Seyðisfjörður ☎ +354 472 1189  
✉ info@gistihussillu.com 🌐 www.gistihussillu.com



## Post-Hostel

Post-Hostel offers six comfortable rooms including access to a fully equipped kitchen in addition to washing machine, clothes dryer and free wireless Internet.

🏠 Hafnargata 4 • 710 Seyðisfjörður  
☎ +354 422 7922  
✉ info@posthostel.com  
🌐 www.posthostel.com



it. They are unafraid of humans and you can get really close to them without difficulty.

## STAY IN A WORLD OF BEAUTY

*Blábjörg Guesthouse give you access to all the East*

Still untouched by the large number of tourists visiting Iceland, much of the East is still pristine and a wonderful place for hikers, photographers and bird watchers – not to mention those who are interested in history, culture, nature and geology.

A region of mountains and fjords, of both highlands and valleys, waterfalls and rivers, inspiration and friendly inhabitants, those who visit it never regret it. If you're looking for relaxation and a break from the stress of a city, this is will give you that and a lot more.

The terrain is rugged, diverse and dramatic, filled with deserted coves and inlets.

### Surrounded by mountains, sea & birds

Nestled in a fjord called Borgarfjörður eystri, in the northern part of the East, surrounded by birdlife and untouched wilderness is Blábjörg Guesthouse. They have transformed a fish factory so completely, you would have no idea of its previous use. It's set right by the sea's edge with a beautiful view of the fjord and the birds that flock around

### A Place to stretch

With only 11 double bedrooms, it is spacious and comfortable, making it an ideal base from which to explore the area. There are hot tubs inside and outside, too, where you can relax, three bathrooms and a fully equipped kitchen. Here you can also enjoy the stories of the elves and Hidden People from the friendly community.

-ASF

**Blábjörg Guesthouse**  
 Brautarholt • 720 Borgarfjörður eystri  
 +354 861 1792  
 helgisig@simnet.is  
 www.blabjorg.is



There are 13 double rooms and 4 singles, adding to the cosy feel of the guesthouse, which has free WiFi and parking.

The restaurant provides guests with a continental breakfast to start their day as many like to go hiking in the surrounding area or bird watching and photographing the stunning scenes.

At other times of the day, the restaurant offers a good selection of food, with their menu including pizzas and hamburgers. Try their traditional Icelandic specialities like smoked lamb.

-ASF

**Tærgesen Guesthouse**  
 Bubergata 4 • 730 Reyðarfjörður  
 +354 470 5555  
 taergesen@gmail.com  
 www.taergesen.com

## STAY IN REYÐARFJÖRÐUR

*Enjoy the beauty of the East Fjörds at Tærgesen Guesthouse*

The East of Iceland is a beautiful place to enjoy a holiday. Deep fjörds, surrounded by high mountains with small communities nestled in them, some magnificent hiking trails, amazing nature and geology, a history and culture all its own. The villages welcome visitors and their hospitality is legendary.

Most of the villages are built on fishing but today, many have other activities, too.

### A Guesthouse with charm

Close to Reyðarfjörður's harbour, in the old part of town is one of its oldest houses —and you can stay there. It's Tærgisen Guesthouse, a house built in 1870 and filled with character that time has not quenched. In fact, its owners have enhanced it, while creating a modern guesthouse and restaurant that has so much more charm that a modern steel and glass box.



## THE FRENCH CONNECTION

*Alive and well at Café Sumarlína in Fáskrúðsfjörður*

In operation since 2002, Café Sumarlína on the Eastern Fjord of Fáskrúðsfjörður is well known for their Belgian waffles with whipped cream and their sweet/savoury French crepes. Other specialities include creamed seafood on toast, a variety of pizzas, lamb fillet and cod dishes, to name a few. The café-restaurant sits just by the harbour on the fjord and on calm, sunny days, the

view of the mountains surrounding the 15 km long fjord is spectacular.

Fáskrúðsfjörður has a rich history and is twinned with the French town of Gravellines near the Pas de Calais. Between 1800 and 1910, record numbers of French and Belgian fishermen arrived here to unload their catches, with around 5,000 men coming every year.

The town has undertaken a project to rebuild and restore a number of important historical buildings that were used by the French fishermen. A luxury 4-star hotel is planned for the old hospital built in 1903, which includes the French consulate and doctors' offices and will be ready for visitors in the spring of 2014.



A popular stop for French tourists, the French Museum of Fáskrúðsfjörður is dedicated to the memory of thousands of French and Belgian sailors who played an important role in the history of the area.

-EMV

**Café Sumarlína**  
 Búðavegi 59 • 750 Fáskrúðsfjörður  
 +354 475 1575  
 sumarlina@simnet.is  
 www.sumarlina.123.is



## QUINTESSENTIALLY GERMAN

*East Iceland's Exceptional Small Hotel-Restaurant*

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

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

This exceptional small hotel has absolutely everything going for it—the

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



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

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

-EMV

**Café Margrét**  
 Þverhamni • 760 Breiðdalsvík  
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 cafemargret@simnet.is  
 none



## JUST BEGGING TO BE EXPLORED

*Breiðdalur Valley has 7 hotels, 6 drinking spots and 190 residents*

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

There are many old hiking trails that criss-cross the Breiðdalur district which have been used for centuries as postal routes and walking paths that once connected the isolated villages. In an effort to open the district to more tourism, a local hiking group has started an ongoing project of

mapping and marking the ancient paths, making them more accessible and safe for hikers with the use of a GPS system.

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

There are wonderful picnic spots around the valley as well as opportunities for horse riding and salmon fishing and you can camp just about anywhere that is not farm land.

### The Museum of Heritage and Geology

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

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

An 'adopted son' of Breiðdalur, the world-renowned British volcanologist, Dr. George P. Walker, spent many years doing research in East Iceland, particularly in the Breiðdalur Valley. He was one of a few foreigners to receive the Icelandic



Order of the Falcon (the equivalent of a knighthood), conferred upon him by the President of Iceland in 1977.

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

-EMV

**Breiðdalshreppur**  
 Ásvegur 32 • 760 Breiðdalvík  
 +354 470 5560  
 hreppur@breiddalur.is  
 www.breiddalur.is



## WILDERNESS IN FULL COLOUR

*Stafafell Guesthouse is a base to the rugged beauty of Lónsöræfi*

Stafafell Guesthouse is a base to the rugged beauty of Lónsöræfi.

Stafafell Guesthouse is situated on a hill with panoramic view of the surrounding countryside, the coastline and the vividly coloured mountain range. The shallow fjord or brackish "Lón" lagoon is only 15 km away. It is famous for attracting the densest population of whooper swans in the world. Its beaches are strewn with colourful pebbles, polished by the Atlantic Ocean.

The guesthouse was originally built as a parsonage in 1897. It was converted into a youth hostel in 1983 with room for up to 30 people in the house and the two cosy

cottages that were added. These each have two bedrooms, a kitchen, bathroom and a living room with a TV.

There is a large, fully-equipped kitchen in the main house, where you can prepare your meals. (Dinners are not provided, so you will need to buy food ahead of time.)

By the guesthouse there is a well equipped camp site with shower facilities, washing machine and a dryer.

### A Hiker's Heaven

Stafafell is well placed on Road 1 for visiting both mountains, glaciers and fjords. It is surrounded by popular hiking

trails that take you through some awesome countryside. For instance, a 4-5 hour hike will take you to Hvannagil, a canyon made of colourful rhyolite on the eastern bank of the Jökulsá í Lóni river where you will see rich bird life, possibly reindeer.

Hikes vary in difficulty from easy to very demanding, requiring proper equipment.

Some areas can be reached using SuperJeeps—but be aware that regular SUV's will not suffice. This area can challenge you to the limit. For the inexperienced or novice, there is still plenty to enjoy and staff at the guesthouse can provide reliable information and counsel.

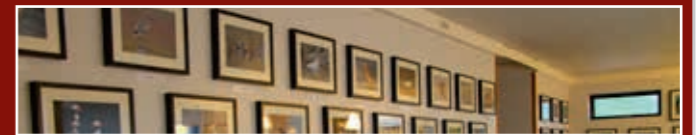
-ASF

**Stafafell Guesthouse**  
 Stafafelli, 781 Höfn  
 +3544781717  
 info@stafafell.is  
 www.stafafell.is

## Við Voginn Restaurant

*A restaurant and coffee shop right down at the harbour*  
*A photo exhibition, featuring bird photos from Iceland*  
*A shop selling food and general stores*  
*Enjoy a meal or coffee with a beautiful view*

Vogalandi 2 • 765 Djúpavogur  
 vidvoginn@simnet.is      +354 478 8860  
 www.djupivogur.is/dalvefur?id=8314



## Langabúð

Museum, cultural centre & café in the oldest building in Djúpavogur, a log building from 1790  
 An exhibition of sculptor Ríkarður Jónsson  
 The café serves light lunch & delicious cakes  
 Löngubúð • 250 Djúpavogur • +354 478 8220



Sanderling in summer plumage



Black Guillemot



Common Shelduck, drake



Red-throated Divers displaying



Northern Shoveler, pair

# A BIRDWATCHER'S PARADISE

*Djúpivogur to Lón, a top site for birds in South East Iceland*

The municipality of Djúpvogur (Berufjörður, Álftafjörður, Hamarsfjörður and Papey island), together with Lón and the Þvottáskriður and Hvalsnesskriður scree slopes, is one of the top five birding sites in Iceland. The largest and most diverse concentrations of birds occur on eutrophic coastal lakes, mudflats, and the shallow waters, some of which hold internationally important numbers of birds, as well as the bird cliffs on the deserted island Papey, six km offshore from Djúpvogur. The coastal lowlands are sparsely populated by sheep farmers, and most of the inhabitants live in a small fishing village, Djúpvogur.

The area around Djúpvogur is unique and in the recent years, the municipality has developed facilities for birdwatchers. Information boards, birdwatching hides and a website are some of things being done to help visiting birdwatchers get the most out of their visit. The Common Shelduck, a recent colonist in Iceland, has become established here in recent years. Other breeders include Horned Grebe, Red-throated Diver, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Long-tailed Duck and Rock Dove. During the migration season birds like Red Knot, Sanderling and Ruddy Turnstone are common on the mudflats around Búlandsnes.

In Berufjörður, west of Djúpvogur, Harlequin Duck can be found at the outlet of River Fossá in the bottom of the fjord and on other rivers in the area.

Papey is easy to visit and there are regular boat trips out to the island in summer. The island is 2 km<sup>2</sup> and marshy, and is surrounded by a few smaller islands. The birdlife is dominated by seabirds. Large numbers of Atlantic Puffin (estimated 200,000 pairs), Brünnich's Guillemot, Common Guillemot, Razorbill and Black-legged Kittiwake breed here. The island also has wetlands which support a range of birds. A recent colonist is the European Shag and the European Storm-petrel has bred there.

To the south of Djúpvogur there are two shallow fjords which support a wide range of birds, Hamarsfjörður and Álftafjörður. They are important stopovers for birds like geese, Whooper Swans and waders. Up to 3,600 Black-tailed Godwits have been recorded in Álftafjörður in a single count and it is one of the main stopover sites for this species in Iceland. The fjords are important moulting sites for the Greylag Goose, and the Common Shelduck has started breeding here, as it has done in Djúpvogur.

To the south of Álftafjörður, the road traverses a series of scree slopes which drop steeply to the sea, known as Þvottáskriður and Hvalsnesskriður. During the summer,

flocks of Common Scoter can be found on the sea here and Velvet Scoter, White-winged Scoter and Surf Scoter are regularly found in these flocks. Huge flocks of moulting Common Eider are also found here in late summer and species like Long-tailed Duck, Harlequin Duck and Black Guillemot feed in this nutrient-rich sea.

Moving further west you come to the shallow fjord or brackish Lón lagoon which attracts the densest population of Whooper Swans in the world. This is one of the greatest wonders in Icelandic nature. Whooper Swans can be found here all year and at certain times of the year up to half the Icelandic population may be present here, approximately 10,000

birds. The largest concentrations are during spring migration and during the late summer and autumn moult. Greylag Goose, Eurasian Wigeon and Common Eider are also common here.

Reindeer are common in the area and can be seen all year, although most frequently in winter and spring. Common Seal are also widespread and breeds in Þvottáreyjar, but they are difficult to approach.

Papey, Hamarsfjörður-Álftafjörður and Lón are all listed as Important Bird Areas (IBA) by BirdLife International. A useful website on birds and birdwatching in Djúpvogur is [www.birds.is](http://www.birds.is)

*Text and photos Jóhann Óli Hilmarsson*



## SAIL A FANTASY WORLD

*The Ice Lagoon Team reveal the secrets of Jökulsárlón*

It's one of the unique features of Iceland—one of those 'must see' spots. Located under the massive Vatnajökull glacier, the lagoon is one of the world's natural wonders. Huge icebergs break off from the tongue flowing down from the glacier itself, plunging into the waters of the lagoon. The sunlight shining on and through the ice produces beautiful effects, while the multifaceted blocks of ice form shapes that are just other-worldly.

### A recent natural wonder

It hasn't always been like this. The lagoon started to form in 1934, and has grown steadily larger since then as the Vatnajökull glacier began retreating and ice started moving slowly down towards the sea, breaking off in huge chunks in the lagoon. It is now the deepest lake in Iceland at around 260 metres.

It's also a photographer's dream, presenting many different photo opportunities to get unique shots. Since the volcanic eruptions of 2010 and before, some of the icebergs are stained with streaks of ash. Many are so huge that they dwarf the little Zodiac boat as it winds its way between them.

It's not just peaceful on the lagoon, the silence is almost eerie, adding to the sense of awe. It's not without life, however, as seals can frequently be seen basking on a lump of ice or chasing after fish - or, quite often, just curiously observing those strange humans in their red jackets.

### Tours that win Excellence Awards

Ice Lagoon-Zodiac Boat Tours has 7 scheduled tours daily. Each lasts an hour and the Ice Lagoon team takes you all the way up to the glacier edge, about 7 km away. The company focuses on personal service with a



maximum of 10 passengers in each Zodiac boat and with professional guides who will point out the jewels and the secrets of the lagoon. This has earned them Tripadvisor's 2013 Certificate of Excellence. It is worth reading Tripadvisor's reviews to see why.

They have three kinds of tours: the Adventure Tour, the Evening Tour and private tours where you have the whole boat and the guide for yourself.

Before starting a tour, one of the experienced guides will tell you about what you can expect to see and will make sure you have your floatation suits and lifejackets.

The Evening Tour is remarkable as the sun is lower in the west, casting beautiful colours over the entire area. With fewer visitors at that time, the silence is all the more profound.

Jökulsárlón is easy to reach from Reykjavik, as it lies on the Ring road in the south, some 78 km before the fishing town of Höfn.

-ASF



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## THE VAST VATNAJÖKULL

*In the Realm of the Vatnajökull Glacier*

The region directly beneath the Vatnajökull glacier is a 260 km long, narrow stretch of land that spans from the west of Skaftafell National Park to the town of Höfn on its eastern border. The lives of people of the region have been shaped and moulded according to the dictates of nature, in a region which, until as recently as the 1970's, was one of the most isolated parts of Iceland. The majority of its roughly 2,100 inhabitants live and work in Höfn, the area's largest population centre; the rest are on farms scattered throughout the region.

### A Photographer's Dream

Driving through this enchanted area, the vastness of the glacier, with its various glacier outlets, makes a compelling impression on the mind. The extensive views across the black sands of Skeiðarársandur towards Skaftafellsjökull glacier leave one in awe of the glacier's sheer magnitude, relentless in its crushing effect upon the land beneath

it. The beautiful Svartifoss waterfall, one of the main attractions within the Vatnajökull National Park, is well known for its underlying black basalt hexagonal columns.



### Some impressive numbers

Vatnajökull is larger than all the glaciers in Europe combined, (there are smaller glaciers in Norway and Russia) and is one of the largest glaciers in the world outside of the polar icecaps. It boasts the highest elevation in Iceland: Hvannadalshnúkur at 2,115 m or 6,870 feet, as well as the lowest point



below sea level at the famous Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon—260 metres at its deepest. As a national park, it's the largest in Europe.

### Points of interest

Activities in the area are numerous—take a snowmobile, jeep or hiking tour on the glacier, cruise gently around blue-tinged icebergs on a boat ride at Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon, observe puffins at Ingólfshöfði, or get a bird's eye view over the glacier on a sightseeing flight. What could be more magical than basking in the midnight sun, in the warm natural hot baths at Hoffell? These are just a few of the possibilities in the Vatnajökull Region.

### Local Festivities

Taste some of those lovely langoustine dishes during the annual Lobster Festival in Höfn, late in June, and don't forget the not-to-be-missed annual fireworks extravaganza at Jökulsárlón on in late August.

For more in-depth information about Vatnajökull National Park, check out the visitors centre, a major hub for hiking and mountaineering expeditions in the area, open year round.

-EMV



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## 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 Humarhátíð (Langoustine) Festival, to be held in 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 7 years ago by Anna Þorsteinsdóttir, her brother Ari Þorsteinsson and their spouses, has definitely earned that accolade.

### A menu to entice any connoisseur

A favourite with tourists from the Mediterranean countries, Humarhöfnin was the first restaurant in Iceland to serve whole langoustine, though it has now become popular in the town.

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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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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## 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 Kristín 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 120g 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. -KB





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# 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 Jöklašel, Iceland's highest restaurant and owned by Glacier Jeeps. Jöklašel 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 Jöklašel 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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EMV

# WE ARE PROUD TO WELCOME YOU TO VATNAJÖKULL NATIONAL PARK!

Vatnajökull National Park is Iceland's newest protected area, established in 2008. With a total area of roughly 13,200 km<sup>2</sup> it is by far the largest national park in Iceland as well as in Western Europe.

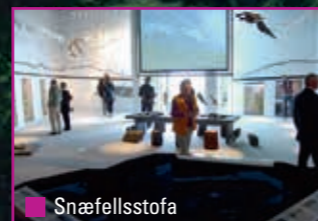
Key features of the park are the ice cap of the Vatnajökull Glacier (8,200 km<sup>2</sup>) and several highly active volcanic systems within and outside the ice cap. The interplay of ice and fire is the single most important force in shaping the nature of the park. As a result, one can find in one place 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](http://www.vjp.is)



Gljúfrastofa



Snæfellsstofa



Skaftafellsstofa



Svartifoss



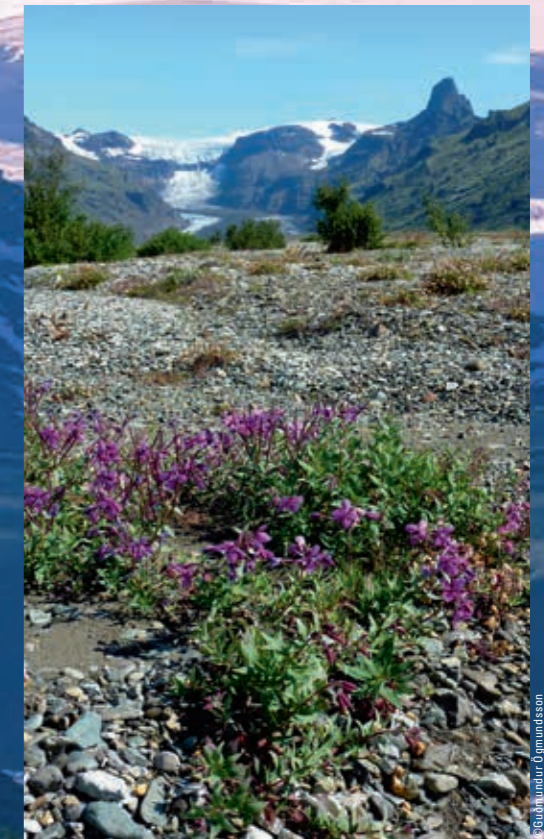
Dettifoss



Hiking Geldingafell, Snæfell in the distance



Langisjór



Morsárdalur



Askja and Lake Öskjuvatn



## A HIKE OF A LIFETIME

*Útivist takes you on a trip through spectacular beauty*

With the opening of the Sveinstindur Útivist cabin as well as the Skælingar cabin a new hiking path has opened up where you can stay every night in a lodge.

This route is renowned for its natural beauty and diversity and has long been a popular Útivist hike. The hike takes you over the Sveinstindur peak in the Fögrufjöll mountains providing a good view over the Langisjór highlands, Vatnajökull glacier all the way to the Grimsfjöll mountains, Hvannadalshnjúkur peak and the southern highlands from the Mýrdalsjökull glacier into the Spregisandur route to the west part of Kjölur. The trail takes rarely-used paths, sandy and moss covered, along the Skaftá river and up the hidden climb by Uxatandar and across the grassy Skælingar, a walk to Gjátindur peak and the Eldgjá volcano itself that makes a good place to stop on this walk, culminating in Hólaskjól. This area shows land being formed, where volcanic activity, glaciers and raging glacial rivers create a unique landscape being shaped and created.

Then the hike goes over the Sveinstindur mountain at the end of the lake and down to Skaftá river to stay in an Útivist cabin. The lodge stands on the foundation of an old cabin used by sheep herders built in the old Icelandic architectural style. From the Sveinstindur summit the panorama of the mountain ranges



is outstanding. In good visibility, you can see Örafajökull glacier in the east and Mt. Hekla in the west. The view of the Langisjór highlands and the green and black peaks of Fögrufjöll Mountains leave nobody untouched.

### Day One

On the first day, you drive up to the Langisjór highlands which, without doubt, has one of the most beautiful mountain lakes in Iceland.



### Day Two

On the second day, the hike goes around Hvanngil and Uxatindar, across the Grettis' mountain slopes and then heads to Skælingar, the Útivist cabin. It continues across a mountainous area where moss and other vegetation fights to survive and the hike sticks to the trails to avoid disturbing the nature. On the left is the Skaftá glacier river that turns into a huge river every few years due to the effects of geothermal heating under the ice cap. This is the longest stretch of the hike and the feeling of arriving in Skælingur in the evening is indescribable. Skælingar is a very spectacular site on the banks of the Skaftá river. There are unique lava formations from the Laki eruption, not widely found elsewhere. The small cabin, built with walls of turf merges into the landscape and provides a good shelter to stay and rest for the night.

### Day Three

The third day we walk to the western edge of Eldgjá, a huge eruptive fissure believed to have erupted in 930 AD. A beautifully shaped waterfall falls into the gap. Follow the divide through the hall in Hólaskjól where we spend the last night. Hikers have a good time and celebrate their achievements.

### Day Four

On the fourth day, take a short stroll. You can walk up the lava by Syðri Ófæra and view the waterfall some call Little Gullfoss. From Hólaskjól is Landmannaleið.

Ferðafélagið Útivist offers guided hikes on this unique route. A shuttle transports the group to and from the starting point. Luggage is transferred between the cabins so you just need to carry a day picnic and protective clothing. Participants only need to have good clothing, sleeping bags and food for the journey.

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Blue Lagoon to Keflavik Airport  
14:00 / 21:00\*\*

\* Via Keflavik Airport

\*\* 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  
Professional English guidance

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## A SECRET BEAUTY SPOT

*Þakgil is one of Iceland's best-kept secrets for campers and hikers*

Let me take you on a journey. But first let me say that if you are on a mad-dash, whirlwind tour of Iceland via the ring road, then this is probably not going to be your cup of tea. If however, you have the time and inclination to go on a journey of discovery to an off-the-beaten-path gem of scenic beauty, then this may be just the place for you.

### Þakgil - a hiker's paradise

15 km off the ring road, just 5 km from Vík, lies a small enclosed canyon, sheltered on all sides by steep, moss-covered vertical mountains. The floor of the canyon is a grassy plain, about the size of an American football field, which serves as a camping site. For the less adventurous, nine recently built, snug pine huts are also available for rent. A gurgling brook passes merrily through the campground and when birds are singing nearby, you can be sure you have just discovered a little piece of heaven.

A short walk up into a nearby ravine reveals the secret of Þakgil's source of electricity—the smallest hydro-electric plant you have ever laid eyes on. The campground managers, Helga and Águst,

will be happy to give you the lowdown on its history, as well as information on several magnificent day hikes to the nearby Mýrdalsjökull Glacier. A dining hall, set in a large natural cave, comes replete with cooking grill and a fireplace for warmth on those cooler summer nights.

### An alternative to Landmannalaugar

Getting to Þakgil is also part of the adventure itself. You will see all manner of weird and



wonderful rock formations, scenic panoramic views that go on forever and even the remains of no less than two movie sets, Beowulf and the American TV show, 'Game of Thrones', parts of which were filmed right here. The gravel road is well maintained and your average passenger car can make it all the way to the campsite in about 30 minutes. Þakgil certainly has no trouble competing with the famous Landmannalaugar, which can get quite busy with tourists at the height of the season.

One of the best things about Þakgil is that it has only become a holiday destination rather recently. Before 2000, the majority of Icelanders had never been here, making this one of Iceland's best kept secrets.

-EMV



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## REFRESHED UNDER THE GLACIER

*Halldór's Café and Restaurant in Vík provides a delicious break*

Ah Vík! That colourful little village known for its black sand beaches and offshore basalt columns that jut straight up from the sea. A place where the dazzling combination of pounding surf, majestic glaciers, and steep mountain pastures neatly come together, to form one of the most picturesque villages in Iceland.

The 700 km<sup>2</sup> Mýrdalsjökull glacial ice-cap, which towers above the town, hides the notorious Katla volcano, which last erupted in 1918. You will be happy to note that all is quiet on that particular front these days.

As if awakening from a long winter's nap, the sleepy village, (pop. 290) comes to life

every spring in anticipation of the arrival of the many wide-eyed tourists who all fall in love with it each summer.

The approach to the town from the west is especially captivating; the deep blue shimmering sea comes into view as you wend your way between precipitous slopes that usher you into the village below. On a sunny summer's day when the sea is tranquil, the view is magical.

In a quiet side street, off the main highway, stands a quaint little wooden house with a rich history. Built in the Westman Islands in 1831, it was dismantled and then rebuilt in Vík in



1895. The building was used continuously as Vík's main retail shop from 1926 to 1980. It is now the home of Halldórskaffi and the Tourist Information Centre, which is open in summer from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm

Halldórskaffi, open from 11.00 am to 11.00 pm, serves simple, yet wholesome meals throughout the day. I asked owner Kolbrún which are the most popular dishes and without any hesitation, she answers with a smile, 'the arctic char and the hamburgers'. This is the kind of place that kids and teens will enjoy as well; tasty, filling, hamburgers, lamb and fish dishes, homemade pizza, soup of the day with home baked bread, and a selection of cakes are all on offer for the hungry traveller. An Icelandic beer, a glass of wine or other spirits are all options, and may be just the thing after a long day of sightseeing on Iceland's charismatic south coast.

-KB





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 www.halldorskaffi.is





## THE OLD COWHOUSE RESTAURANT

*Sitting Pretty on Iceland's South Coast*

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

The remodelled former barn easily seats 50 to 60 dinner guests while retaining its unpretentious character and sweet bovine

simplicity, making this a thoroughly enjoyable place to stop for lunch or dinner while travelling the south coast.

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

Open year-round, the Old Cowhouse plans monthly events including an October evening of traditional food, a November

evening of game (reindeer and geese), a December buffet of traditional Christmas dishes, as well as musical evenings of Icelandic folk music at various times throughout the year.

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

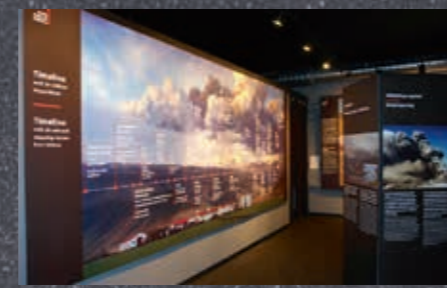
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## A MULTINATIONAL TAPESTRY

*A long, artistic Icelandic story of intrigue and love*

**H**volsvöllur in South Iceland is not only the gateway to Iceland's volcanic wilderness. Here you also enter ancient saga grounds. Almost 1,000 years ago incredible family dramas took place in the area. A 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar left us the story for posterity.

The Saga of Njál deals with relationships and murder, and culminates in a dramatic family feud and the extinction of an entire clan. Displaying the saga in an exciting way, the museum of Hvolsvöllur shows probably the most unusual art project in Iceland: the Njál's tapestry.

### Njál in new ways

Icelandic sagas in their original language sound strange to our ears. The artist Kristín Ragna Gunnarsdóttir had the brilliant idea of converting Njál's drama into an image project to be created by visitors.

Inspired by the famous tapestry in Bayeux, Kristín has printed 91.5 metres of canvas with scenes and pictures of the Njálssaga and titled them with original quotations. The beautiful figures and ornaments are now waiting to be stitched by diligent hands. Finely spun Icelandic wool is used for the embroidery. It was dyed with native herbs and is impressive with its fresh colours.

### 1000 years - 1000 hands

The project is ambitious. It might take 1000 hands to transform this 1,000 year old story into vibrant images. Everyone is invited to help in the project. Needlework artists sit next to members of bowling clubs, riders alongside hikers and managers. Whether you can only spare one hour, or want to spend a rainy afternoon in the cosy embroidery workshop, whatever country you may come from and whatever language you speak, you are welcome to join in and help.

Images and colourful woollen threads are connecting people of all nations and encouraging mutual awareness and

storytelling - just as in the days of Njál, when people shared stories in the Viking halls. Is there a more enjoyable way to meet local people in a relaxed atmosphere? The impressive canvas roll rests on an easel and reveals only ten metres of Njálssaga - the work for all 2013. Each year ten metres of embroidery are scheduled to be completed, so no matter when you come, be part of the project!

### Time travel with happy end

The Museum in Hvolsvöllur is a place for time travel. You can visit the exhibition of the Icelandic merchant's association, or lose yourself in the maze of the saga exhibition.

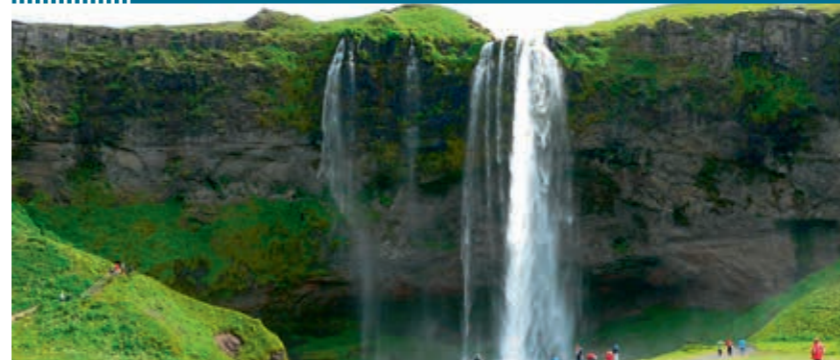
The latter especially tickles your senses by mixing an audio guide with meaningful replicas, like the clothes and weapons of Viking times, and with overwhelmingly expressive paintings of selected scenes of the saga.

Take a deep breath when leaving the exhibition and relax in the museum café, built in Viking style. Take your time with a coffee or hot soup to catch up on the experience again and enjoy the photo exhibition in the hall.

Young local artists are presenting their personal focus on Iceland. And maybe you will happen to be there when the next concert takes place. A programme can be found on the museum's website.

-EMV

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## PERSONAL ICELAND

*Arrive as a customer, leave as a friend with Iceland Guided Tours*

**W**hen I was young, I travelled the world on a shoestring. I read everything I could and amassed volumes of travel books and guides. Looking back, I wonder what I missed because suddenly, all my cherished beliefs about independent travel came crashing down after a tour to the south coast with Iceland Guided Tours.

agree. Leaving the driving to others, I could just relax and enjoy the constantly changing weather and landscape. Our driver/guide was bursting with interesting knowledge, not only about what we were seeing, but a whole lot of insider information not found in guidebooks.

### Guides with wit and knowledge

Iceland Guided Tours is run by a husband and wife team, Óðinn and Addý, who are long time tour guides themselves and all their guides are handpicked for their knowledge and ability to deliver with wit and insight in English.

### Are you wearing glasses?

I had read that seeing Iceland without a guide was like leaving your glasses at home—and now, I have to say that I wholeheartedly

### The little extras that make the difference

Small groups and personal service are the hallmarks of IGTours, using comfortable mini-buses. IGTours provides day tours and activities to various locations in Iceland. They can organise private tours for families and individuals by private car, Super Jeep, or minibus to any destination in Iceland.

Now I only have one question...do I toss out the guide books?

-EMV

**Iceland Guided Tours**  
 Borgarhaun 18 • 810 Hveragerði  
 +354 556 5566  
 info@igtours.is  
 www.igtours.is



## TÖLT ON THE VOLCANO

*Icelandic Horse fun in Hveragerði*

**D**id your trip to Iceland include Icelandic horses? Hardly anyone can escape the merry magic of this special breed of horses. You don't have to go far to explore the Icelandic volcanic landscape with its natural hot springs and boiling mud pools on the back of an Icelandic horse. Solhestar, the riding tour operator in Hveragerði, offers all year round individual service to give you an unforgettable holiday experience. Take advantage of the pick-up service at your hotel and enjoy your horse riding tour.

### Riding - Your choice

Sólmundur is bursting with ideas. You don't fancy riding with a group? He will create a personal riding tour for you. Did you ever ride a horse around midnight? During summer Solhestar offers a ride in the midnight sun.

There is hardly a more stirring experience than gliding smoothly on an inspired horse through the golden light in the timeless nature, smelling the dew, enjoying genuine Icelandic snacks and

greeting the dawn. Or enjoy a day tour with the fresh sea air in your face while riding along the beach from the fishing town of Þorlákshöfn back to the farm.

Sólhestar is a small family business, specialising in customised short riding tours. They can also organise riding tours for groups and longer tours. The dream of tölt on the volcano is just a click away.

-DT

**Sólhestar**  
 Borgarheiði • 801 Óllus  
 +354 892 3066  
 solhestar@solhestar.is  
 www.solhestar.is



## A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

*Árborg is a worth the visit*

Árborg is a community of three towns: Selfoss, Eyrarbakki and Stokkseyri on the south coast of Iceland, where lush farmlands and large lava fields intertwine to create one of the most interesting landscapes in Iceland. It is also densely populated and with people come culture, history and entertainment.

the whole southern coastline, they went in open boats, rowing for their lives.



### Conquering the sea

The sea is a life giver as well as a life taker. Ever since the first settlers came ashore, boats have launched from these shores and brought back the catch of fish. With no harbour along

Þuríðarbúð in Stokkseyri is an interesting example of an old Icelandic fishing station and the exhibition inside is educational. From there the first Icelandic female cockswain sailed.

Nearby, sits the Icelandic Wonders Museum with the ghosts, elves and trolls that roamed the land in ancient times.

After a ghostly encounter it's time for a spot of bird watching. The country's largest river flows nearby. The vast marshlands have shrunk but are still home to thousands of birds each year. It is a very popular spot for birdwatchers who flock here.

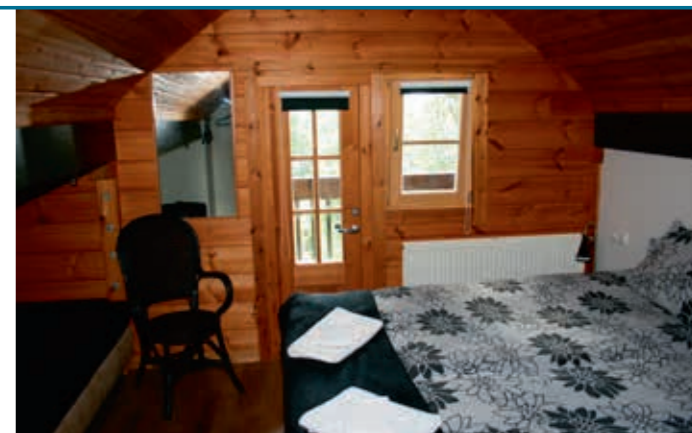
### Culture In Eyrarbakki

Eyrarbakki has a heritage museum called, 'Húsið' - 'the House'. This beautiful old house, built as a home for a merchant in 1765 was a great centre of culture in its time.

There are many excellent restaurants and hotels in Árborg and in Selfoss two popular swimming pools. It's an excellent starting point to travel from to the many beautiful spots nearby.

-SS

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 radhus@arborg.is  
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## AN IDYLIC STAY

*Fagrilundur Bed & Breakfast In the heart of the Golden Circle*

Travelling around the Golden Circle, you pass through the village of Reykholt, known primarily for its horticultural farming using geothermal energy.

Surrounded by trees, flowers and lawns, the newly-opened Fagrilundur Bed & Breakfast (formerly Kaffi Klettur), is right in the centre of the village. The lovely wooden chalet-style guesthouse is cosy, warm and inviting. Inside, several well-chosen Dutch antiques decorate the walls of the breakfast

room, and the lace curtains in the windows add to the rustic charm.

Fagrilundur comprises 6 bedrooms. Upstairs, there are two large bedrooms that each sleep up to 4 people, with their own attached bathroom. On the ground floor, there are 4 smaller bedrooms that sleep 1 or 2 each, with shared bath. Bathrooms are all well-appointed with brand new modern fittings, comfortable hot showers, hair dryers, etc.

### Breakfast to the songs of birds

You wake to birds singing in the trees, the aroma of freshly made waffles and steaming hot coffee. You can have your breakfast on the broad wooden patio overlooking the garden, or inside in the breakfast room, as you wish!

Reykholt offers a fine swimming pool, visits to the geothermal greenhouses, a small grocery store, 'Café Mika' Restaurant all close by.

-EMV/ASF

**Fagrilundur guesthouse**  
 Skólabraut 1, Reykholt • 801 Selfoss  
 +354 486 8701  
 info@fagrilundur.is  
 www.fagrilundur.is



### Coffee in traditional style

One cannot enter an Ethiopian restaurant without getting acquainted with their lovely coffee ceremony and at Minilik, Flúðir it is a real treat as the Ethiopians are second to none when it comes to coffee.

The restaurant can seat 25 diners and also provides take-away. So, if you are staying in a summerhouse near Flúðir, you can also order their splendid dishes for both large and small parties. As Minilik is a small restaurant, be sure to book your table ahead.

-SS

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 azeb-kassay@hotmail.com  
 www.minilik.is

## A TASTE OF ETHIOPIA

*Ancient African Coffee and Cuisine in Upcountry Flúðir*

Flúðir is possibly one of the best locations in Iceland for an Ethiopian restaurant. Ethiopians are famous for their fasting 150 days a year, which means they are not allowed to eat any kind of meat.

With Flúðir being one of the largest greenhouse areas in Iceland, the access to vegetarian ingredients has to be the best. Even when serving the traditional Ethiopian chicken and beef dishes, the plates are loaded with very fresh vegetables.

The owners of Minilik in Flúðir are Árni Hannesson and Aseb Kahssay and they opened the restaurant in June 2011.

It has proved to be popular, especially with tourists—and the local people are catching on, too, warming to this exotic and wonderful food with locally grown vegetables and imported Ethiopian herbs and spices. Chicken and beef come from Icelandic stock and, blended together, they make a delicious meal that has to be tried.



## RAISED ON CHOCOLATE

*Café Mika's chocolates have a past, present and future*

Mika was born and raised on chocolate. It flows in his blood and comes out in the most delicious delicacies—pralines so full of rich flavour that they never seem to last. They're swiftly devoured by all who come in contact with them and it takes the strongest soul to actually make it home with them intact.

Café Mika is becoming a popular place to stop when taking the Golden Circle tour as

it's found in Reykholt, not far from Geysir, making it a nice break on your trip. But it's not just the pralines that are attracting visitors, as Mika has a menu that has your taste buds watering just reading it over.

For those interested in a snack, the rich hot chocolate drink, made fresh from beans sourced from all over the world, topped with whipped cream is stiff competition for traditional coffee.



For me, enjoying a meal at Mika's is always worth the time. He takes traditional meals and adds that extra touch that makes them memorable. This summer, he is introducing a wood-burning pizza oven, a Big Green Egg grill for pizza, grills and smoking meats and fish and an ice cream maker to make his own specialities. See reactions on TripAdvisor and you'll make it a point to stop by.

-ASF

**Café Mika**  
 Skólabraut 4 • 801 Reykholt  
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 on Facebook

# SLAKKI ZOO'S 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY



For the past 20 years, both adults and children have been having fun, enjoying the animals and playing games at the Slakki Zoo and Play Centre in Laugarás, close to Skálholt cathedral and not far from the famous Geysir. It's clear that it has struck a chord in the hearts of its visitors, many of whom return several times a year.

Of course, the countryside is synonymous with animals. For the children to be able to experience animals close up, to be able to touch and hold many of them, is a treat that is rare for many nowadays.

They love the opportunity to play with animals of all kinds and to look at the birds and fish in their own environments.

Summer is a precious time in Iceland and everyone tries to make the most of it.

With activities for all the family, adults included, it makes a great day out in a place where the simple joys of life can be indulged in by everyone.

### A Safe and Fun Activity Day

There are animals of all sizes from horses to mice, pigs to ponies and everything in between. Some are inside and others can be enjoyed in the gardens. The kittens, for example, are a favourite inside their own little house, where children can hold and pet them for as long as they wish—and that can be a long time.

This is a safe environment where parents can relax, knowing their children will be enjoying themselves without harm.

Families often make a day of it. Besides the animals, there is a large aquarium and many different species of birds to enjoy.

Even farmers come with their families—often wondering why their children love it so much when they have animals at home!

It's not just the animals, though. There are other games to play which unite the family in a fun entertainment such as the putting green and crazy golf.



### Relax with Restaurant Refreshments

Naturally, when you're staying all day in a centre such as Slakki, refreshments are very important and here you will find a restaurant and café filled with home-made snacks, including delicious hamburgers with salad and apple cakes with cream.

The café is in a small turf house, with plenty of seating outside where you can enjoy the sun and the yummy, locally-made Kjörís icecream.

Stuffed animals may be fine at home, but nothing can replace the experience of holding or playing with live animals. No computer or TV can take their place, either, so it's no surprise that many families return again and again.

Slakki's indoor zoo is open every day throughout the summer months until the end of August. It is one of Iceland's secrets that is being revealed on the Internet, with pictures and videos being posted by

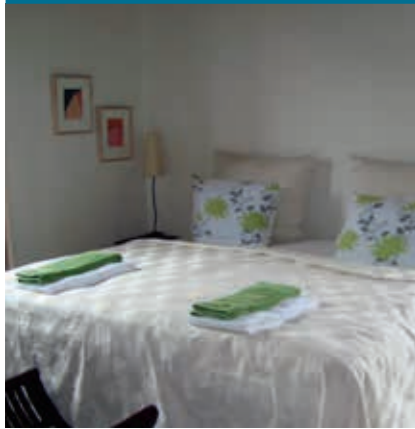
contented customers and their happy children.

If you're driving the Golden Circle trip, see for yourself. It's only a few minutes off the main road to Geysir. You'll find it a short distance past the cathedral in the village of Laugarás, just before the bridge and, after you see for yourself, I think you'll agree it was well worth taking the time to visit this most unusual tourist attraction. If you have children, it's a must!

-ASF

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## WITHIN THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

*Gallerí Guesthouse is surrounded by famous attractions*

The small but bustling town of Laugarvatn lies in the Golden Circle created by Þingvellir, Geysir, and Gullfoss and in the middle is the quaint and quiet Gallerí Bed and Breakfast.

Started by owners Þuríður and Joel after their kids had flown the nest, three extra bedrooms are now filled with tourists wanting more than the normal day trip to Iceland's most famous attractions. From an enclosed patio, two of Iceland's active

volcanoes: Eyafjallajökull and Hekla are clearly visible.

Breakfast is included in the price of the room. Gallerí's knack for handicrafts shows in light fixtures made by Þuríður and small decorations found throughout the rooms.

The Gallerí store is where Þuríður and Joel's artistry shines, allowing travellers to take home a small piece of Icelandic design.

Joel and Þuríður's hospitality extends an invitation to their guests to come along

and find out the café's secret to tasty bread, baking it in a natural hot spring close to Geysir. This bread is served along with slices of salmon each day at the Gallerí café.

-KB

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 www.gallerilaugarvatn.is



## DOWN INTO THE DEPTHS

*Caving with Laugarvatn Adventure*

The mouth of Gjábakkahellir leads down to rocky paths hollowed out by lava flows that pushed through earth, forming the cave's smooth and polished walls near Laugarvatn, the town within the Golden Circle.

The experienced guides of Laugarvatn Adventure have had over a decade of training in caving and can navigate through almost any of these caves. Tours vary in difficulty from Gjábakkahellir's relatively

gentle descent to Tintron's vertical drop accessible only by abseiling down a rope.

Laugarvatn Adventure's three cave tours let visitors safely delve into the depths with the help of guides who were educated in caving and are active members of the Icelandic Search and Rescue Team. Children over five can even go on some of the easier tours, while adults tackle the challenge of rock climbing on Þingvellir's craggy cliffs or crawling through a small hole at the opening

of Litli Björn cave. Tours are offered every day from May through August with a two person minimum necessary for departure.

-KB

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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. But it was between 1980–1984, as he received training as a pastry chef at the Culinary Institute of America, New York and worked with two pastry chefs at the Palio restaurant in Manhattan that he got his inspiration to specialise in chocolate and desserts that, in 1986–1987, led him to 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', with its lamb, fish, seafood and game caught in the wild. His menu is seasonal and features exotic dishes that can be made from reindeer, goose, duck, cormorant, guillemot, puffin, minke whale or pan-fried arctic char. 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 skyr mousse with crow berries 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.

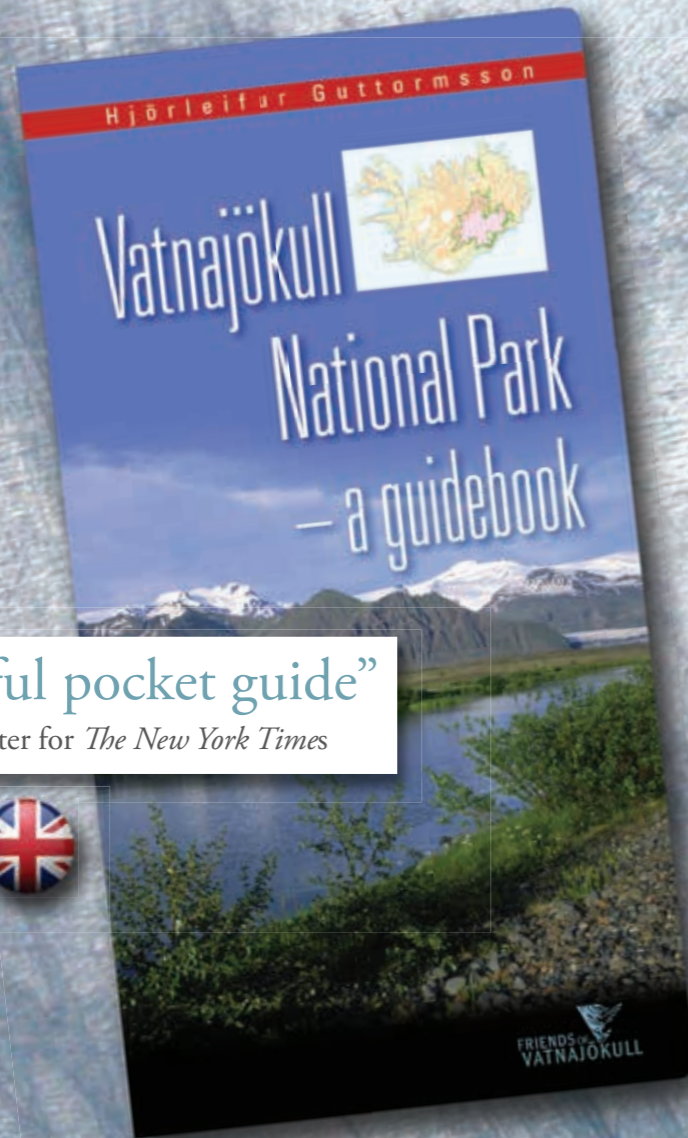
### In the heart of the Golden Circle

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 Eyafjallajökull volcanoes.

-EMV/ASF

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Whether you want to picnic beside Lake Mývatn or climb the glaciers above Skaftafell *Vatnajökull National Park — A Guidebook* is your ideal companion. The handy little tome provides essential and thorough information about all the best sights in the park. Available in Icelandic, English and German.



“A wonderful pocket guide”

Eric Hansen, reporter for *The New York Times*





## THE POWER OF IMAGES

*A photographer in the footsteps of the Vikings*

**B**eir Flosi riðu vestur á sand - Flosi and his men rode over the sand to the west. Behind this brief line from chapter 126 of the Njáls saga hides a drama that began with manslaughter and ends with a vendetta approved by the Althing, or parliament, almost 1000 years ago.

“It is very exciting saga material and a challenge to any image creator”, says Brynjar Ágústsson, photographer in Reykjavik, and he starts to describe this scene of men on horseback, who came from Mount Svínafell, and rode round the back side of Eyjafjallajökull into the harsh valley of Markarfljót, in order to set fire to Njál’s house.

### Stories like pictures

Transferring the Icelandic sagas into images - that is Brynjar’s objective. He has already earned a reputation with his impressive Viking period portraits: men’s faces – speaking of drama, passion and steely determination; or the end of a fight – eerie funeral scenes in twilight, scared women in a shady hut. Pictures like these directly grab the viewer’s attention in a way that no line of text could ever do.

### Moments of emotion

Brynjar, a renowned landscape photographer, is a former member of the Rimmugýgur Icelandic Viking Community from Hafnarfjörður. During his active years, he discovered his passion for the historic scene portrait. He has captured stunning moments on screen – moments with a whole story behind them that, with a fitting caption added, can unfold within the viewer’s mind without letting him go.

Was Flosi, from the Njáls saga mentioned above, a murderous incendiary or a man of honour? A photo could say more than many words. What kind of expression would we find on the face of a man like Gunnar, whose wife consciously sent him to death, when she refused to give some hair to fix his longbow? The saga remains silent about Gunnar’s feelings. A picture of the scene could present the drama in an overwhelming way and touch much more than Hallgerdur’s simple remark: “Then I’ll remind you of your slap now.”

### Life stage for the photographer

Brynjar has already carried out several projects, for example, Silfur Egils, the



historical exhibition about Mosfellsdalur during the Viking Age.

After shooting, he works on his material with a professional image-editing program and creates a special nuance of fantasy by deliberately alienating the pictures in order to drag the viewer’s eye deeper into the scene.

### Pictures are our language

“The photos tell entire stories”, says Brynjar, “Today’s world consists almost entirely of pictures. We have grown into it and the young generation especially is able to deal with the forcefulness of pictures rather than words.” From his point of view, at historical sites such as the old parliament at Thingvellir, or Borgarfjörður, where Egil’s saga takes place, visitors would be much better off with information boards that display large scale photos in the style he offers, subtitled by thrilling short texts, than

with endless readings. “Pictures speak our language, in any language”, he says. His Egil’s saga pictures show famous scenes from the story, for example, when Egill secretly buries his silver treasure and when he, himself, is buried. There are also amazing panorama pictures that show everyday life in the time of the Sagas.

Brynjar works on different Icelandic sagas’ scenes for shooting and provides professional Viking models who use authentic costumes and props. The scene is compiled and the setting is professionally edited by the photographer. The saga settings are all over Iceland. He might travel to the highlands and shoot exciting scenes at raging glacial rivers or in the endless volcanic desert, for example - a feast for any creative artist.

Brynjar’s pictures are characterised by their own handwriting. His landscape photography is overwhelming and almost unsettling in its blend of outstanding clarity and soft focus lens. The extremely bright light in Iceland challenges every photographer. Brynjar’s pictures show Iceland the way it is really like behind the light. They show the mighty power of colours and the dynamics of the landscape. Visit his website [www.panorama.is](http://www.panorama.is) and get inspired!

-DT



© Sigrún Mátelsta Kreibitz



© Jarmir Gerhardt



© Karin Gerhardt



## THE ICELANDIC HORSE

*A true companion through times*

When Iceland was settled before the year 1000 AD, settlers not only brought sheep and household items on their small sailing vessels. Horses joined the dangerous trip across the northern seas. First findings of saddles and bridles date back to 10<sup>th</sup> century, when Iceland still was pagan and people believed in the god Odin who rode Sleipnir, an eight-legged shamanic horse with magic powers.

Icelandic saga literature is filled with stories about horses, not only as a means of transport in daily life, but as a sign of wealth and object of desire. The most famous example was the horse Freyfaxi in Hrafnkel's saga. Nobody was allowed to ride Freyfaxi, and a fatal feud started when Hrafnkel's shepherd, Einar, ignored the ban and was subsequently killed by his master.

### Brave partners

The Icelandic horse is a small, sturdy breed from Scandinavia that came with the settlers. It must have been a brave one, too, with strong nerves, considering the long boat-trip to Iceland. In post-settlement centuries, merchants added horses from the continent, and the Icelandic breed developed into what we have today: a small riding horse with a height of around 138 cm (54 in or 13.6 hands) to the highest point of the withers; sure-footed, with a nice and willing temperament; tough and resilient in its physical strength, a friendly and independent, gregarious animal.

Icelandic horses have survived harsh winters, famine, and volcanic eruptions and assisted man as partners in ploughing, harvesting and carrying heavy loads like fish, timber, hay or stones.

Cars only came to Iceland after World War II. Until then, a group of horses would carry people long distances, through deserts of lava, ice and sand, crossing glacial rivers on small boats or by swimming. Machines have taken over labour and traffic now. However, for one job, the Icelandic horse still is practically irreplaceable: gathering the free-ranging sheep from the Highlands in early autumn. Here the secret bonds between man and horse are still tangible.

Famous poems have praised the horse through the ages. In olden times, horses were often buried next to their late owners



© Brynjólfur Eggertsson

to demonstrate the strong relationship. This, of course, is no longer allowed, but as late as 1920, a farmer in South-Iceland decided to share a grave with his horse, on the slope of a mountain they both loved to explore.

### Tölt – the long-distance gait

Unlike other breeds, Icelandic horses have two additional gaits: tölt and pace. Tölt is a four-beat lateral gait with only one foot carrying the weight at a time, providing a smooth and comfortable ride on long distances. The pace is a fast, two-beat lateral gait used for racing over short distances.

In the Middle Ages in Europe, the special tölt gait almost disappeared in breeding, as it was not suitable for carriages. In the inhospitable Icelandic landscape, carriages have never been used, and the tölt survived.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Icelandic horses were sought after by Danish shepherds because of their tölt. Tölt is still enjoyed today, riding for pleasure through Iceland's beautiful landscape. Just as in the old days, people

join highland and cross country riding trips with 2-4 horses, changing their riding horse about once an hour to keep them fresh and willing. Visitors can also enjoy the qualities of the horses in numerous shows and competitions during the summer.

### Today's athletes

In order to protect the stock's health, Iceland banned the import of horses in 1909. Since the 1950s the export of Icelandic horses to the continent has increased, in the post-war years as working horses, and later as athletic riding companions. With a total population of 300,000 Icelandic horses worldwide, they can be found in almost any European country, the US and New Zealand. Every second year, a world championship takes place to present the best horses of the breed. Due to their hardiness, they are also popular in endurance competition. One of the most successful endurance horses in Europe is an Icelandic horse. In the US, a 25 year old Icelandic endurance champion, Remington,

just completed his 209<sup>th</sup> ride of 50 miles and will be the highest mileage gaited horse in equestrian sports.

Horses form a strong part of Icelandic culture. Colourful herds, graze calmly on endless meadows, braving the elements. There is nothing so peaceful as being with them on a sunny day and no freedom like riding them through lava fields and across rivers, as men did hundreds of years ago.

-DT



© Brynjólfur Eggertsson



## LET BOOKS BRAG FOR YOU

*New Landscape Photography - I Was Here*

**B**ragging about your perfect holiday can become a bit tiresome after a while, as you keep repeating the same stories, but never fully capture your experiences. The solution is a professional photography book with the best of what Iceland has to offer that does all the bragging for you – and, of course, keeps your memories alive. The book in question is aptly named “I Was Here” and will be released in the summer of 2013.

Author, Kristján Ingi Einarsson, is one of Iceland’s most experienced photographers and respected in his field and has two other landscape books to his name: *The Essence of Iceland* in 2009 and *Iceland so Quiet* in 2010, as well as countless other projects and exhibitions.

Kristján is particularly enamoured with the tranquillity and stillness in the nature of Iceland and is always looking out to find something new. “The unspoiled and peaceful landscapes in collaboration with the ever changing weather and light seem to create endless photographic opportunities of both the grand and the tiniest details. You can take thus take pictures on the same spot over and over again, but they will never turn out exactly the same. That’s why I often compare photography in Iceland to fishing,

because you never know what you’re going to come home with,” says Kristján. He thus prefers to let the pictures come to him and, as an avid traveller in his home country, there never seems to be a lack of inspiration.

His new book comes in a new and exciting panoramic format, which Kristján says gives certain pictures added value and presents them in a new light, in addition to the book being very compact and handy.

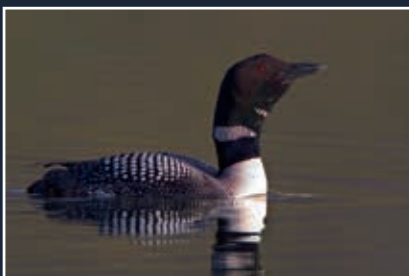


# BIRDWATCHING IN PARADISE

## Birding sites around Lake Mývatn

Mývatn is a shallow and highly fertile lake with powerful fresh water springs and extensive areas of geothermal heat. Invertebrates thrive in the lake and they provide the food for the huge number of birds living in the area.

Mývatn is one of the best known birdwatching sites in Iceland and is also a Ramsar site. Fifteen species of ducks breed regularly at Mývatn and the River Laxá, and there are few places in the world with such a diversity of breeding wildfowl. Barrow's Goldeneye is the area's flagship species and the greatest density of breeding Harlequin Duck in the world is found in the upper



Great Northern Diver calling

reaches of the River Laxá; these species breed nowhere else in Europe but Iceland. The same is true of the Great Northern Diver, which also breeds at Mývatn. Other species which breed at Mývatn include Whooper Swan, Greylag Goose, Pink-footed Goose, Red-throated Diver, Horned Grebe, Gyr Falcon, Merlin, Rock Ptarmigan, various waders, including large a population of Red-necked Phalarope, Black-headed Gull, Arctic Tern, Short-eared Owl and Eurasian Wren. Almost 120 species have been recorded at Mývatn.

### Take a Tour from Reykjavíð

Let's take a tour clockwise around Mývatn, approximately 35 km by road, and visit a few of the best birdwatching sites. Just below the old hotel at Reykjavíð is a pretty stretch of the lakeshore with a number of small islets. Horned Grebes breed commonly here and various dabbling ducks can be seen here too—sometimes Northern Shovelers are present. It is a very pleasant place to go birdwatching.

Just south of the village of Reykjavíð, there is a bay called Helgavogur. The bay is ice-free

in the winter and often attracts large numbers of birds at that time of year. In winter the water often gives off a lot of steam owing to the presence of geothermal heat and it sometimes makes for an impressive sight. In winter it is one of the main sites for dabbling ducks at Mývatn; in summer all species of dabbling duck which breed in Iceland can be found here, including the rarest, the Northern Shoveler. Other species breed here, including several pairs of Horned Grebe, and waders and gulls can often be seen on spits of land jutting out into the bay.

### The Dry Rocks of Dimmuborgir

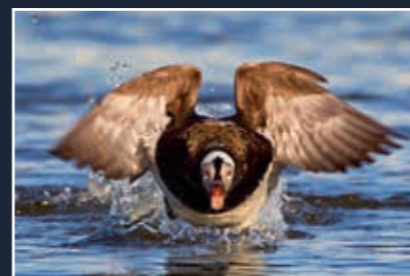
Dimmuborgir is a special place. Apart from the lava formations and bizarre landscape, the bird life here differs from elsewhere around the lake. It is a very dry place and cliff-nesting birds such as the Common Raven, Merlin and Gyr Falcon all breed here. Redwing and Eurasian Wren are conspicuous in the scrubland.

At Höfði, there are native birch woodlands with patches of rowan, and numerous introduced species have been planted. There

are a variety of birds, with a range of passerines, including Eurasian Wren, Redwing, and Common Redpoll. In the bay to the north of Höfði there are large numbers of ducks and Barrow's Goldeneye breeds in the lava formations; there is often a great commotion in the spring when the females are fighting over the best nesting sites and chase each other around and are then joined by the males.

### Around the Klasar Rock Pillars

Along the shore at Ytrivogar there is a path leading to the Klasar rock pillars, which must feature on every second postcard of Mývatn. There are various birds along this path, including Horned Grebe which breeds



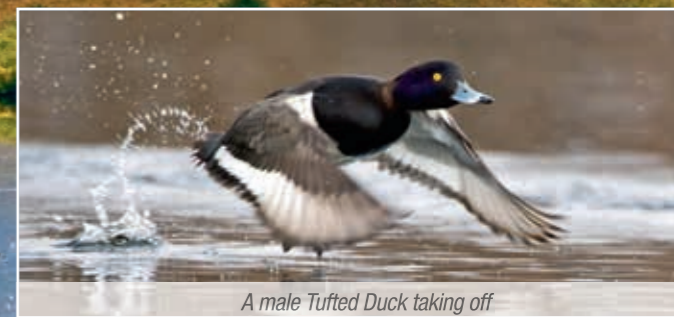
An aggressive Long-tailed Duck drake



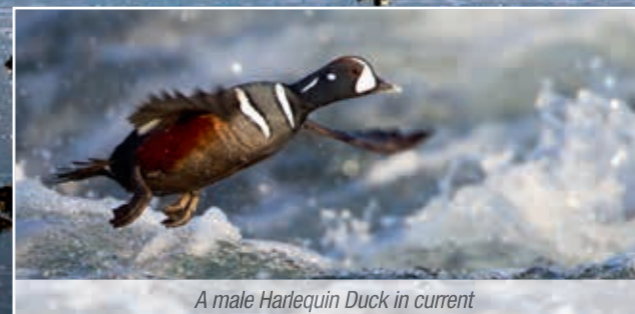
Drakes Barrow's Goldeneye fighting for territory



A pair of Horned Grebes feeding young



A male Tufted Duck taking off



A male Harlequin Duck in current



A pair of Horned Grebe in courtship dance

in the reeds right by the path, and a range of breeding ducks. There are often a lot of birds at Birtingatjörn, on the other (eastern) side of the road but unfortunately there is nowhere to stop the car to watch them.

Lake Stakhólstjörn forms part of the protected area around the pseudocraters at Skútustaðir. The islet in the lake is home to nesting Great Northern Divers. You can often hear the haunting call of the divers on beautiful spring and summer evenings.

Kritartjörn is separated from the lake by a long, narrow spit of land. To the south and west there are large expanses of sedge, which are home to Horned Grebes and numerous dabbling ducks. There are often lots of Whooper Swans here and at Álftagarði, near Skútustaðir, the bay is often teeming with birds.

### A Parade of Harlequins

The River Laxá in the Mývatn area is one of the best known breeding sites for Harlequin Duck in the world. Food is plentiful and the birds dive to the bottom of the river to catch black fly larvae. It is also one of the best sites for brown trout fishing in Iceland.

In years when there is little food in the lake itself but there are still plenty of black flies, lots of other birds come to the river. Barrow's Goldeneye raise their young here and the river hosts plenty of other ducks.

On the western side of the lake from Vagnbrekka to Neslandavík there are numerous good sites for birdwatching. The road closely follows the lakeshore. As this is a protected breeding area from May to July, it is not recommended that you leave your car or walk around here—it is much better to watch the birds from your car. There are often flocks of dabbling ducks, diving ducks, Great Northern Divers, geese, Horned Grebes, waders, gulls and Arctic Terns here. The western shore is the best place to find Common Scoters at Mývatn. It is less common on the eastern shore but can be found there too.

The bird museum at bay Neslandavík is one of the best birdwatching sites at Mývatn. A flock of several dozen Whooper Swans moult there and in late summer you can find hundreds, if not thousands, of ducks on the bay. Horned Grebe, geese, ducks and various other birds breed around the bay. **JÓH**

# IT'S A BIRD'S LIFE

*One year in the life of the birds in the Lake Mývatn area*

Mývatn is known to birders throughout the world for its rich birdlife, particularly its abundance of breeding wildfowl. No other site in Europe can boast such a diverse range of breeding ducks as the Mývatn area. Fourteen of the sixteen species of duck which breed in Iceland can be found here; the Common Eider and Common Shelduck are coastal species and are therefore rarely seen at Mývatn. Three other species of wildfowl, Whooper Swan, Greylag Goose and Pink-footed Goose, also breed in the area. Two species of divers and one grebe breed: Great Northern Diver, Red-throated Diver and Horned Grebe. Their habits resemble those of ducks in many ways, at least during the summer.



*A pair of Horned Grebes feeding young*

## Different habitat

The Mývatn area offers you a wide range of excellent bird watching sites. Bird life and bird habitats are extremely diverse, typified in this region by highland oases, lakes of global importance for birds, rich birch woods and scrubland. Wetlands and small lakes are frequently encountered and moorlands are found widely.

## Spring

In April, as spring arrives and the ice on the lake melts, migratory birds flock to Iceland. Fields, ponds, lakes and rivers are swamped with birds arriving from Europe and Africa. The first breeders, like Raven and Gyr Falcon, have already laid their eggs and at

the end of April the Horned Grebe starts its magnificent courtship display.

In May, the elaborate display of numerous species of ducks reaches its climax. May and June are the best months for birdwatching. Nature is recovering from the long, hard winter and the birds are extremely active and conspicuous. The countryside is filled with the sound of bird song, courtship and lively displays, the sun barely dips below the horizon and the symphony of nature seems endless. Drakes are particularly impressive at this time of year, with Long-tailed Duck and Barrow's Goldeneye fighting vigorously for mates and territory. Harlequin Ducks hurtle along the River Laxá and the Great Northern Diver can be heard wailing out on the lake.

## The Remaining Months

In July, everything seems to calm down and the adult birds get on with quietly feeding and raising their young. The drakes moult and group. Drake Harlequin Ducks and Common Scoters head for the sea.

In August, the birds gather for migration and those that travel the longest distances, like the Whimbrel

and the Arctic Tern, leave for their wintering grounds. Mývatn is by now swarming with ducks if the breeding season has been successful.

September is the main migration month in north-east Iceland but geese and some ducks and passerines do not leave until October. However, numerous birds remain in the area during the winter. At Mývatn and River Laxá some areas remain open all winter and attract resident Whooper Swans, Barrow's Goldeneyes, Goosanders and Mallards. Even a few Harlequins can sometimes be found on the river in winter.

## Other birds

Waders often nest in or close to rich, vegetated marshland, which is a common habitat in the Mývatn area. They take advantage of the abundance of midges and can often be seen on the shores of the lake, picking up insects which have drifted ashore. One of the most characteristic birds of the Mývatn area is the Red-necked Phalarope. Eight species of waders breed in the area, including Black-tailed Godwit, and several more species are seen regularly.

Black-headed Gull is the most common gull in the Mývatn area and the only species which breeds in any number. Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Great Black-backed Gulls are summer visitors to the lake. The Arctic Tern is a common breeder but it does not



*A drake Harlequin Duck*

breed in large colonies at Mývatn. Arctic Skuas breed on the surrounding moorlands.

The varied habitats around Mývatn attract a range of passerines and the abundance of insects provides rich pickings for them and other birds in the area. Birch scrubland and woodlands are home to Iceland's typical forest birds, like the Redwing, Common Redpoll and Eurasian Wren, for example.

Snow Bunting and Northern Wheatear nest in lava fields, stone walls and craters.

Other land birds are the resident Gyr Falcon and Rock Ptarmigan, and the migrant Merlin and Short-eared Owl.

## Midges

The midges at Mývatn (which means Midge Lake in Icelandic) and the River Laxá are the mainstay of the local birds' existence. If the midges were absent, there would be far fewer birds. The larvae of non-biting chironomid midges live in the lake itself; they develop in the mud on the lake bed and live on diatoms and decaying organic matter. Black fly larvae, on the other hand, attach themselves to rocks in the River Laxá and feed on passing debris. Only the black fly bites; chironomids simply irritate people, livestock and birds by flying into their noses, eyes and ears.



*Pair of Harlequins on the fast flowing water of River Laxá*



*A pair of Red-necked Phalaropes*



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# THE WORLD'S LARGEST MAMMAL ON DISPLAY

## *The Icelandic Museum of Natural History Gets its Crowning Jewel*

When an Icelander has a bit of good luck and finds or discovers something by chance that benefits him greatly, you'll often hear the word 'hvalreki'—which literally means 'beached whale'. It's a rare occurrence that, in olden times, could even feed an entire village through the long and harsh winter and was valued accordingly.

When a 24-metre (80 feet) long blue whale was found beached in the North of Iceland in 2010, it turned out to be a 'hvalreki' in both meanings of the word, as such a large and intact specimen has not been previously

found in Iceland and will undoubtedly be one of the most popular items of Icelandic Museum of Natural History.

In 2014, the museum will be relocated to the grand Perlan building, a revolving mirrored dome on top of five giant water tanks, offering views over the whole capital area.

### **The Crowning Jewel**

The blue whale is thought to be the biggest animal ever to have lived on earth and this specimen is among the largest of those. It weighed around 120 tons and, to give you an

idea of the creature's immensity: its tongue weighed about the same as a full-grown elephant and its heart about the size of a small car.

Dr. Hilmar J. Malmquist, manager of Icelandic Museum of Natural History, says that he sees the blue whale as the crowning jewel in the museum's future. "It is extremely rare to discover an intact skeleton of this size, as only ten or so beached blue whales have been found here during the past century. Then the carcasses are rarely intact. Some of the bones are, in fact, quite fragile and need to be preserved according to exact

specifications which also contributes to the fact that very few whole blue whale skeletons exist around the world," says Hilmar.

The blue whale is also becoming increasingly rare in the world's oceans, Hilmar explains, as the populations have gone down from maybe two to three hundred thousand a century ago to ten to twelve thousand today. About one thousand blue whales inhabit Icelandic waters for part of the year.

Even though the Museum's exhibitions have not been fully designed yet, Hilmar says the Perlan building is perfect for such

a large piece. The Perlan building is open from the basement to the glass dome at its peak. The whale's head could possibly be positioned on the lowest floor in the open space between the water tanks and the skeleton could reach diagonally up some 10–15 metres, almost to the top where the glass dome is. Visitors could thus examine the skeleton on the different platforms on the way to the top.

### **A 124 Year Old Dream Comes True**

The Icelandic Museum of Natural History hasn't really found a permanent home till now.

The Icelandic Natural History Society was founded in 1889 with one of its primary goals being the establishment of a suitable home for such a museum in the capital area.

Although the natural sciences and nature preservation have been diligently carried out through other institutions, it isn't until now that the museum has found a fitting venue.

There, visitors will be provided with a detailed and informative insight into Iceland's nature, while education for all levels and scientific research will be undertaken at the centre.



Image by © Þorvaldur Björnsson





# SHAPED BY THE BAY

## Explore Culture and History on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula

On the northern part of the Snæfellsnes peninsula lies Stykkishólmur, a picturesque seaside town that overlooks the beautiful Breiðafjörður bay.

The town's rich history as a centre for trading, transportation, culture and service for the bay area gives it a unique sense of antiquity and historical significance.

The town's centre is home to some of the most colourful and oldest houses in the country—making it almost a museum in itself.

### Seeping into the Culture

The mayor of Stykkishólmur, Gyða Steinsdóttir, says that its proximity with the Breiðafjörður Bay contributes a large part to the town's character. "We've enjoyed the riches of the bay and its magnificent beauty

for centuries on end and that tends to seep into the town's character," says Gyða.

### The Past that Lives Today

Stykkishólmur's historical significance also contributes to its unique character. It served as a centre for trade and commerce centuries ago, as well as a seat of government. Gyða says that Stykkishólmur's inhabitants have consciously made an effort to preserve the town's old spirit, both by preserving the town's image and by maintaining old traditions from the bay area. Visitors will get a chance to experience this when going out to eat in Stykkishólmur, where they'll get fresh ingredients from the bay and surrounding area, served on plates made by local designers from local materials.

### The Living Bay

If you only have time to do one thing while you're in Stykkishólmur, a chance to go sailing in Breiðarfjörður Bay is not to be missed. There are several trips available, one of which is a comfortable tour boat ride where visitors are invited to enjoy fresh sushi - tasting whatever comes up when the nets are pulled in - fresh sea-urchin, for example - while sailing around the seemingly countless islands.

There's also the option of guided tours on so-called RIB boats that are able to get up close to the islands so visitors can see—and photograph—its inhabitants: seals and a multitude of colourful seabirds, including the famously distinctive puffin from just a few metres away.

### Steeped in History

History and culture are prominent in Stykkishólmur as the town has three museums. In the 'Norwegian House' you will find the Snæfellsnes district museum. There you can receive a lot of information about the region and its history. The house itself was built in 1832 by Árni Thorlacius, who was a merchant and ship owner in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### The Ice Museum

Stykkishólmur has also two fine museums that represent the two strong elements of Icelandic nature: ice and fire, in both original and conventional ways. In the case of ice, on the highest point of Stykkishólmur, with its splendid views, the old town library has been

changed into a museum of water, weather and words. In the museum you'll find 24 glass columns with specimen of water from all the primary glaciers of Iceland, in a piece made by renowned artist, Roni Horn.

### The Volcano Museum

Dr. Haraldur Sigurðsson, the world-famous volcanologist, founded the Volcano Museum in 2009.

In the museum, you can not only learn about everything connected with volcanoes, eruptions and other geological matters, but also see how these strong forces of nature have been expressed through the centuries, not only in Iceland but also around the world through works of art, multimedia displays and exhibits.

### The Perfect Base

Accommodation and services in Stykkishólmur are plentiful, from a quality campsite, budget hostels and high-class hotels. You'll find quality restaurants, a supermarket, golf course and the obligatory Icelandic swimming pool, where the local people gather and exchange opinions on everything from the weather to politics.

The Snæfellsnes peninsula is a must when coming to Iceland. It is strewn with natural, historical and mystical phenomena and Stykkishólmur is the ideal base to explore it.



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## PREPARE FOR LUNAR LANDING

*Europe's largest area of unspoiled nature is Mývatn Tours' playground*

Travelling in the uninhabited interior of Iceland is unforgettable. In the safe hands of Myvatn Tours, with 30 years experience guiding visitors in this particular area of this terrain, it is nonetheless an adventurous day, driving across the largest open area of unspoiled nature in Europe with breathtaking landscapes, an environment of magnificently simple splendour, dominated by sandy deserts, stark or moss-covered lava plains, ever-present mountains and volcanoes, incredible colours, roaring waterfalls, unbridged rivers,

colourful sulphurous fields, delicate but rich flora, young lava fields, and ice-cold glaciers. It was on this terrain that the US astronauts practiced for their lunar landing.

Located north of Vatnajökull, about 100 km south of Mývatn, there is little rainfall. Described as a 'complex of nesting calderas' in the rain shadow of Vatnajökull glacier, the area is known as Ódáðahraun, or the 'desert of crimes'—an intriguing name for the largest lava field in Iceland.

Created by an immense volcanic eruption thousands of years ago, followed by others,

including one in 1875 and a smaller one in 1961, the main caldera measures 55 km across, giving you some idea of the volume of material which has been ejected. In the aftermath of the explosions, a series of craters were formed, and one such crater is the opaque, milky blue Lake Öskjuvatn, the deepest freshwater lake in Iceland. It was this eruption in 1875 that caused much hardship around Iceland and resulted in the largest emigration of the Icelandic population to Canada and United States in subsequent years.

The tour takes 11-12 hours and it starts at 8 am at the Information Centre in Reykjahlíð, Mývatn. From there you will be driven through the wondrous Mývatnsöræfi.

The mountain road is surprisingly comfortable compared to many others. It's a rare privilege to stop and sip the clear water of the spring-fed rivers that you have just forded in this remote Highland paradise!



-EMV



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