

EINAR TH. THORSTEINSSON

BEST OF ICELAND AND

# BEST OF ICELAND

THE BEST INFORMATION  
ABOUT ICELAND AT YOUR FINGERTIPS





Photo: Ingólfur Júlíusson.





The Best of Iceland is an extensive and informative book about the Icelandic Tourist Industry. It contains articles from the first 32 issues of Icelandic Times magazine as well as a number of brand new articles on nature, natural wonders, birds and wildlife, towns and villages, museums and galleries, swimming pools, activities, curiosities, accommodation, restaurants, design and handicraft – and the endless exciting possibilities available to our guests. The winter wonders with the Nordic Lights, the summer season with the Midnight Sun.



Whether it is fishing, sailing, horse-riding, skiing, snow-mobiling, adventure tours, hiking, mountaineering, river-rafting, glacier-tours, hang-gliding, or just plain relaxation in the tranquil nature, here you will find the best possibilities on offer in Iceland.

The book travels clock-wise around Iceland, starting in Reykjavík – at 08.00 – with maps for villages and towns, as well as greater areas. There is vast information on each of the ten main areas, their specialities and interest points; Reykjavík, West Coast, Westfjords, North-West, North-East, East, South-East, South, South-West and, of course, the Highlands.

The tourist industry is an ever-growing field and thus we do not claim to give a complete account of the possibilities – but we are close. You can be pretty sure you'll find everything you need in this book.

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**ICELANDIC**

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

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



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# BEST OF ICELAND 2016

Information about Iceland at Your Fingertips

It took a volcano to bring Iceland to the centre stage in the eyes of the world, early 2010. From being Europe's Best Kept Secret, the country was suddenly thrust into the limelight, making Iceland a top tourist destination. Now, 2016, many thousands of people all over the world are seeking information about Iceland and the number of visitors is burgeoning.

The Best of Iceland provides valuable resources of information that you can use to plan your trip and use as you travel. It answers those basic questions of where to stay, where to go, where to eat and what to do and buy. It contains a wealth of information about the country, its nature, culture, customs, history, recreational activities and lifestyle.

Enjoy your visit & welcome back!

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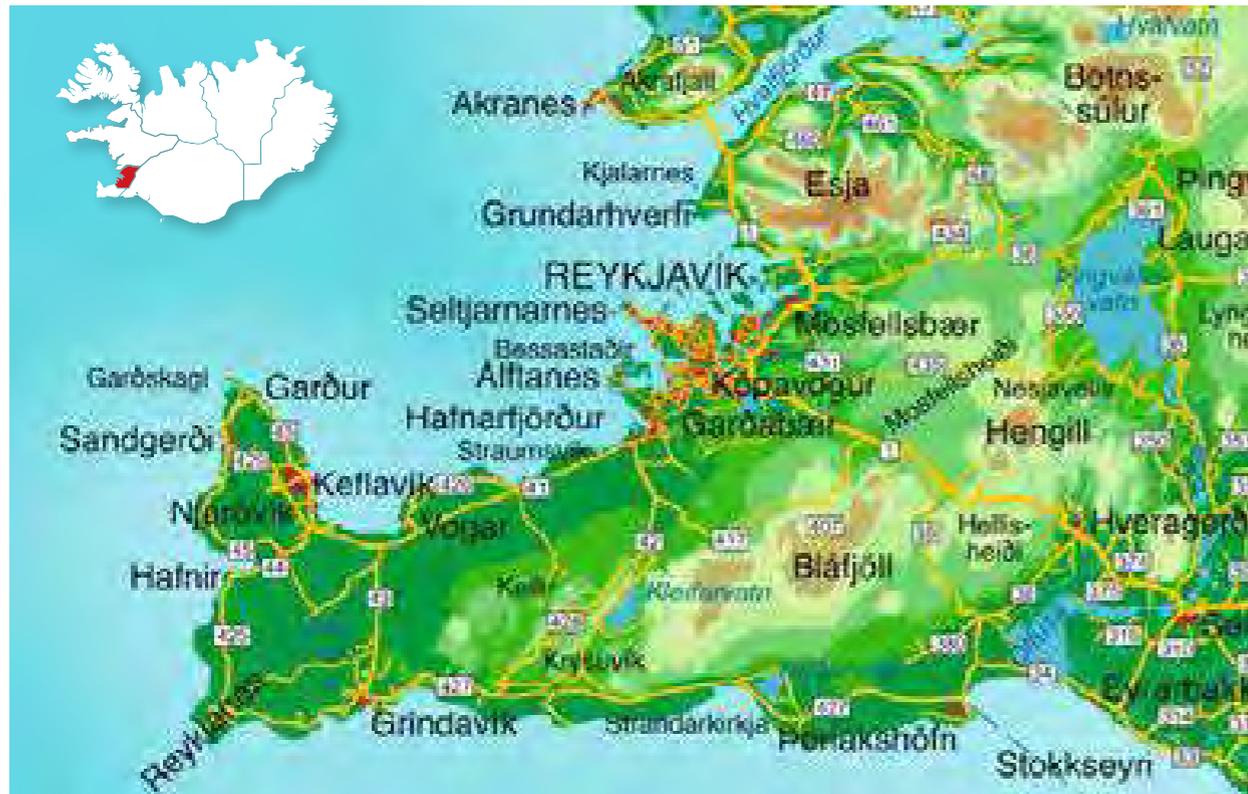
Photo: Björn Rúniksson.



# The Greater Reykjavík Area



*Rafn Sig.*



Sunset at Elliðaavatn lake near Reykjavík.

# THE GREATER *Reykjavík* AREA

One of the world's smaller capitals, Reykjavík is surrounded by the towns of Seltjarnarnes, Kópavogur, Garðabær, Álftanes (where the President lives), Hafnarfjörður and the country town of Mosfellsbær, combining to make up the Greater Reykjavík area. It is also one of Europe's youngest capitals. Founded by the first permanent Viking settler in the 900s, Ingólfur Arnarson, it has grown from a handful of houses a few centuries ago to a compact and thriving metropolis.

and the new concert hall complex by Reykjavík's harbour, Harpa, has a full programme each month. Innovation and inspiration play a major role in the city's life. From here, visitors can reach the whole country. The countryside is always very close by. Activities such as tours, whale- or bird-watching, fishing, swimming, hiking, biking and horse-riding are very popular. There's even ice skating. On weekends especially, the city is filled with nightlife that continues till morning. There are plenty of pubs and restaurants with both genuine Icelandic food and international cuisines. So you never need to go hungry. From youth hostel to guesthouses and hotels, there's accommodation for every budget.



@VISITREYKJAVIK

The National Museum holds the history of the nation, while the National Library, just opposite it, has the nation's books and records. There are many art galleries and museums throughout the area



Harpa Reykjavík Concert and Conference Centre.

The Pond in Reykjavík



Alþingishúsið (The Parliament House) is a classical 19th century structure which stands by Austurvöllur in central Reykjavík, Iceland. It houses Alþingi, the Icelandic parliament. The building was designed by Danish architect Ferdinand Meldahl and built, using hewn dolerite, between 1880 to 1881.



Reykjavík by night, taken from air.



Reykjavík on a good summer's day from the air.

Höfði is a house in northern Reykjavík, the capital city of Iceland, built in 1909. Höfði is located at Félagstún. Initially, it was built for the French consul Jean-Paul Brillouin in Iceland and was the exclusive residence of poet and businessman Einar Benediktsson (1864-1940) for many years. It is best known as the location for the 1986 Reykjavík Summit meeting of Presidents Ronald Reagan of the United States and Mikhail Gorbachev of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. That was a major step to the ending of the Cold War. Within the building the flags of the United States and the Soviet Union are cross-hung to commemorate the meeting.



# 365 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

*The wonderland that keeps the Christmas spirit alive all the year*

On Laugavegur, which is Reykjavík's main shopping street, The Little Christmas Shop is in holiday spirits all year round. The owner, Anne Helen, happily makes sure



she keeps that Christmas spirit alive; come rain or shine. **An obsession for Christmas**

Anne Helen admits that she has an incurable obsession for Christmas as well as a genuine passion for things of beauty in general. Her pride and passion lies in searching for various Christmas things of quality and she is always on the lookout for items of unique beauty.

She imports products from all over Europe but her main ambition is to specialize in Icelandic handiwork and ornaments. The Little Christmas Shop has a large selection, mostly made exclusively for Anne Helen by a number of craftsmen, who each have a distinctive approach, working with materials such as glass, clay and wool.

In addition to customary Christmas ornaments, she offers Icelandic folklore figurines, such as the thirteen Yule Lads and the notorious Christmas Cat. Tourists enjoy visiting the store and partaking of Anne Helen's well known hospitality, where the shop's friendly atmosphere



makes them feel more than welcome. It is almost impossible to leave this winter wonderland empty handed! It is just too tempting to invest in an Icelandic Yule Lad for your Christmas tree back home and it is a warm, lovely way to remember your visit to Iceland.

## Crazy about Christmas

Anne Helen has always been crazy about Christmas and the sparkling atmosphere surrounding the holidays, so to run her own shop, devoted exclusively to the Christmas season, is a dream come true.

Before the Little Christmas Shop became a reality, Anne Helen sold decorations and Christmas-inspired articles from her garage, which attracted curious guests to her home at all hours every day. Being a very sociable person, she encouraged people to relax and enjoy their visit. She moved her treasure trove to her new shop on Laugavegur, in the heart of Reykjavík's bustling shopping area, which was only 3 streets away from her garage.

The beautiful shop devoted to Christmas has become an integral part of the businesses in the neighbourhood as The Little Christmas Shop is open seven days a week; all year round.

During the summer months of July and August, about 70% of Anne Helen's business is selling Icelandic handmade Christmas products

to foreign visitors, who are especially fascinated by the uniqueness of her merchandise.

## Children and Santa

In addition to serving adult customers, Anne Helen is always pleased to meet children from all over the world who are drawn like magnets to her joyful store. Many of them are excited to get their hands on the Christmas letters that are sold in the shop and which they can then send to Iceland's Santa. The children are guaranteed that, when Christmas time comes, they will receive a letter as well as a treat in the mail from the man himself.

## 13 Mischievous Yule lads

When visiting Anne Helen at the Little Christmas Shop, one can expect her to share some interesting and fun stories from the various Christmas traditions of Icelandic culture. Stories of the mischievous thirteen Icelandic Yule lads have been known to scare some foreign children but are nonetheless extremely popular!

- HH



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# THE ALL-ICELANDIC WOOL SHOP

The Handknitting Association of Iceland sells Icelandic wool and products

Sheep came to Iceland with the Viking settlers and quickly proved their value, 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 that lacks 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. -ASF



# THE WORLD'S MOST EXCLUSIVE WATCHMAKER

They sell to the stars but are known only to the few

It is probably the world's smallest watchmaker, located in a very small shop in one of the world's smallest countries and yet they produce the most exquisitely crafted and sought-after handmade watches.

In this era of electronic, battery-powered watches, you might expect that automatic mechanical watches had passed into history. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is a greater demand for high quality timepieces that will outlast the temporary electronic watch phenomenon.

## The choice of connoisseurs

You can be defined by your choices. There are watches for the mass market and there are those watches that are individualised, personalised collectors' items, works of art that are cherished for generations. These are investments - especially those limited editions.

Yet, they have a key place in the lives of the wearers.

Kings, princesses, international leaders from East and West, film stars, rock idols - all have made their way to the small shop on Laugavegur, Reykjavík's main shopping street, to select their own watch, have it assembled and personalised just for them, a testament to their discernment of true quality.

While I was visiting the shop, it's wall filled with photos of well-known personalities who are now wearing their watches, I couldn't help but wonder if it was only the rich and famous who could afford such time pieces. My answer came as I was standing there. A beautiful young woman came to pick up a watch she had ordered and two tourists selected watches for themselves. They would return later in the day after their selections had been assembled specifically for them in the tiny studio at the back of the shop.



Others, wanting something even more personal, have their watches engraved on the inner rotor with special messages.

## Relying on reliability

Pilots and the Icelandic coastguard have to be able to trust their watches. Lives could depend on them. The coastguard are issued with the "Sif" watch, designed especially for them. The only watch in the range without a transparent back, it has a 4mm Sapphire non-reflective glass and can be used to a depth of at least 1,000m. It is also available to the general public, along with pilots' watches, likewise known for

their dependability and absolute reliability.

## Wear the volcano

Iceland used to be known as "Europe's Best Kept Secret" but it was thrust into the limelight in 2010 with the Eyjafjallajökull volcanic eruption. The fine ash that brought Europe's air traffic to a halt now coats the face of the most sought-after watch, the Goð. Ornate Viking engravings on the case make this watch stand out - especially as some of the engraving can be personalised to make it totally unique. -ASF





# THE WARMTH OF NORDIC FUR

*Feldur Workshop specializes in the design and production of high quality fur products*

Feldur Workshop is an Icelandic company, situated at Snorrabraut 56 in downtown Reykjavík. They offer products from fox, mink, reindeer and sheep, to name just few, for wear or for home decoration.

The groundfloor is newly renovated in a stylish and practical manner to best accommodate the various fur products designed and handmade on site. One of Iceland's most respected interior designers, Leifur Welding, created an open space plan to grace the classical, yet modern product designs offered in the shop. The highlight for most visitors will surely be the opportunity to observe the master furrier himself at work in the midst of the workshop, where he

meticulously patterns coats, hats, gloves, collars, vests, jackets and headbands from different furs.

Heiðar Sigurðsson studied in Sweden for four years and has since worked as a furrier for about 30 years. He opened Feldur Workshop in 2006. "We specialize in accessories like hats, gloves, collars, vests and headbands though I also design fur coats and jackets", he says.

In Feldur Workshop, you can also buy designs made from sealskin, which Mr. Sigurðsson gets from Greenland, such as shoes, collars, jackets, coats and handbags which can be used as both fashionable garments or heart-warming souvenirs.

## Inspired by nature and people

Feldur Workshop prides itself in offering only high quality items in their collection. When asked where he gets his inspiration from, Mr. Sigurðsson tells us that the Icelandic nature and extreme weather have been his main sources of inspiration, as fur and wool have kept the cold north winds at bay for centuries.

He also stresses that he puts great emphasis on his customers' happiness. In addition to seeking inspiration from nature's elements, he also says that his customers give him a great deal of inspiration, as well. That's not hard to imagine, given that he works in the middle of the open space and has a



good chance to seek information about his customers' desires. This is also a way for the furrier to stay in close, personal contact with his clients.

It's worth mentioning that he also provides skillful repairs to furs, free of charge, when a Feldur Workshop product is brought in.

## Accessories for your home

Then there are the accessories for your home - made from first class fur and skin. Mr. Sigurðsson produces decorative natural skin products such as lamb hides or reindeer skins to cover your sofa or hang on your wall, or more processed items such pillows from lambskin. Could you imagine a

piece of Nordic nature beautifying your own home such as a skillfully made accessory from high quality material?

## A selection of shops

If you are interested in buying Feldur Workshop's products, we recommend you try to take the time to visit the workshop on Snorrabraut 56, to enhance your buying experience.

Alternatively, there are a number of stores in Reykjavík that keep his designs in their collections. Among these located in the centre of Reykjavík are Rammagerðin, Geysir, Mýrin and Ravens. Some stores in Kringlan and Smáralind shopping centres also carry his products, as does the Duty Free

shop in Keflavík airport. Some hotels also carry a selection of items, such as Grand Hotel, Hilton Hotel and Natura Hotel.

You can also view the Feldur collection on their website. Mr. Sigurðsson says he plans to build a web shop so people can order online in the future. His designs are available in some shops in Scandinavia as well.

Yes, fur is 'in'—whether it's to wear or as something to decorate your home with.

-SJ

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# CULTURAL CAPITAL OF THE NORTH

*The Harpa Concert and Conference Centre wins acclaim for good reason*



A few years ago, it was unheard of to host a major concert or conference in the country dubbed 'the world's best kept secret' but how things have changed! Iceland has been discovered and now ranks as not only a top tourist destination but as the location of choice for hosting concerts and international conferences.

## Expanding infrastructure

Iceland's capital, Reykjavík, small by world standards, is a dynamic, vibrant city where English is commonly well-spoken. It features newly-built, top class hotels, a range of international gourmet restaurants and an exciting night life, with all the trappings of a modern city within easy reach.



## A Vision for the Future

In the early 2000s, Iceland was a heady place. People had great ideas and vision. It was in this atmosphere that the idea of a purpose-built concert hall and conference centre was conceived in 2004. Its design was given to

Danish architects, Henning Larson, Danish-Icelandic artist Ólafur Elíasson and Icelandic architects, Batteríð, with Vladimir Ashkenazy, as the artistic advisor, to create a new home for the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, The Icelandic Opera and the Reykjavík Big Band.



An ideal spot at the harbour, with the bay and mountains of Esja behind it, was selected for the iconic, radical design of a quasi brick, shimmering glass facade, inspired by the basalt columns found in locations such as Skógafoss waterfall.

## Designed to be multi-purpose

Natural lighting and transparency are key to the design, the striking geometric shapes of the facade both capturing and reflecting the light, distributing the solar heat radiating from sunlight striking the internal black walls. Natural geothermal heating supplements this environmental masterpiece of clean energy, covering 28,000 square metres (300,000 square feet). Responsibility for the acoustics, design of the theatre and sound equipment and the sound isolation fell to Artec Consultants Inc, from the USA.

Harpa's role is as a venue for music, culture, conferences, gatherings both Icelandic and foreign. Thus, the design called for a multi-purpose construction, with different hall sizes, meeting rooms, areas for exhibitions and receptions, shops and services.

The names of the four main halls correspond to the elements of fire, water, air and earth. The largest, Eldborg ('Fire castle') is named after the West Iceland volcanic crater. It seats up to 1800 guests in a dramatic setting that complements any production.

The smaller recital hall, Norðurljós (Northern Lights) has a deep blue decor



that can be configured for different themes suiting conferences, jazz and chamber groups, receptions or functions. It is designed to be combined with Silfurberg, the main conference hall, for larger functions. Silfurberg accommodates up to 750 guests but can be divided in half for smaller events. Specialised acoustics are configurable to fit the occasion.

Water is represented by Kaldalón (Cold Lagoon), the smallest hall, seating almost 200 guests. It's named after the beautiful blue bay in the Westfjords, also the birthplace of one of Iceland's most celebrated songwriters, Sigvaldi Kaldalóns.

## The Future Today

Iceland has a rich cultural heritage for so small a population. Harpa has become a hub for many forms of cultural expression, bringing a breadth to its offerings that other centres would envy. Visitors frequently express interest in the building itself, so guided tours take visitors behind the scenes and share its secrets and stories.



Harpa is a living entity, responding to the needs of the time with new ideas and developments. Technology enables state of the art facilities, including a Business Centre, high-speed Internet and its own dynamic website to keep patrons up to date with a wealth of detailed information services and provides online ticket booking to its events.

Wherever people gather, food and refreshments are important. Harpa provides a versatile catering service for all types of events from weddings to funerals, company parties to conferences—and everything in between.

## Almost lost to history

The half-built project was almost abandoned in the economic crash of 2008 but the government saw its potential to the country's future and committed to its completion. It received its new name, Harpa, on the Day of Icelandic Music, 11th December 2009 and was formally opened 4th May, 2011.

## Recognising Excellence

Since its opening, Harpa has received numerous awards recognising that it offers the best concert and conference facilities in Northern Europe, including the prestigious Best MICE Centre award in 2012. Its design won the Mies van der Rohe architecture award in 2013. Gramophone magazine selected it as one of concert halls of the new millennium and Travel and Leisure magazine chose it as the best performance venue in 2011. Now, in 2016, it won the well-known Business Destinations Travel Awards for 2016 as the Best Meetings and Conference Centre in Europe.

Since opening, over 6 million visitors have passed through its doors, placing Harpa in the top level of concert and conference centres worldwide, making it an inspired choice to host a conference in such a unique location, where famous orchestras vie to play.



# TREASURES AND RICHES

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

However, its true wealth lies in what has made it what it is today as each generation has added their own contribution to the country's heritage. What you see in today's society is the result of all its previous generations and is what makes it truly unique. The National Museum of Iceland is located next to the University of Iceland and holds a sample of the lives previous generations have left. Here is where you will gain so much greater insight of what makes Iceland today and the value attached to each individual's life.

## A Young Nation with a Mature History

'The Making of a Nation' is the museum's permanent exhibition, displaying the

heritage and history of the Icelandic people and country, from the early days of the Settlement right through to modern times. It offers a fascinating perspective on many aspects of life and society throughout Iceland's short history.

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

## Travel Through Time

The exhibition is conceived as a journey through time, beginning with an example of one of the ships in which early settlers

crossed the unpredictable ocean with the most rudimentary of instrumentation from their Viking homeland to the high-tech airport of today, handling many thousands of travellers. Using about 2,000 objects and 1,000 photographs, this is the next best thing to personal time travel.

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

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

## The National Museum Holds the Nation's Wealth

### Craftsmen Before the Age of Plastics

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

Temporary exhibitions add an additional perspective on Iceland's heritage, with thousands of photographs showing life over the last century. For example, there is an exhibit containing a range of ornamentally-carved drinking horns. Your imagination can take you back to see the care and skill of the craftsman at work, transforming these bovine horns into objects of art—practical drinking goblets that have disappeared from modern mass-produced plastic society.

### History is for Children

Museums can make a very special contribution to a child's development.

Recognising that, museum educators make presentations for schoolchildren from a young age all the way up to university students, with each presentation being both geared to their age and maturity level and the national curriculum.

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

This is the way to learn history—hands on and seeing it first hand. The multimedia presentations build on the displays to provide adults and children alike with a fascinating, engaging experience that educates without you even knowing it!

### Stay for a Day in Time

You can choose how long and how much



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

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

-ASF



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Images by © Gabriel Rutenberg



# JOE & THE JUICE GETTING JUICED IN ICELAND

Joe & the Juice is an on-trend coffee shop/ juice bar that opened in January 2015 at Keflavík International Airport. The concept answers the needs of today's traveller for a quick pick-me-up in the form of great espresso drinks, freshly pressed smoothies and juices, and a variety of sandwiches prepared on the spot.

**A Winner Is Born**  
Created by the Danish entrepreneur Kaspar Basse, Joe & the Juice won the prestigious FAB Awards in the category of 'Best Airport Coffee Shop of the Year' in Copenhagen for 2013 and 2014.

**Whew! Hot!**  
The popular brand, known for its attractive 'juicers' and hip electronic dance music, can be found all over Denmark, and has been popping up elsewhere in Europe—Norway, Sweden, Germany, the UK, France and more recently, here in Iceland.

According to Joe & the Juice's Icelandic manager Daníel Kári Stefánsson, "People come for the atmosphere as well as for the healthy drinks, and it's been going even better than we initially expected.



The reaction from the Icelandic public has been great".

**Flavour, Nutrition and Hydration**  
Unforgettable names for freshly pressed juice combinations such as 'Sex Me Up' – passion fruit, ginger and apple, 'Joe's Green Kiss' – spinach, ginger and apple and one called 'Hell of a Nerve' – strawberry, elderberry and banana, are sure to grab your attention.

For a distinctly Danish touch, Joe's sandwiches are made with traditionally baked rye bread, using flavourful combinations of fillings such as Serrano ham, mozzarella and tomato, and a touch of pesto.



**Size Matters**  
Joe & the Juice uses a unique blend of coffee beans that have been specially cultivated in South America. There's no extra charge if you want to up your caffeine intake with a double shot in your latte and you choose your cup size—in pink, purple, yellow or grey. How about a ginger shot for a natural boost of energy? Coming right up! Just ask!

**Where to Get Juiced in Iceland**  
You can find Joe & the Juice at Reykjavík's Kringlan Shopping Mall, Kópavogur's Smáralind Shopping Mall, Laugar Fitness Centre and Keflavík Airport's check-in lounge. A great way to take off. This is one place to check out! -EMV

**Joe & The Juice - Iceland**  
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## A GOURMET EXPERIENCE

Steaks and Style at Argentina Steakhouse since 1989

Iceland is a land of secrets, waiting to be discovered. For those who love good food, wines and spirits, the only give-away is a flag hanging above two gates on a side-street just off Laugavegur's shopping street. Here, at the end of a dark hallway is a large wooden door with an ornate handle that opens into one of the most popular and respected restaurants in Iceland. Popular, that is, with people in the know. This hidden epicurean jewel has been sought out by visitors from all over the world for the past 27 years!

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

However, the meal is the culmination of that experience. Before anything touches your taste buds, your other senses are

immersed in the rich leather and wood, the intimate lighting and atmosphere of the rustic, Argentinean-style decor, the music and the tantalising aromas. Enjoying a drink from the large selection of fine wines and spirits stocked at the bar in front of the fire crackling in the hearth, relaxing in the comfortable chairs of one of the lounges, provides the perfect ambiance to the start of your evening.

Steaks are the hallmark of Argentina's cuisine. Icelandic beef is untouched by drugs, additives or steroids. They have been genetically unaltered over the 1,000 years since the first settlers. Allowed to grow slowly, they have developed just the right amount of fat necessary for the meat to grill perfectly and the muscles are finer, so the steak is succulent and tender. Icelandic lamb is renowned for its unspoiled, natural growth as they roam unrestrained in the mountain wilderness pastures, also free from additives or hormones, colouring or enhancers – and that shows in its



tenderness and taste! Also on the menu is a wide range of carefully selected fresh seafood, shellfish and lobster, to provide a choice for every palate.

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

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

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



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# HLÍN REYKDAL STUDIO

Visit an eclectic shop in Reykjavík's Grandi neighbourhood.

Iceland's fondness for innovation and design is no secret. In fact, Reykjavík is home to a relatively large group of talented and diverse designers, creating everything from product design objects to knitwear. However, much like the country, Iceland's design culture is quite young—the Icelandic word for design, hönnun, was coined in the 1950s. The design community has grown considerably over the decades from a small, craft-based group to a proper industry, all while maintaining the quirky, nature-based Icelandic aesthetic.

Along with folklore and history, many Reykjavík creatives cite nature as a major influence in their work. Designers thrive on the geological contrasts of their small volcanic island, with its vast lava fields, punishing weather conditions, and the richness of the colours and textures of the landscape. Hlín Reykdal is one of those designers, with a line of accessories that are unique, yet timeless.

### Dynamic young talent

Hlín is a young designer with a strong passion for fine art and design, which comes across in



her beautiful creations. As the daughter of two artists, Hlín has design encoded in her DNA. Born in Reykjavík and a graduate in fashion design from the Iceland Academy of the Arts, Hlín started out as a designer of accessories.

Her line of jewellery includes bold beaded bracelets, feminine soft tassel necklaces, and draped delicate necklaces. Her pieces are versatile as they can be worn for dressed up or casual occasions. Each is handmade in Iceland. Indeed, every bead is hand-painted and threaded with precision, using high quality materials.

### Growing across the world

Hlín has grown her business with the help of her husband Hallgrímur, a civil engineer. Her work is stocked in scores of shops in several countries and she recently opened her flagship store in the up and coming Reykjavík neighbourhood of Grandi. Located at Fiskislóð 75, the studio is open Monday-Friday from 11:00-18:00 and Saturdays from 11:00-16:00. Her designs are also available at Epal, Mýrin, and Meba/Rhodium in Kringlan and Smáralind. Travellers on Icelandair flights can also purchas

-JG



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# A TASTE OF NEPAL

Nepalese Kitchen has delicious food, a warm atmosphere and friendly service

Nepalese Kitchen is a cosy restaurant on Reykjavík's Laugavegur that is truly a feast for the senses. Upon walking inside, guests are greeted by the aroma of delicious spices as well as a welcome from its friendly owner, Deepak Panday. Deepak, who was born in Nepal, has been living in Iceland for about 10 years, and takes great care in creating a warm atmosphere, first class service, a diverse menu and absolutely delicious food. "I have been a chef for 34 years and I enjoy serving quality food and authentic spices for Icelanders and tourists," says Deepak. This passion for food started when he was a child and led him to work as a chef in many countries including England, India, Nepal, France and the United States, before settling in Iceland.

### Inventive Dishes

The dishes, prepared by Deepak and his wife, are perfectly spiced, while the chefs are eager to cater for any dietary restrictions. "We have guests that have a gluten allergy, or a number of other food sensitivities and we are happy to prepare food just how they like it," says Deepak. "All our dishes are made from scratch for each individual guest." The menu is so diverse, it could be difficult to choose just one dish! Diners will find chicken, lamb, seafood, and vegetarian choices with sauces ranging from delicate to hearty.

### Special Spices

The key to Nepalese food is the spice used. Deepak is very concerned about the spices; not just how they taste but also how they impact the body and soul. "We have spices that can be helpful to diabetics, people that are stressed, and those with some food sensitivities," says Deepak. Every summer, he travels to India to hand-select the herbs and spices used in the restaurant. "I want to see the plants for myself, to see that they are the best quality," he says.

### Beautiful Space

The restaurant is tastefully decorated with a nod to Nepali culture in the art, linens and even music. It's clear that the restaurant is a labour of love and



Deepak's passion for quality food shines through. "It is so important to cook good food for people; it gives them so much. People feel loved when they get good food," says Deepak. One of his favorite dishes on the menu is a Nepali curry. "The spice mixture is unique and it comes directly from my mother." Plan to stop by Nepalese Kitchen during

your next stop to Reykjavík for tasty food, a wide selection of beer and wine, and warm service. -JG



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# THE ICELANDIC HOUSE OF SPECIALITIES

*Skólabrú Gourmet Restaurant feeds connoisseurs of good food*

Skólabrú is one of the most respected restaurants in Iceland. It is located in one of downtown Reykjavík's most iconic older buildings. The nearly 120 year old house delivers a very relaxed and elegant setting, right next to the Pond and the almost 220 year old Reykjavík Cathedral, Dómkirkjan.

## A perfect service for the world's clientele

Skólabrú caters to international clients who love gourmet food and wine and awesome service, but still expect reasonable prices. The restaurant is known for handling parties and meetings for very demanding clients, including foreign embassies and the large crews that accompany the foreign film

productions that Iceland has attracted in recent years. The restaurant has also handled some very unusual requests, such as setting up a dedicated mobile restaurant in order to keep film crews well fed when they are on location somewhere far away from Reykjavík and civilization in general.

## Different strokes for different folks

Skólabrú can easily handle 150 people, and the second floor can accommodate up to 80 people in a private setting. The main floor has a small separate room which can accommodate up to 14 people. This room has a wall mounted large screen TV and is perfect for a private meeting or a small seminar. The second floor is a spacious venue



with a high ceiling, and it can be set up with a large projector screen and all the equipment necessary to host a professional conference or a large private meeting. It is also frequently modified and decorated to handle special requests, including private parties for companies, weddings and birthdays. A free transport service is available for groups. Both floors have internet connections.

## Nothing but the best

New owners took over the business in 2009, but the restaurant has operated since 1992, so it has an established network of suppliers that guarantees the very best quality raw materials are available at any time. The chefs deliver magnificent meals that range from modern takes on traditional fish and meat dishes to gourmet vegetarian dishes, and the various more exotic specialities that the restaurant is famous for.

## A full menu

Skólabrú is well known for its traditional rack of lamb and salted cod (bacalao). For those looking for more exotic meals, the chefs offer exquisite specialities such as seawolf (Atlantic Wolfish,) and wild goose carpaccio.

The dessert menu is mouth watering and the wine list has the perfect red, white, and sparkling wines to complement your meal and dessert. An assortment of beers and strong drinks is also available. Skólabrú is the perfect restaurant for people who love gourmet food in a nice setting, and the service provided to groups is unparalleled. -SF

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# TURNING ON TOP OF THE WORLD

*The Pearl, a five star revolving restaurant with a remarkable view of the city*



On top of the hillside of Öskjuhlíð, one of the city's most popular green areas, stands The Pearl, an unusual building consisting of a huge glass dome placed upon six hot water tanks. Due its height and geographical position, it provides its visitors with a breathtaking 360° view of Reykjavík and it's surroundings.

## A moveable feast

Under the impressive glass dome revolves one of the country's finest restaurants, recently rated as one of the world's ten best revolving restaurants. The floor turns constantly, but slowly—so slowly actually that, if it wasn't for the changing view, guests probably wouldn't notice it. Over your starter you might be admiring Mount Esja to the north but once your dessert arrives you may be gazing at the ocean to the south!

The Pearl prides itself in a team of chefs

second to none and a menu best described as an inventive cross between an international cuisine and Icelandic ingredients. The menu changes with the seasons. In autumn, the summer's á la carte is replaced with a buffet of wild game that continues into the Christmas season, when traditional dishes are added. The new year always kicks off with a menu created specially to bring food lovers culinary excellence at the best price in town! The only thing that stays on the menu throughout the year is the signature lobster soup originated by the legendary Belgian chef Pierre Romeyer who, after a friendly encounter with the Pearl's head chefs, simply gave them all his recipes!

The Pearl's status as a first class restaurant is a result of the ambition and passion of it's owners and staff who relentlessly try to refine their cooking, bringing in chefs from all over the world and travelling regularly to learn from the



Photos: Óskar Páll Einarsson

best and gather new ideas. Therefore it's no surprise that this year, head chef Stefán Elí won the esteemed 'Taste of France' award for creating an outstanding fusion of French and Icelandic cooking.

## I'll have a gelato ... with a view

But pots and pans also sizzle during the day in The Pearl's Cafeteria, from where you can walk directly out onto the viewing deck to enjoy your cup of coffee. At The Pearl, authenticity is not a word to be taken lightly. Everything is made from scratch: soups, crêpes and a wide selection of breads and pastries. They even brought in a pastry chef from France and went all the way to Italy to learn how to make the perfect gelato - and perfect it is!

However you look at it, The Pearl is a unique spot in the capital, a place bound to satisfy your appetite for both delicious food and jaw dropping panoramas - a revolving world of delight. -HP



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# THE NORTHERN LIGHTS SEASON

From September to Mid-April with Reykjavik Excursions



Reykjavik Excursions is one of Iceland's oldest and most popular tour companies and has over two dozen tours on offer all year round. The company aims to have something on offer for everyone.

The winter time is when you can see the northern lights. With plenty of darkness and often clear skies, it is the season to enjoy the lights and Reykjavik Excursions offers a few different variations of northern lights tours. From the original northern lights tour, to a tour where the hunt for the northern lights is combined with a horse show or stop at Fontana Wellness spa in Laugarvatn, everyone should be able to find something to their liking.

## Northern Lights Tour

This is the original northern lights tour. The destination varies between days, depending on the weather forecast and where the best northern lights sightings are expected to be. The sky is often lit up in a breathtaking dance of colours ranging from green to purple.

The guide will tell you all about the northern lights on the tour and if you do not see the lights, you can rebook again free of charge.

## Horse Theatre and Northern Lights Tour

The Icelandic horse is a special breed of horses, which by most standards would be categorised as a pony. However, due to its weight and weight-carrying abilities it is registered as a horse. They are well known to be friendly and fearless, often galloping towards the fence when they see people passing by.

As part of the Horse Theatre and Northern Lights Tour, you will be driven to Fákasel Horse Park in South-Iceland, where you get to see the show Legends of Sleipnir. It is a fifty-minute long multimedia theatre, with performers and Icelandic horses.

The show brings to life the story of the Icelandic horse and its unique relationship with humans by weaving together theatre, history, mythology and music.

After the show, you will be offered a traditional Icelandic meat soup, with vegetarian options available as well as a children's menu. After nourishing body and soul, you head out for a northern lights hunt.

## What to bring

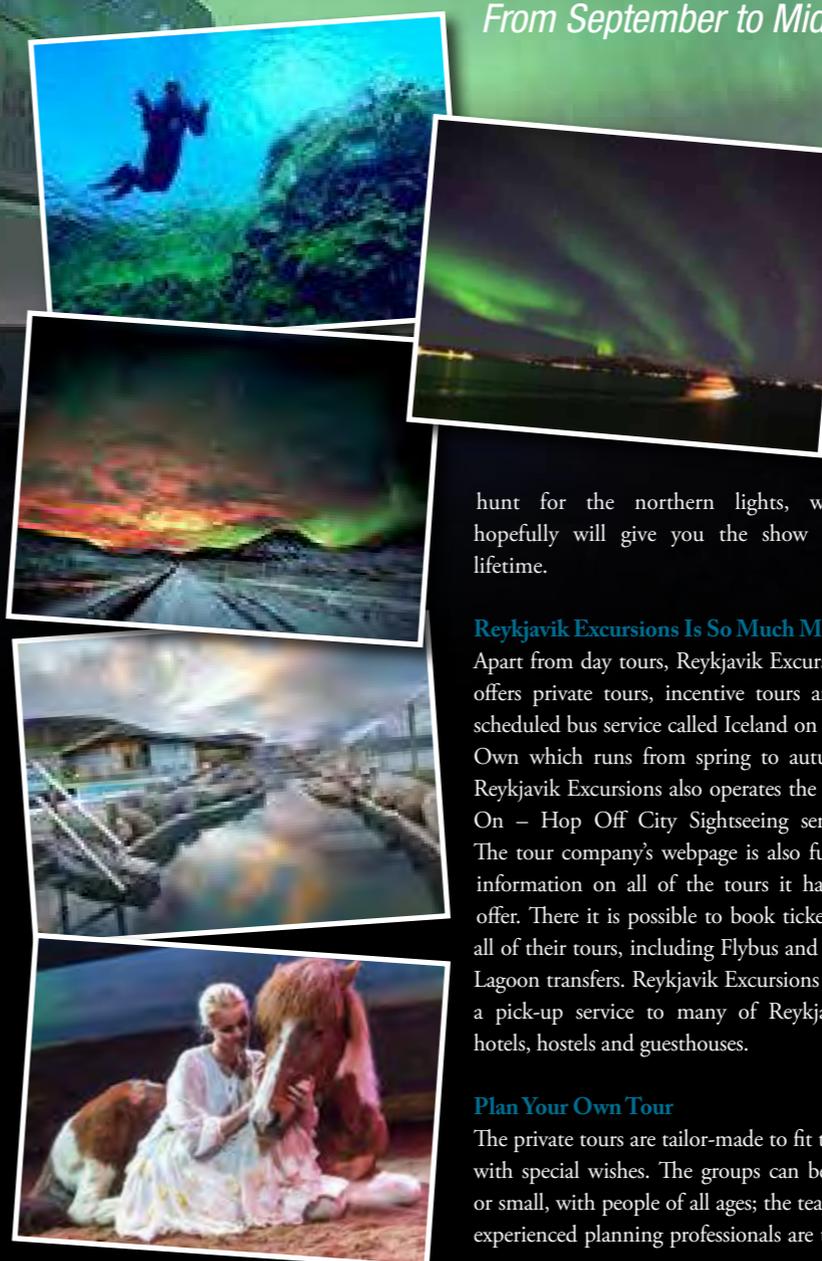
Warm clothing is essential as you'll hopefully spend some time outdoors enjoying the lights. Wear a hat, gloves, warm shoes and several layers of clothes. Photographers love shooting the northern lights for good reason. They can usually get a picture that far exceeds what the human eye can see.

Photographers should bring a tripod and an external shutter release for time exposures. After manually setting the focus to infinity your camera settings should be as follows: ISO 200, f.2.8 and expose for 30 seconds. Please note that the use of built-in or external flashguns disturbs other guests as the eyes need some time to adjust to the darkness for northern lights viewing.

## Warm Baths & Cool Lights

From BSÍ Bus Terminal, you are taken to Fontana Wellness geothermal baths, which is a small and intimate spa next to Laugarvatn in South-Iceland. There you will get ample time to have a soak and afterwards you will get to fill up on your energy with a delicatessen from the local style buffet.

After this relaxing time, you will go out on a



to make your dream holiday come true.

Additionally, Iceland is a destination like no other with its exotic locations, combined with the many possibilities for fun activities. You do not have to go far out of the capital, Reykjavik, to be in a completely different world. It cuts down your travel time and allows you to make the most of your time.

Iceland on Your Own is a scheduled bus network which offers travellers increased flexibility and freedom when exploring Iceland. It is available to individuals and groups and the scheduled buses run across most of Iceland including the Icelandic highlands.

Passengers can hop on one of the scheduled buses on a designated stop anywhere in the country. This enables those who have rented a car, for example, with Enterprise Rent-A-Car, to venture further inland. The highlands of Iceland are mostly only accessible by special vehicles.

Tours with Reykjavik Excursions are available all year long with variety of departure times. Further information and descriptions of all tours can be found at [www.re.is](http://www.re.is).

Whatever your needs or wishes, Reykjavik Excursions will be able to help you out.

-HDB

hunt for the northern lights, which hopefully will give you the show of a lifetime.

## Reykjavik Excursions Is So Much More

Apart from day tours, Reykjavik Excursions offers private tours, incentive tours and a scheduled bus service called Iceland on Your Own which runs from spring to autumn. Reykjavik Excursions also operates the Hop On - Hop Off City Sightseeing service. The tour company's webpage is also full of information on all of the tours it has on offer. There it is possible to book tickets to all of their tours, including Flybus and Blue Lagoon transfers. Reykjavik Excursions runs a pick-up service to many of Reykjavik's hotels, hostels and guesthouses.

## Plan Your Own Tour

The private tours are tailor-made to fit those with special wishes. The groups can be big or small, with people of all ages; the team of experienced planning professionals are there



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# GO WEST!

*Air Iceland is opening up the Westfjords*



Air Iceland offers twice-daily flights to Ísafjörður, the unofficial capital of the Westfjords. The Westfjords have some of the best nature in Iceland. There are endless coastlines, steep bird cliffs, and gorgeous mountainous landscapes that await those that make the trip.

Ísafjörður, which is home to about 4,000 people, is the ideal place for tourists to base from when exploring the region. Given the small size of this remote town, you could feel a bit isolated, but that's just the feeling many tourists relish. The town itself is quaint, with shops and restaurants in the small downtown area while the mountains offer a picturesque backdrop to the bustling harbour. Take a short drive out of town and you'll find fascinating rock formations amongst towering mountain ranges—and more sheep than people.

Air Iceland's two daily flights leave from the Reykjavik domestic airport to Ísafjörður. The experienced and professional staff take great pride in providing travellers a seamless



and convenient travel experience with friendly service.

### Exciting Westfjords day tours

Air Iceland partners with several tour operators around the country and offers three different day tours to the Westfjords, including the flight from Reykjavik to Ísafjörður.

The 'Ísafjörður Day Tour', available all year round, gives travellers a taste of the local nature, history and food in the Westfjords. The tour begins with a trip to the oldest fishing station in Iceland, Ósvör Bolungarvík, before heading to the Maritime Museum in



Ísafjörður. The afternoon is spent exploring the surroundings and nature of Ísafjörður followed by a visit to the eco-friendly fishing village of Suðureyri to enjoy some fresh, local fish. The second tour, 'Dynjandi & the Westfjords', takes travellers to Dynjandi, where guests can take a hike up to the top tier of this majestic waterfall. Dynjandi is one of the most impressive and beautiful waterfalls in the Westfjords. Additionally, guests get to see the spectacular Önundarfjörður, Dýrafjörður and Arnarfjörður fjords, offering jaw-dropping views. This tour, which is available from 1<sup>st</sup> May—31<sup>st</sup> October, also stops at the golden sand beach at Holt and



the cosy Þingeyri (Thingeyri) fishing village and gives travellers the opportunity to explore Ísafjörður on their own.

The third tour takes you to some of the most isolated and beautiful parts of the Westfjords. The 'Under the Westfjords' Cliffs' tour starts with a circle around the Svalvogar peninsula, which is remote and off the beaten path. You will be in awe as you follow the rugged coast, hiking to see the dramatic cliffs, calm creeks, rich birdlife and colourful mountains. You might have a chance to see arctic foxes, seals and whales, as well as a lot of roaming sheep. The tour is available from 1<sup>st</sup> June—30<sup>th</sup> September.

### Gorgeous Greenland

Air Iceland also flies to our close Nordic neighbours, the Faroe Islands and Greenland, in addition to its domestic flights around Iceland. In fact, in June 2016, Air Iceland is adding a new gateway to Greenland at Kangerlussuaq on the west coast. Kangerlussuaq means 'big fjord', and they mean it—the fjord is 170km long and, at its halfway point, is crossed by the Arctic Circle. The main event for many travellers is seeing the Greenland Ice Cap, which is easily accessible from Kangerlussuaq. The Ice Cap is a true wonder of the world as



the glacier edge calves into roaring river rapids below, leaving a choppy face of ice in its place.

In addition to exploring the remarkable Ice Cap, a local tour operator runs a number of excursions, including trips to see local wildlife, such as arctic foxes, reindeer, oxen, falcons, eagles and ravens, as well

as boat trips, horse riding, guided hikes, sightseeing flights and a visit to the US military museum. Besides Ísafjörður and Kangerlussuaq, Air Iceland flies travellers to Grimsey in the north to cross the Arctic Circle, to Akureyri, the capital of the north, Egilsstaðir, in the east, to explore the vast and breathtaking East Fjords, as well as Vopnafjörður and Þórshöfn (Thorshofn), both in the east. Air Iceland also flies to Kulusuk, Nuuk Ilulissat, Narsarsuaq, and Ittoqqortoormiit in Greenland.

Air Iceland is ready to accommodate you, whether you are a flying for business or leisure. The warm, capable and friendly staff are ready to welcome you and make your dream trip come true.

-JG




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# SNORKELING AND DIVING **S** IN SILFRA

*The clearest water between two continents*

You might not immediately think of snorkelling and diving when forging out vacation plans for this island in the North Atlantic. Yet Iceland is one of the world's top five diving destinations.

If you enjoy swimming and feel comfortable in water, or have a PADI licence for diving, the Land of Fire and Ice will present underwater perspectives that are unparalleled. Iceland's largest and oldest diving school DIVE.IS prides itself with knowing the best places and is keen on guiding you safely through the elements.

## **Silfra - the earthly ordeal**

Born from a lava-oozing rift, where the continental plates drift apart, the

mid-Atlantic ridge has, in some places, risen above sea level. One of these rare places happens to be Iceland. In the Þingvellir National Park, the continental drift can be observed, thanks to a huge chasm that started to open between the continents around the year 1798 and formed the famous Silfra underwater fissure in Lake Þingvallavatn. Not more than a 40km drive from Reykjavík, Silfra is located in a sheltered environment that is easily accessible even during the winter months.

There is hardly a spot in the world where you can get closer to the drama of the Earth's genesis in its original element, water, – and you will hardly find a spot with at view on things as clear as in Silfra.

## **Pure water, pure drama**

Be prepared to dive in one of the purest waters in the world. Glacial melt water, filtered through a huge lava bed proves to be a unique Icelandic phenomenon. The water's journey through the lava takes 30 to 100 years before it bubbles up from an underground source into Silfra – water that can't be purer. You can try and drink it while diving or snorkeling.

## **Clearwater's Credence**

The clarity of the water allows a visibility of up to 120 metres, with scenery that you won't forget. All four sections of Silfra can be explored by both snorkelling and diving. With expert guidance, this scenic dive or snorkel trip will take you through the 'Big

Crack' where, at its narrowest point, you can touch both continents at the same time.

Surrounded by incredibly pristine water you will pass through the 'Hall' and finally float into the silent grandeur of the continental drift.

The fissure's awe-inspiring rock walls rise up to 20 metres, and the 'Cathedral' bears its name quite rightly. Boulders give evidence of bygone earthquakes in an area that now seems to be one of peace and eternity. Nature is lost in contemplation, fish only rarely stray into the fissure. Here and there, drifting algae float like green mermaids' hair through the stillness of the water. The charming 'Lagoon' reveals a breathtaking panorama of underwater's infinity.

## **Diving with the pros**

Numerous top-trained guides from DIVE.IS provide undiluted diving pleasure. The company boasts long experience and offers not only perfect equipment servicing and PADI training, but also professionally guided diving and snorkelling tours that leave nothing to be desired.

And if you are out there diving or snorkelling anyway, why not continue with the guys from DIVE.IS for your next adventure? The combo-tours make things easy. Get out of the drysuit and into outdoor jackets and safety helmets, and head for a walk into Icelandic lava caves, where impressive lava formations speak of the Earth's power. Or stay with the element of water and combine your

Silfra trip with a visit to Gullfoss and Geysir on the Golden Circle, or a with relaxing bath in the Blue Lagoon.

If the weather is really unsuitable for diving, DIVE.IS comes with a cheerful alternative: The organized 'Storm hike' with a subsequent visit to the famous Icelandic rescue unit will transform a bad weather day into a real highlight.

On the company's website you will find the entire programme with comprehensive information as well as tempting photos and videos.

-DT



*Diver in Silfra Lagoon*



*Snorkler in Silfra Cathedral*

*Diver touching Two Continents*



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Tech House ehf.

# OFFERS EXCITING INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

It is hard to resist the cosy appeal of a rustic log house, especially after a long day spent enjoying the outdoors. Tech House ehf. understands the functional beauty of high-quality log homes and cabins, and looks to share its passion with new international clients.

## Investment Opportunities

Specialising in import, export, contracting and steelwork, Tech House ehf. is benefitting from Iceland's booming tourism industry and is seeking investors for a wide variety of development opportunities in Iceland and abroad, especially within the tourism market. While currently supplying products to partners in Portugal, Tech House ehf. is interested in drawing international investors for similar large contracts such as the construction of a series of holiday cabins and homes, and potentially, for a hotel in the beautiful Icelandic countryside.

## High-Quality and Energy Smart

Attractive, practical and energy efficient, Tech House ehf. pre-fabricated spruce log houses are factory built in Eastern Europe, and are straightforward to assemble on



location. Clients can choose from a range of log and frame houses in several types and sizes, with logs available in widths from 20mm to 90mm. Tech House ehf. has the capacity to produce structures up to several hundred square metres in size.

Through many years of experience in the Icelandic construction industry, Tech House ehf. has fostered an extensive network of international producers and distributors that allow them to provide the best materials at competitive prices. In addition to pre-fabricated housing units, Tech House ehf.

is able to source a varied range of materials to complete the building process, including central heating systems and piping, sliding glass doors, window fittings, and tiles.

For clients interested in custom builds, Tech House ehf. offers flexible layouts and completely customised interiors and finishings, as well as masonry and exterior stone accents. The possibilities are endless, and the final results guaranteed to please.

## Potential for Growth

Potential is the keyword for Tech House ehf. With a broad network of business contacts, a thriving wholesale dealership, and a reliable supply chain, Tech House ehf. looks forward to a future of innovation and expansion. Prospective investors can expect an abundance of exciting opportunities, and a business relationship based on trust and excellent service. To learn more about Tech House ehf., visit [www.multikerfi.com](http://www.multikerfi.com) or contact [icelava@outlook.com](mailto:icelava@outlook.com). -MJA

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## CATCH THE NORTHERN LIGHTS ALL YEAR ROUND

*Aurora Reykjavík's Northern Lights Center lets you see the Lights all year*

There is perhaps nothing more magical and unforgettable than witnessing the beauty of a Northern Lights display in one's lifetime. It's the dream of many who come to Iceland, but alas, those unpredictable, frenetic lights tend to have a mind of their own and don't always show up on cue. So it is with great joy that we welcome one of Iceland's most recent additions—Aurora Reykjavík's Northern Lights Center, where the Northern Lights are always on display.

## A Unique Experience

The centre is the unique creation of four enterprising young Icelanders who recognised the need for just such a place—a kind of one-stop-shop for all things Northern Lights. Located on the far side of Reykjavík's Old Harbour, the centre serves both educational and inspirational purposes. Here you can read up on the auroras through stories and legends from around the world, learn something

about the science behind this amazing phenomenon and gaze at spectacular Northern Lights photography from top Icelandic photographers. There is even a specially equipped 'photo booth' where you can learn how to adjust your camera's settings should you want to try your hand at capturing an auroral display yourself.

## Soothing Sights and Sounds

However, Aurora Reykjavík's real pull and ace up its sleeve is its fantastic HD time-lapse film of recent auroral activity. Projected onto a 7 metre wide screen, you can sit back and enjoy this 13 minute film that features a dazzling display of auroral activity, accompanied by relaxing music. Therapeutic and restful are two words that come to mind to describe this zen-like experience.

## Hot coffee and choice gifts

Before leaving, be sure to grab a free cup of coffee in the Northern Lights Center gift



shop and check out the impressive display of clothing, glassware, paintings and woollen knitwear by some of Iceland's most creative designers. The theme? You guessed it. -EMV

**Setting the record straight**

*While in Iceland, you might be told that the outside air temperature needs to be around 0°C or below in order to see the Northern Lights. The oft quoted but erroneous assumption is that the Northern Lights only appear at these temperatures. We would just like to set the record straight that while it is true that the Northern Lights do happen to be visible more often when the air is cold and the sky is clear, their appearance has nothing to do with actual temperature of the air.*



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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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## 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.

### Leather and design at its finest

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.

### Architect as well as an artist

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."

Reykholzt, at Rammagerðin at the Keflavík International Airport, and directly from Guðrún. More information can be found on Facebook: Arkart-leather-design.

-NHH

### Available upon your request

The Ark Art collection is available at the National Art Gallery, Snorrastofa in

**Ark Art**

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Arkart-leather-design

**T**ARAMAR is a company at the forefront of natural pure skin care in Iceland. The Reykjavik-based company provides a line of products that use fresh, organic ingredients instead of murky formulas that many “natural” products claim to use. The products are based on many years of scientific research, including elements of food science. Dr. Guðrún Marteinsdóttir, Professor at University of Iceland, founded the company whose core themes are: science, slow cosmetics and purity. TARAMAR offers creams and serums that are designed to reconstruct collagen fibers, restart healthy metabolism and protect the skin cells from aging due to oxidation and environmental factors.

**Natural Ingredients**

A multitude of products tout “natural” and “organic” ingredients, but that does not always equate to high quality as many companies also use harmful compounds in their products. TARAMAR, however, uses only high quality and pure ingredients including Icelandic seaweed, lava filtered water and local medicinal herbs. The formulas are based on cutting-edge technology and scientific principles.

These ingredients, along with naturally derived peptides and enzymes, work to improve the strength and health of the skin. TARAMAR has incorporated these potent ingredients and used their bioactivity to create pure and safe products that work with nature, not against it. Icelandic seaweed and herbal extractions are known to have high antioxidant values and help decrease inflammation and redness, while promoting healthier cells. In these products, TARAMAR encapsulates the bioactive compounds—enzymes and peptides—into liposomal delivery systems, thus ensuring beneficial actions at intercellular levels.

**Comprehensive Product Line**

TARAMAR offers a day treatment that is a moisturizing and cell activating cream light enough to wear under makeup. It goes on smoothly and has a pleasant, natural smell. You won't find strong, unnatural perfumes in the products. Also available is an anti-aging serum that strengthens the collagen fibers and hydrates skin for a smoother and firmer appearance. Next is a purifying treatment: an algae cleansing



*Dr. Guðrún Marteinsdóttir.*

oil that helps awaken skin cells and firm the skin. Rounding out the product line is TARAMAR's night treatment that stimulates and restores skin cells while users sleep, reducing wrinkles and leaving the skin silky smooth.

All the products are based on innovative research using live cell models to understand how potent bioactives interact within cells and the damage that dirty formulas can cause. The products are so pure that, technically, they could be eaten.

**Ancient Methods, Modernised**

No other company in Iceland creates skin care products like TARAMAR. “We are modifying ancient techniques,” says Guðrún. “Most companies buy their ingredients and mix them together and 30 minutes later, there's a cream. In contrast, we use slow cosmetic methodology; some of the extracts take 6 months to prepare. Nearly all the ingredients are made from scratch by us or Icelandic organic farmers, starting with seeding in early spring to become powerful extracts one year later.

All the procedures are done by hand. When extracts are ready, they are hand pressed and your hands simply glow from the very beneficial power of the medicinal herbs”. The final product is extremely satisfying, with a deep, mature, luxurious feeling of a total harmony of all the compounds.



**Unique Packaging**

The majority of skin care products are packaged in clear or light bottles that can actually hurt the bioactive properties of the ingredients.

Indeed, the powerful bioactives isolated from the seaweeds are especially fragile

and can break down when exposed to light. Clear containers don't offer the necessary protection. Therefore, TARAMAR decided to use black glass bottles to contain the products. While there is science behind the decision, the bottles are also chic and eye-catching.

**Available for Purchase**

TARAMAR accepts orders on its website, [www.TARAMAR.is](http://www.TARAMAR.is), and they have products available at a duty free kiosk in Keflavik International Airport. For travellers visiting Reykjavik, products can be ordered and delivered to their hotel.

TARAMAR is looking at international markets like the United States, Germany and Japan. It is also possible to invest in the company in the form of B shares. For more information, email the company.

-JG

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Mosfellsbær is known for its beautiful scenery.

# Mosfellsbær



One of the greatest swimming pools in Iceland, Lágafellslaug attracts both young and old.

# THE MANSION OF THE ICELANDIC SOUL

*Gljúfrasteinn Museum is the Former Home of Icelandic Writer Halldór Laxness*



Gljúfrasteinn-Laxness museum, in the Mosfellsdalur valley, is only 20 minutes away from Reykjavík on the way to Þingvellir National Park. It was the home and workplace of Halldór Laxness (winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955) and his family for more than half a century. It is now open to the public as a museum. Hardly anything has been changed in or around the museum since Laxness lived there and thus, it is a perfect example of how the cultural families of Iceland lived during a century of stunning changes, an era when Iceland took a leap from being a remote and tad primitive fishing and farming community to becoming a player on the world stage.

## Capturing the Soul

Laxness, who was born in 1902 and died in 1998, absorbed the players and all the tiny

steps as well as the big jumps, often foreseeing their consequences, creating his much-loved literature from the fast-paced journey and characters the Icelanders discuss and refer to as if they had actually existed. He totally captured the Icelandic soul.

In the reception building at Gljúfrasteinn, you can watch a multimedia presentation dedicated to Laxness's life and work. Indeed, it is worth your while as the writer was both interesting and fun, with a tremendous sense of humour. There is also a souvenir shop on the premises where Laxness's books can be obtained in various languages.

## The Source of Inspiration

The reason Laxness built his home here was his love for the Mosfellsdalur valley. He was born and raised there. It was there, at his grandmother's knee, that he learned to

appreciate the different destinies of the human race and develop a kindness towards those less fortunate—which is quite apparent in his novels. The area where Laxness spent his childhood became his source of inspiration throughout his life.

The garden at Gljúfrasteinn is open to the public and a number of pleasant walks can be taken throughout the area. Halldór Laxness spent long hours roaming the beautiful countryside around Gljúfrasteinn and visitors are encouraged to walk both along the river Kaldakvísl and around the valley, which were both his childhood haunts and his inspiration in later life.

If you already know Laxness's work, you will love this museum. And if you don't, the museum is your first step towards an unimaginably versatile and rich world.

If you are planning to visit during the summer check the museum's schedule first. During June, July and August there are chamber concerts in the living room, which sports a grand piano, as Laxness was an excellent pianist himself. -SS



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# STAY WARM THIS WINTER

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

Iceland is known for its ferocious winter storms. Generations of Icelanders have stayed warm, dry and comfortable wearing woollen clothing from the sheep that roam the mountains in this wild country.

Icelandic wool is noted for its special qualities. It has a virtually waterproof outer layer and a soft, warm inner layer. The clothes are warm and shower-proof. This makes them especially comfortable and suitable for all weathers—unlike many wool clothes that end up a heavy, sodden mess when it rains.

## Made in Iceland, Found in Álafoss

All the woollen clothing to be found in Álafoss is made in Iceland from Icelandic wool, ensuring that you can find these authentic qualities you are looking for.

Today, the clothing ranges from traditional to high fashion. Many young designers have taken the Icelandic wool to create a whole new range of designs and colours, which gives plenty of choice for men, women and children alike. You'll find them at Álafoss alongside a stock of the traditional designs that have become



## A Living History

Álafoss is also a virtual museum. Built in 1896, it was here that the Icelandic woollen industry began and flourished. The mill itself has closed but the building now houses the Álafoss store.

There are looms, pieces of machinery, vintage-style cash registers, original early phones and examples of equipment used to make the original company the powerhouse that drove Icelandic society for so many years in the 20th century. There is a small café which overlooks the waterfall that started it all. It is the kind of store where you can relax and browse, enjoy the ambience and find those special gifts and personal items that are so rarely found in Europe or the rest of the world.

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



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Images Gabriel Rutenberg

## BAKED TO PERFECTION

30 years supplying delicious handmade baked goods at Mosfellsbakarí

Just over 30 years ago, a young couple worked together at a summer job in the Westmann Islands. Later, they met again, working with the herring in the very east, in Seyðisfjörður. Love blossomed and Ragnar and Áslaug married.

They decided to start a bakery in Mosfellsbær. They wanted it to provide a real service to the then tiny community, so they added some tables and chairs in the cosy atmosphere of the warm bakery, so people could sit and chat over a coffee and cookies. That thoughtfulness, along with their growing range of delicious breads, cakes and pastries made them very popular. Travellers from Reykjavík would stop off on their way to the north.

### Chocolate Lovers

An opportunity presented itself to open a branch in the capital and this, too, was soon thriving. Its reputation was enhanced when Hafliði, Ragnar and Áslaug's son, started making his chocolate creations.

These are real chocolates in contrast to the mass-produced bars in supermarkets and you can just taste the quality!

Is it any wonder, therefore, that these delicious delicacies that are sold in the bakeries have been come widely known - and even entice the taste buds of travellers going through Keflavík Airport?

### The best of baking

Icelanders relish real, freshly-baked bread and pastries. Family events and parties always have a range of delicious cakes.



Located in Háaleitisbraut and in Mosfellsbær, their range of handmade breads, cakes, pastries, cookies, sandwiches and buns are so wholesome and delicious. In the latter two bakeries, there is also a delicatessen, showing their continued commitment to service and innovation. The original bakery in Mosfellsbær has moved to larger premises at the shopping centre but it still retains its comfortable café, with more seating.

### Start the day deliciously

Whether you are on a day trip or travelling around the country, stopping of at one of the bakeries will certainly give you a good start—and a good opportunity to stock up on delicious lunches, snacks and coffee to fortify you. The glittering silver Italian machines offer a good reminder of just how good coffee can taste when made right. And those chocolates? Don't tell your friends or relatives. They are just too good! —ASF

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# THE FINE ART OF KNIFEMAKING

Bringing an Ancient Viking Tradition Into the Present since 1990

In the town of Mosfellsbær, just a 15 minute drive from Reykjavík, master craftsman Páll Kristjánsson (or Palli) and his co-creator Soffía Sigurðardóttir are hard at work in their rustic atelier, where they create an array of handsome knives for collectors, chefs, and all those who appreciate the workmanship that goes into a finely crafted tool.

### Icelandic Artisans at Work

Damascus steel, well known for its durability and razor sharp blades, as well as stainless steel from Denmark, Germany and Sweden are choice materials favoured by Palli and Soffía. Many of the blades are Viking Age replicas decorated with finely etched designs that are then expertly paired with a handle carved by Palli. Traditional Icelandic materials are all used to create beautifully carved handles – birch, rowan, horse's hooves, reindeer antler, goat and sheep horn and even fossilised wood. Palli's knives can be found spread throughout the world in



85 countries and as collector's items, they sometimes enjoy fierce bidding between collectors on the internet.

### The Woman's Touch

For her part, Soffía, who has worked under Palli's tutelage for several years, has created a line of beautiful professional kitchen knives and forks which are gaining in popularity. Blades for these knives come in various shapes and materials (Japanese, Damascus steel or high carbon steel) and the finely balanced handles make them a joy to use in the kitchen. Chefs, cooking schools and cooking enthusiasts tend to love to show off these one-of-a-kind handmade kitchen tools that have become a much sought after souvenir from Iceland.

### Custom-made

Should you have your own design ideas or materials that you would like to use, Palli and Soffía are happy to work with you to produce a custom knife made to your specifications. More information can be found at their websites listed below where you can browse their collections and even place special orders online.

### Walk-ins Welcome

Palli and Soffía's workshop can be found at Álafossvegur 29, 270 Mosfellsbær. Opening hours are from 9am – 6pm, Monday through Friday, and on Saturdays from 9am – 4pm, or if you are in the neighbourhood outside of those hours, you are always welcome to pop in for a chat. Though a visit to their workshop would be well worth your time, you can also find their products available in Brynja hardware store on Laugavegur 29 in the centre of Reykjavík.

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My main focus is on personal and relaxing tours for all ages. I want to give people the time they need to really see and feel what Iceland is about," says Birgit Fork, the owner of Creative Tours Iceland.

Birgit, who moved from Germany to Iceland in 2008, says that individuals and families can choose day tours where the aim is to photograph or paint or play in the nature.

Creative Tours Iceland offers 8 different day tours: The Golden Circle (a 'Meet the Natives' course is optional); Volcano Kids (summertime), Reykjanes; Whalefjord (visit to whale museum included); Northern Delights (wintertime); Creative Tour; South Coast (Jökulsárlón optional) and the 'Just for You' tour.



**Paint, Photograph or Play**

The Volcano Kids tour is for families with children. The aim is to see Iceland through children's eyes, play and visit the lambfarm Bjarneyjarsandur in Hvalfjörður. Birgit is a pedagogue and loves to offer tours where the children can enjoy themselves.

Birgit is also a painter and she decided to offer a unique tour, the Creative Tour, where people have the possibility to let their creativity flow by painting, photographing or writing in Icelandic landscapes.

Creative Tours Iceland offers trips for groups of up to 12 people. Available languages are German and English. Pick-up from accommodation is flexible, especially in summertime "because it never gets dark and we are out to catch the best moments," says Birgit. *-KB*

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Much has been written about the curious belief that many Icelanders hold: that of the existence of elves, trolls and hidden people. Now you might just be of the opinion, along with many other foreigners, that this is nothing more than silly superstition, seen only in Disney movies and in the kitschy gardens of old people. Well, that might be true for you, but here in Iceland things are a tad different, in case you haven't noticed.

**Believe it or not**

Like it or not, it will be just a matter of time before you are compelled to confront the issue once and for all. Eventually you come face to face with entirely sober and lucid Icelanders who recount their personal experiences of the elf phenomenon.

Surveys taken over the years reveal that

Icelandic opinions of whether elves exist have not changed very much. The most recent survey from 2006 found that only 13.5% of the sample population believed that this is all basically a bunch of hooley. With only 8% of the sample unwilling to commit to any opinion either for or against, that leaves 78% of the population as either firm elf believers or at least open to the possibility of their existence.

**Elves all around**

Even a very famous geothermal lagoon has an elf story and reports of elves interfering with plans to expand this particular popular tourist destination, soon surfaced.

Apparently, during the excavation of the site, the machinery suddenly came to a complete halt. Suspecting 'elf involvement', management finally called in a medium to find out what the problem was. The elves

explained that they were upset because they had not been consulted. They wanted to inspect the building's blueprints and asked that the plans be downloaded to a USB stick, put into a box in a hole in the rocks and they would get back to management after they had discussed the matter.

The elves eventually accepted the plans and agreed that construction should go ahead.

**No laughingstock!**

If you are in Iceland, or are planning a visit, come with an open mind and suspend your own beliefs at least for the time being. Then, should you happen to run into an Icelander who is convinced of the existence of these beings (which is very likely), you might gain a new Icelandic friend.

Just try not to laugh. They take these matters seriously. *-EMV*

# ANCESTORS' KNOWLEDGE

Healthy Food Directly from the Earth



In the old days, people still had an understanding of nature's richness. They used what Mother Earth provided them with. They picked leaves and herbs, or searched the shores for the ocean's supplies such as seaweed. The shore is a garden; you just have to know where to harvest and what to collect.

## A Natural Pioneer

Biologist Eyjólfur Friðgeirsson knows nature pretty well. He is passionate about the harvesting of nature, which he sees as a food source and a treasure for delicacies. In 2005 he started his company, Íslensk hollusta (Icelandic Wholesomeness), aiming at the use of natural Icelandic products in their own taste and freshness, such as cheese and a variety of herbal teas. Nothing is added or changed in the production of the products.

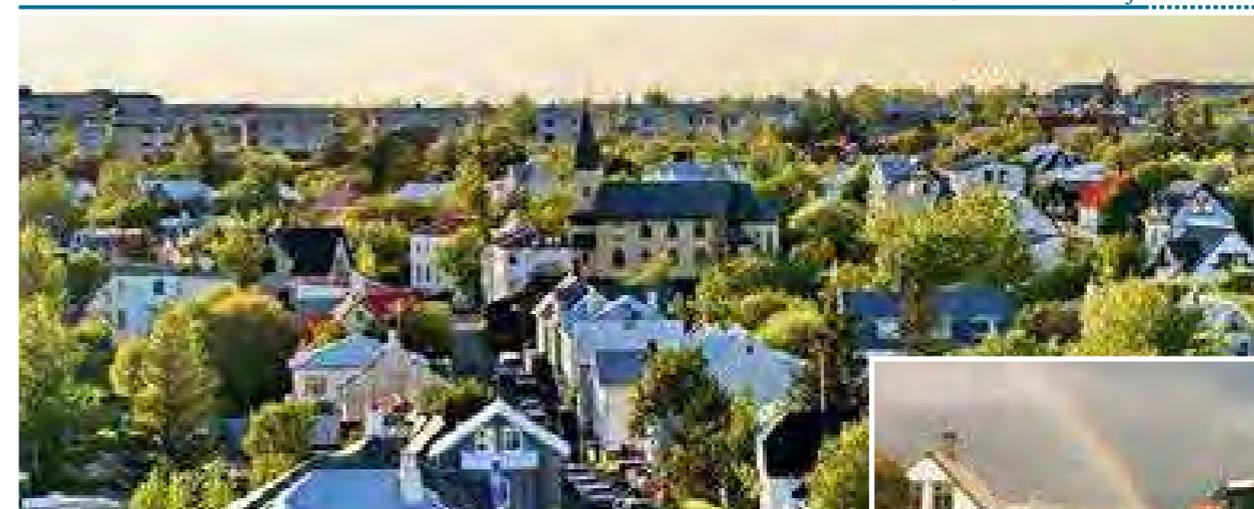
Eyjólfur is a pioneer in his field in Iceland. He was the first to revive the idea of using

seaweed as a dried snack and adding Iceland moss, angelica and birch leaves into cheese making. He was also the first to create a bath salt from Icelandic geothermal salt, using seaweed and Mount Hekla pumice. The country is rich in natural resources when it comes to nutriment. His task was to reawaken folk knowledge about how to harness these gifts of the earth. The idea proved to be a success, and today his goods can be purchased in souvenir shops around Iceland. Northern Lights Salt gift packages (a seasoned salt made according to his special recipe) are available in the Saga Shop on board Icelandair's aircraft.

## Hand-Picked and Healthy

The hand-picked Icelandic moss is ready for use in tea or porridge. In the old days, seaweed was consumed in times of famine. Today we know that there is hardly a more nutritious food.

By adding this seaweed to your daily diet, you can be sure that you are consuming ingredients from unspoiled Icelandic waters. Homemade sauces, juices and jams made from traditional materials are a treat. Pamper your body with a rich bath salt, or treat yourself with Icelandic Herbal Tea and Arctic Thyme Tea from Íslensk hollusta. Try the Viking Salt, produced with an ancient salt production method. The light and compact Seven Spices Gift Packet containing tea, salt and seaweed is an excellent contribution to your cuisine. "Mother Earth knows what is best; we pick it for you, and you just have to take it home", says Eyjólfur. -DT



## 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 and is only about 20 minutes' away from Reykjavik centre with fast lane city express bus number 1. It has a colourful history, as one of the oldest Icelandic 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 Huldufólk, 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. There are two tours that explain more about the park, that celebrated its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013.

It's easy to imagine these 'Huldufólk' (hidden people) living here amidst the lava rocks that fold and twist, forming tiny caves and strange shapes. Beside the pond, winds a pathway past 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. So don't get surprised if you come across city signs that read 'Town of Lava', 'Town of Vikings' or 'Town of Elves'.

## 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, teeming with birdlife. -ASF





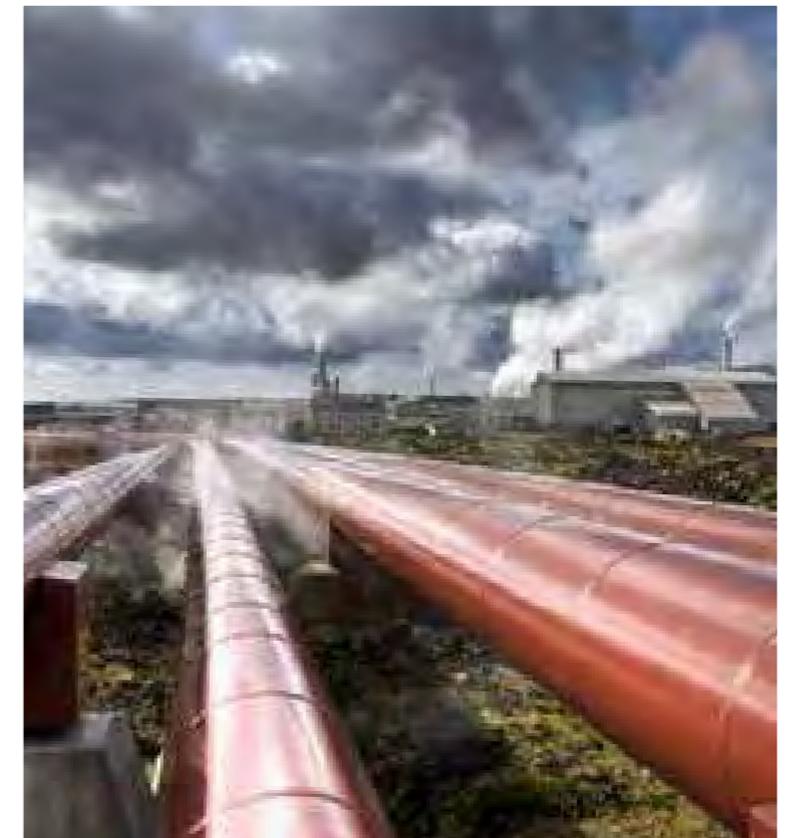
# THE *Reykjanes* PENINSULA

The Blue Lagoon



**Y**ou could spend your whole holiday on the Reykjanes peninsula. Stand on the bridge spanning the continents. Take a thrilling ATV ride up to a moonscape of mountains, volcanos and lava fields. Bathe in the world-renowned Blue Lagoon, with its warm, healing waters. Ride the Icelandic horse. Go hiking and caving. Catch your breath—you are just beginning! Here, some of the first pioneers set up home. You can see their ancient ruins. Their rich fishing fields just offshore still provide large catches but winter storms are so fierce they can throw ships many metres inland. Their salt fish is famous in the Mediterranean countries. Here, you will find the Viking longship that sailed to America in the steps of Leif the Lucky, the first European to discover North America in the year 1000, and the museum for one of the world's most famous polar explorers, Jean-Baptiste Chacot. Take a tour with one of the knowledgeable guides to see the area: the birdwatching sites, the ancestral Viking house, the boiling mud springs and steam vents, bubbling lakes, the cultural centres. Enjoy a stay in one of the hotels, guesthouses or camp sites and eat delicious meals in a wide variety of restaurants, pubs and cafés. This is the Land of the Vikings!

Photos; courtesy of the Reykjanes Marketing Office.



Creating geothermal energy.



Hikers' gathering.



The Blue Lagoon.



Riding in Grindavik.



Sogið Canyon.



Misty winter in Reykjanes.



Quadbiking in Sandvík.



Valahnúkur and Reykjanes lighthouse.



Geothermal Power Plant.



Sandstone in Krýsuvík.



# LATHER UP WITH SOAP VIKING BATH PRODUCTS

Ever wonder how the Vikings managed to keep clean? According to sources, early Icelanders actually enjoyed regular ablutions, washing up after a hard week's work with homemade soaps. The art of soap making is an ancient practice, and Soap Viking aims to follow the traditional soap formulas of days past to produce high quality Icelandic soaps and bath products.

## Viking Soap Formula

Soap Viking is a family-run company specialising in entirely handmade soaps and bath products that are light, cleansing and naturally based. The company's 'Viking Soap Formula' utilises Icelandic ingredients whenever possible, including pure Icelandic water, tallow, local canola oil, and fragrant herbs like wild thyme.

## Natural Inspiration and Traditional Culture

With several varieties to choose from, some of Soap Viking's most popular soaps are connected to Iceland's landscape and culture.

'Soap Eruption' and 'Eyjafallajökull' are both blended with volcanic ash from 2010's famous eruption, and the ash acts as a mild exfoliant to brighten the skin. 'Aurora Borealis' is a dark-tinted soap beautifully marbled to resemble the mysterious Northern Lights for which Iceland is renowned.

It's easy to spot Soap Viking's 'Wool Felted Soap' – the brightly coloured bundles of felted Icelandic wool foam well and make for a refreshing scrub. Soap Viking supports Icelandic farmers and producers to ensure that the best possible ingredients are used.

Þorvaldseyri farm, located at the base of Eyjafallajökull is Soap Viking's supplier of canola oil, and their namesake soap,

'Þorvaldseyri', can only be purchased at the Þorvaldseyri Visitor Centre.



## Soaps, Scrubs, and Sea Salt

In addition to handmade soaps, Soap Viking also produces lightly scented bath bombs, bath salts and body scrubs made with fine Icelandic sea salts and essential oils. The 'Viking Bath Formula' products will soften and nourish your skin and help you relax, Icelandic style.

Soap Viking's products are available in fine gift shops across Iceland, including Eymundsson bookstores, Rammagerðin, Islandia, and the Keflavík International

Airport, and Soap Viking's producer, Sápan ehf., is located in Reykjanesbær only minutes from the airport. Soap Viking bath products contribute to an indulgent bathing experience, something the ancient Vikings knew all about!



# DUTY FREE ICELAND ICELAND'S BEST KEPT SECRET



Iceland was once called “Europe’s Best Kept Secret”, but tourism has grown exponentially this century. And in 2015, it is predicted that this country of around 330 thousand citizens will receive over one million visitors, most of whom will pass through Keflavík International Airport, which has an exceptional duty free shopping centre.

Duty Free Iceland is tax-free and open day and night. It is available to arriving and departing passengers regardless of origin and destination, and it carries all the common international brands and products, plus a growing range of unique Icelandic products.

### Award Winning Icelandic Spirits and Beers

The Duty Free Iceland shop carries all the popular international brands, but it has also brought in some of the very best examples of local spirits and beers. The pioneering

family at Eimverk Distillery produces environmentally friendly high-quality spirits from pollution-free botanicals, using only geothermal energy. They bring us Flóki whiskey, the first entirely Icelandic whiskey, and Vor Gin which won the 2014 San Francisco World Spirits Double Gold Award.

Iceland’s first micro distillery, 64° Reykjavík Distillery, has won many international awards for its products, including the Grand Gold Quality Award in the Belgian Monde Selection, the Silver award in the British International Spirit Challenge, and the Red Dot award for great design. It also received the 2011 Silver ISW International Spirit Award in Berlin, for its crowberry liqueur. Duty Free Iceland also carries a large selection of local beers, which have also earned many international awards. A wide range of flavours is on offer, from both numerous smaller breweries and larger companies.

### Internationally Acclaimed Icelandic Cosmetic Products

In addition to the traditional international brands, Duty Free Iceland offers numerous locally produced cosmetic products from several Icelandic manufacturers, including Sóley Organics, Villimey, Purity Herbs, Blue Lagoon and Zopure. Their products are becoming internationally known for high-quality ingredients, lack of harmful chemicals, and of course their effectiveness.

Sóley Organic, for example, has acquired an international reputation for its signature product, Græðir (Healer), which can heal various forms of eczema, psoriasis, skin irritations, burn wounds, yeast infections, diaper rashes, dry skin, and even minor wounds.

The scientists at Bioeffect won a Nobel prize for their work, and their company offers a range of revolutionary biotech skin care products, including the recently introduced



EFG Day Serum which rejuvenates the skin and minimises the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles.

### Icelandic Confectionery

Duty Free Iceland stocks the popular international brands as well as some purely Icelandic brands with growing reputations, such as Omnom and Hafliði Ragnarsson. Their ranges of mouth-watering chocolate confectionery have become extremely popular and almost impossible to resist.

### Don't Wait Until Departure

Duty Free Iceland also has a store in the arrivals section, in the luggage hall. You can shop while you wait for your luggage, and save up to 50% on city prices. -SF

 **Duty Free Store Ltd.**  
Keflavik Airport • 235 Keflavik  
+354 425 0410  
dutyfree@dutyfree.is  
www.dutyfree.is 



# A TRUE GEM

*Keflavík's Diamond Suites Boutique Hotel*



Iceland's magnificent nature is in a class of its own with few, if any, rivals when it comes to its scope, diversity and utter uniqueness. Many a first time visitor has been virtually stopped in their tracks as they take in the beauty of the land that confronts them. Words never seem to do the subject justice, but one American writer, Stephen Markley, records in his book, 'Tales of Iceland', 'The problem with driving around Iceland is that you're basically confronted by a new soul-enriching, breathtaking, life-affirming natural site every five minutes'. Totally!



*Steinþór Jónsson.*

## Step into your own world of luxury

Surrounded by all this natural magnificence, it is only fitting that visitors to the country should have access to equally impressive accommodation. The Diamond Suites Boutique Hotel is the only five-star hotel in Iceland. The hotel opened officially on 17<sup>th</sup> May to a discerning clientele who are looking for something above and beyond the norm. For some it's the hotel's attention to detail and superior craftsmanship, for others it's the unsurpassed customer service. For others, for whom privacy is not just a luxury but a necessity,

Diamond Suites is the only option. With your own private entrance, you will step into your own exclusive domain where your privacy and peace of mind are assured.

## The Five Gemstone Suites

The hotel's five suites, named after precious gemstones, each have their own unique theme and are decorated in a chic contemporary design with touches of elegance throughout—Versace marble tiles and wallpapers, glass taps by the renowned French designer, Philippe Starck, bathroom fixtures by Duravit, in-room whirlpool baths, private balconies and many

other singular items found nowhere else in Iceland, if not the world. Other highlights include a beautiful solid oak headboard carved from a single, solid piece of wood, exquisite recessed lighting by Moooi, a decadent Versace dinner service, and the high-tech bathroom of your dreams.

"Having stayed in some of the most exclusive hotels in the world, we have tried to incorporate the best we have found throughout our travels into our concept", says owner/manager, Steinþór Jónsson. "Virtually everything—from the choice of bevelled mirrors to the original artwork on the walls, right down to the smallest



details I, with my wife, Hildur, have carefully and purposefully chosen."

## The Diamond Suite Luxury Pack

If you opt for the best of the best, the Diamond Suite Luxury Pack meets that requirement in every way. All five suites can be opened up to form one spacious, 3,000 sq. foot private apartment with an sophisticated array of amenities including a personal butler, concierge and full time access to the hotel's service team, who are on hand to attend to your every need. "We understand that everyone has different needs and requirements, and it is our pleasure to accommodate each guest to the best of our ability", says Steinþór. To help you make the most of your stay in Iceland, the luxury pack also includes a Range Rover and your own



private driver/guide, so you can see Iceland in full comfort and style.

## Kef Restaurant at your service

Enjoy your meals, either in your suite or in Hotel Keflavik's glass enclosed conservatory restaurant, run by chef Jenny Rúnarsdóttir, who won Iceland's Masterchef competition in 2012. Fresh Icelandic ingredients form the basis of Jenny's inspirational dishes which are best enjoyed with a glass of wine from the hotel's exclusive wine list—a small Barolo Cannubi 2008 with your dinner, sir?

## A family of hoteliers

With 30 years experience of managing Hotel Keflavik behind him, Steinþór is well positioned to open Iceland's very first five

star hotel. "17<sup>th</sup> May, 2016 is in fact the 30 year anniversary of Hotel Keflavik, which we opened with my parents in 1986. So it is a great honour for us to inaugurate the Diamond Suite in their memory."

In the months leading up to the grand opening, the hotel has hosted dignitaries, famous actors and well known singers as well as several exclusive visitors seeking a high-end hotel experience. "We are grateful for the enthusiastic feedback and positive reviews we have received from our guests", concludes Steinþór. -EMV

**Hotel Keflavik**  
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 +354 420 7000  
 steini@kef.is  
 www.kef.is



# SECRETS REVEALED

Reykjavik Excursions offers tours to some of the hidden jewels of Iceland

Iceland is quite far from everywhere, so landing at Keflavik's International airport, probably one of the first things on your mind is to get to your hotel.

## Flybus to your hotel

Waiting outside the terminal for every flight, you will find the Flybus, ready to deliver you smoothly to your hotel door. Likewise, when you have to leave, the Flybus will be there to take you to your plane. Started in 1979, it is one of the most appreciated services for travellers.

The coach also leaves from the downtown BSÍ bus terminal and stops en route at the Viking Hotel in the centre of Hafnarfjörður. Flybus can also take you to your hotel via the

Blue Lagoon. There are numerous departures daily from there to Reykjavik - and to the airport, to catch your flight. If you would prefer to visit the Blue Lagoon later, there are frequent departures from Reykjavik, with pickups from your hotel.

## A bliss for body and soul

The geothermal water originates 2,000 metres below the surface, where freshwater and seawater combine at extreme temperatures. Filled with active ingredients, it is enriched with silica and algae minerals, perfect to energize and nourish your skin.

Well known for its effects on patients suffering from psoriasis, the Blue Lagoon's

services are constantly developing, in collaboration with some of the worlds most distinguished scientists.

Surrounded by this amazingly bright blue warmth, you will be vigorously stimulated in both body and mind, even just floating around. A swim-up bar delivers specialised skin masks, nourishing algae masks, exfoliating volcanic scrubs, or luscious cocktails for those who wish to imbibe. The Blue Lagoon also has an amazing restaurant, LAVA, offering only the best contemporary dishes from natural Icelandic ingredients. The restaurant's team has an international perspective, regularly seeking inspiration by spending time at Michelin star restaurants in New York, London and Paris.

Built into a stunning lava cliff, with views over the lagoon, it is an unforgettable setting for a relaxed lunch, a family dinner or a romantic evening meal.

## A few things to keep in mind when visiting the Blue Lagoon

- Stay hydrated. Staying in warm waters for long periods can cause dehydration. Remember to drink, before and during your visit.
- Use conditioner. The water does not harm your hair, but it will make it dry. So use plenty of conditioner, before and after you enter the water.
- Remove the jewellery. The water can affect items of jewellery, so please remove them before you enter the lagoon. You can keep them in your private locker.
- Skip the goggles. There is no visibility beneath the surface, so goggles and underwater cameras are unnecessary.
- Bring sunglasses. On sunny days, we highly recommend that you bring sunglasses, as sunlight reflects strongly off the water.

## Fly me to the moon

As the Flybus glides towards Reykjavik, you'd be forgiven for wondering if you have landed on the moon, with the views of volcanoes, lava and massive rocks. A plume of steam can be

seen rising against the mountain backdrop: the famous Blue Lagoon, a bright blue crystal oasis in the midst of the lava field. For tours visiting the region surrounding the Blue Lagoon, Reykjavik Excursions has a trip leaving Reykjavik at 9 am to take you around the area with its bubbling hot springs and brilliantly coloured mountains, its cliffs, teeming with birdlife and the lighthouses that have saved many a seaman's life.

Here, you can walk on the bridge that spans two continents, as the Eurasian and American tectonic plates pull apart in dramatic form.

Close by, you'll see the steaming mud pools and coloured rocks and hear how a priest set a trap for a troublesome female ghost some 400 years ago, causing her to fall into one of the pools and giving the area her name.

This is Viking territory, where some of the first settlers lived, farmed and fished centuries ago. The tour visits the Viking museum that houses the replica longship, "Íslendingur", that sailed to America in 2000, celebrating the

discovery of the New World by courageous Vikings hundreds of years before Columbus was even born. Vikings are still skilled craftsmen and this tour takes you to a glass blowing workshop. Their designs are world famous and you can take some of the finished products home with you - or have them shipped.

The tour ends at the Blue Lagoon, where you have the choice to invigorate your senses by bathing or dining, or you can take the coach back to your hotel. The former is recommended, as you can take a later coach home after enjoying this unique experience.

## Pourquoi-Pas?

Across the road are handicraft shops for unique last-minute gifts and the marine life exhibit, with a display about the famous explorer, Jean-Baptiste Charcot, whose research vessel, the Pourquoi-Pas, was shipwrecked in a fierce storm in Faxaflói bay in 1936.

Then, with the airport just minutes away, the coach will deliver you to the terminal in plenty of time for your flight home.

-ASF/SP



**Reykjavik Excursions**  
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# THE PLACE TO STAY IN GRINDAVÍK

*Guesthouse Borg offers economical comfort in a friendly house*

In most countries, the opportunity to experience life in a fishing town has all but disappeared. Not so in Iceland, where Grindavík is one of the busiest. Situated a few kilometres from the world-famous Blue Lagoon, 20 minutes from Keflavik's International airport and 40 minutes from the capital, the town is packed with history going back as far as the first settlers.

A geological hotspot, the area offers such a wide array of other tours, sights and experiences that one holiday is not enough.

Guesthouse Borg is an ideal place to stay, meet interesting people and enjoy the facilities and fun the town offers. It caters for individuals, couples, families and groups of up to 16 people in a clean,



modestly-priced homestay accommodation. You'll find a full kitchen where you can cook your own meals, a laundry and a computer to go online. Breakfasts are provided on a self-service basis. Owners Björk and Magnús make this a comfortable home from which to launch out to explore the area.

-ASF

**Guesthouse Borg**  
 Borgarhrauni 2 - 240 Grindavík  
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## Grindavík



Images © Gabriel Rutenberg



## GRINDAVÍK'S HARBOUR CAFÉ

*The reputation of the 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 way beyond Reykjavík, over 50 km away.

This is a fishing town and the café is a fishermen'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. 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, though. 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.

Bryggjan is open from 8 am - 11 pm on weekdays and from 9 am - midnight or so -if there is a lot of action, on weekends. Bryggjan can also be found on Facebook by the name of "Bryggjan Kaffihús".

-ASF

**BRYGGJAN**  
 Kaffihúsið í Grindavík  
 Miðgarði 2 - 240 Grindavík  
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 fiskinet@simnet.is

# CHECK OUT THE NEW REYKJAVÍK CITY MUSEUM COMPRISING 5 TOP MUSEUMS:



Árbær Open Air Museum



The Settlement Exhibition



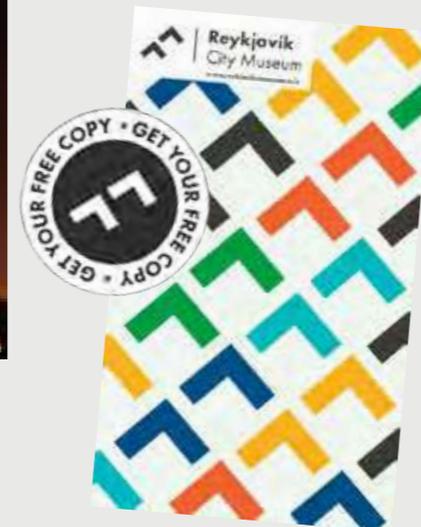
Reykjavik Maritime Museum



Reykjavik Museum of Photography



Viðey Island



# PAPA'S RESTAURANT

*The Best Fish and Chips in Town*



made of course with all-Icelandic quality beef as well as authentic lamb dishes.

As the name would imply, Papa's Pizza also make some seriously delicious pizzas. The restaurant offers a pleasant, clean, relaxed atmosphere with friendly staff. You can take a break for a quick lunch or relax there in the afternoon for a full meal and mingle with the locals at the bar in the evening.

*Opening hours:*

*Weekdays: 11:30am – 3:00pm*

*& 5:00pm – 9:00pm*

*Weekends: 12:00 noon – 9:00pm*

Going to Grindavík without trying some fish dishes would be something like going to Italy and not having pizza and many claim the best fish and chips in town are to be found down by the harbour at Papa's Pizza. Don't let the Italian sounding name

throw you off; Papa's Pizza is as local and authentic as they come.

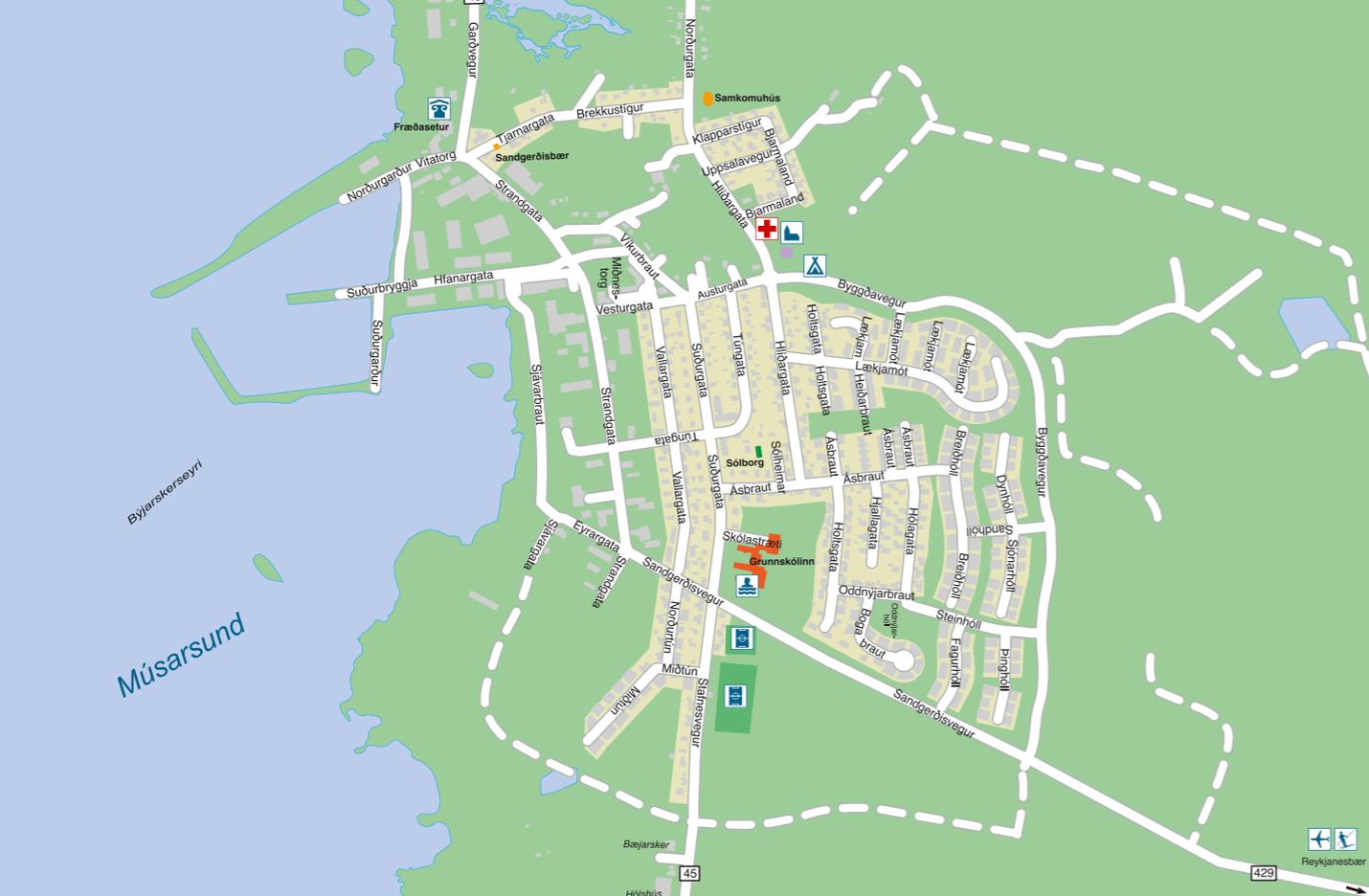
Their fish and chips dish comes with either delicious deep-fried or pan fried cod – always fresh of course – and keeps satisfied customers coming back. Papa's pride themselves on their gourmet burgers,

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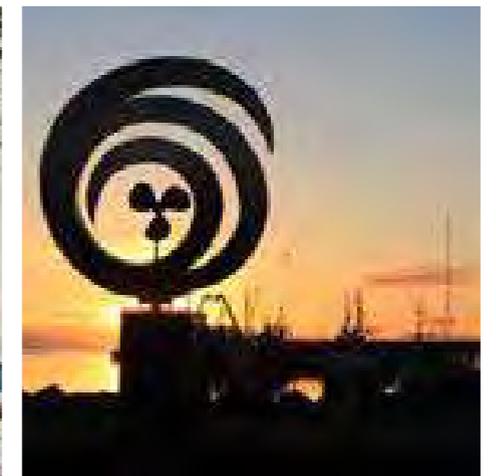

# Sandgerði



Quite a few fishing outfits and a large number of fishing vessels are operated there.



The seashore is a world of its own, filled with adventures for all ages.



Beautiful sunset by the ocean.



The famous French polar explorer, dr. Jean-Baptiste Charcot (1867-1936) was a frequent visitor in Iceland.



There is a lot to see at the "Þekkingasetrið" museum in Sandgerði.

# SANDGERÐI

## – LIFE BY THE SEA

The friendly fishing town of Sandgerði is an ideal place to visit for those who have an interest in Iceland's close connection to the ocean—not only because of its importance concerning fishery but also as it boasts an interesting research centre open to the public, focusing on the environment's eco-system.

Driving around Reykjanes peninsula where Sandgerði is located can be of interest for nature enthusiasts, especially those awed by Iceland's unique scenery.

Camping in Sandgerði could be a convenient choice for the beginning or the end of one's trip as Keflavik International Airport is located within Sandgerði's municipality.



served as ancient routes between farms and towns.

### Historic places by the coast

You will come across various interesting places on your way. One such place is Bäsendar. It used to be an important market town until 1799 when it was destroyed by a big flood. Bäsendar was also of great importance for fishing as was Stafnes, but the reefs just by Stafnes are quite dangerous. The trawler, 'Jon the President' was wrecked off Stafnes in 1928. As a response to that tragedy rescue teams were founded across Iceland, such as the Sigurvon rescue team in Sandgerði.

You will find the church of Hvalneskirkja close to Sandgerði. The church was built of stone in 1887 and one of Iceland's most cherished poets, Hallgrímur Pétursson, served there as a priest for a number of years. Finally, in Hafurbjarnastaðir, between Sandgerði and Garður, there are graves from pre-Christian times discovered in 1947. This

discovery was a breakthrough in historical understanding of Iceland and some of the remains found there are now on display at the National Museum of Iceland.

### By the harbour in Sandgerði

The town of Sandgerði has 1600 inhabitants—not a small number if one bears in mind Iceland's small population. The community was established around the end of the 19th century, about the time fishery was revolutionised by technology. More often than not, it is the harbour that gives fishing towns in Iceland their character. Sandgerði is no exception; and improved harbour facilities have been built there in recent years. Walking around the harbour, watching the ocean and imbibing the smell of the sea life is a good way to enjoy nature.

This part of Iceland knows how small and insignificant human existence can be when dealing with the powerful ocean yet the source of rich fishing-grounds just off its coast is vital for Sandgerði's community.



Our vulnerable physical existence is reflected in Álög, the monument by the sculptor Steinunn Þórarinsdóttir found at the entrance to the town.

One can certainly say that the harbour is the heart of the town, as most of Sandgerði's services are located there, including restaurants, shops and galleries.

Sandgerði boasts a nice swimming pool in addition to an 18-hole golf course. In the northern part of town, there are some cute summerhouses one can rent. Just outside town, the pond is a perfect spot to watch some birdlife as hundreds of migratory birds gather there every spring.

### Sudurnes Science and Learning Centre

A great way to understand the environment and the history of Sandgerði and its surroundings is to visit the Sudurnes Science and Learning Centre. Suðurnes is actually another name for the Reykjanes peninsula,

its literal meaning being 'the peninsulas of the South'. The centre is run in cooperation with Southwest Iceland Nature Research Institute and University of Iceland's Research Centre in Sudurnes. The research facilities include unique clean seawater and possibilities, found nowhere else, to conduct research in ecotoxicology, behavioural ecology and fisheries.

Additionally, the centre has two exhibitions: one presenting nature and the other history. These exhibitions are both fun and enlightening at the same time. In the nature gallery you can touch various stuffed animals from Icelandic wildlife and see various exotic sea creatures. There is also a collection of plants and shells and the only stuffed walrus in Iceland.

The history gallery houses the 'Attraction of the Poles' exhibition. The research vessel Pourquoi-Pas was wrecked on the rocks of Faxaflói Bay in 1936. Many of the crew perished, along with the French medical

doctor and polar scientist Jean-Baptiste Charcot, who acquired the nickname 'Gentleman of the Pole' because of his excursions to the Polar Regions.

### A challenging interaction with nature

The centre also organises a treasure hunt which is very entertaining, especially for children. By bringing a car and a camera for exploration, you will experience the environment around Sandgerði in a fun yet challenging way!

For those about to leave the country, driving to Sandgerði a day earlier, camping near the services such as the swimming pool, exploring the area via the entertaining treasure hunt might just be the best way to end an Icelandic vacation.

-NIH



# 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



Gamlabúð



Skaftafellsstofa



Skaftárstofa



▲ Svartifoss



▲ Dettifoss



▲ Hiking Geldingafell, Snæfell in the distance



▲ Langisjór



▲ Morsárdalur



▲ Askja and Lake Öskjuvatn





**T**op sites: You don't need to go far to watch birds in Iceland as there are good birdwatching sites almost anywhere, even in central Reykjavík. Among the places most regularly visited by overseas birdwatchers are the Snæfellsnes peninsula in western Iceland, the vast sea-cliffs at Látrabjarg in the Westfjords, the Flói Nature Reserve in southern Iceland and the Vestmannaeyjar archipelago off the south coast. Perhaps the



most famous birdwatching site in Iceland, however, is the Mývatn-Laxá area in north-east Iceland, where more species of duck breed than anywhere else in Europe, 14 species in total, in addition to numerous other species. However, birds can be found throughout the country and the best areas are often close to water. This is especially true in winter, when birdwatching on the coast is almost always more rewarding than inland. Many European birdwatchers are particular keen to see Iceland's 'Big Four', i.e. Harlequin Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Gyr Falcon and Brünnich's Guillemot, all of which are relatively easy to find at the right time of year or in the right areas.

#### Other target species

Iceland represents the southernmost limit of the breeding range for several High Arctic

birds. Few places offer better opportunities than Iceland to see Pink-footed Goose, Long-tailed Duck, Ptarmigan, Gyr Falcon, Red Phalarope, Red-necked Phalarope,



# Best in Birdwatching

## Where and when to watch birds in Iceland

Glaucous Gull, Brünnich's Guillemot and Snow Bunting. Red Phalarope, Gyr Falcon and White-tailed Eagle all enjoy special protection and visiting a nesting site of these species is strictly prohibited.

Another popular bird is the Atlantic Puffin, which is best seen in the Westman Islands archipelago, the islands of Breiðafjörður bay, the cliffs at Látrabjarg or in Borgarfjörður eystri.

#### When they can be seen

Birdwatching is an all-year activity in Iceland. The best time of year, in the view of the author, is from mid-April to the end of June. Spring migration is at its peak from mid-April to mid-May, when the nesting season begins. This peaks in June, and peters out in July. Autumn migration lasts from late July until the end of October.

Coastal seas, especially off the southwest, are relatively warm due to the influence of the Gulf Stream, while inland, some bodies of water remain unfrozen throughout the winter due to geothermal springs or



spring-fed rivers, and so Iceland's winter birdlife is quite varied.

#### The origins of Iceland's birds

Iceland's flora and fauna is largely European (Western Palearctic) in origin. Several species, however, have colonised the country from the west, and Iceland can therefore said to be the meeting point of east and west. Iceland furthermore marks the southern breeding limit for several species and the northern limit for several others and, as such, is also the meeting point of north and south.

- JÓH

Jóhann Óli is President of BirdLife Iceland and author of the Icelandic Bird Guide. Translation by Edward B. Rickson



# THE ICELANDIC SHEEP

*Strong and hardy, Icelandic Sheep contributed to the nation's survival*

Sheep. They seem to be everywhere, wandering freely all over the mountains and highlands as if they own the country. They are one of the most common animals in Iceland.

Icelandic sheep are so called short-tailed animals, an ancient Nordic Breed which was formerly common in the north part of Western Europe, but now only found in a few areas of the world. It is a strong, hardy breed which has adapted well to Icelandic conditions.

The Icelandic sheep is special in many ways. Part of the breed is called 'leader sheep' and possesses unique qualities, not found in any other sheep breed in the world. Many stories have been told of their rescuing both men and other sheep from danger.

Around 1980, there were about 10 times more sheep than people in the country or around 2,000,000 sheep (including the summer lambs) and 226,948 inhabitants. The number has now been reduced by almost half, because of overgrazing in some cases but also market developments.

In former times, sheep were allowed to graze freely all year round, even in winter. This had disastrous effects when the climate

became cooler. The interaction of natural forces: water, wind, fire and ice, as well as the encroachment of men and animals has, in the course of time, disturbed the layer of surface vegetation. When destroyed, a chain reaction of soil erosion begins which is difficult to stop. This shows how hard the struggle for survival has been in Iceland. The sheep has been called one of the keys to survival the country in the old times. The animals could survive on winter grazing, and the people fed themselves on their meat and milk and made warm clothes from the wool.

Since the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, steps have been taken to fight erosion by reforestation, reseeding and other programmes to protect sensitive areas from overuse by men and animals. Government regulation now prohibits unsustainable use of land. One of these steps has been to reduce the number of sheep so now there are 475,000 adult sheep in the country or 1,100,000, including the summer lambs.

### Lambing Time

The mating season is in December. The farmer registers the individual matings, and their dates. So when the lambing season



starts, he can look into his book to see who their father is and on which dates his lambs are due. It's important to know the date of delivery so that he can keep the mother indoors when she gives birth and to be able to shelter the newborns on their first days. Each farmer has a special earmark, cut into one of the lamb's ears soon after its birth.

This traditional book-keeping method would make it easy for farmers to provide a genealogical tree of the meat you are purchasing! Today, the lambs are also tagged with modern plastic eartags. Nowhere else in the world are sheep bred by this method because in most countries the sheep simply have their lambs outdoors and no one knows anything about their genealogy.

The lambs are born in May and stay with their mothers all summer long. After the first few days indoors, they graze on grass fields on the farm for 3-4 weeks. Then they are sent out to graze the hills and mountain pastures all over the country, running free until the middle of September, feeding on the rich and nourishing vegetation. During the intervening time, the farmer harvests the hay to feed his sheep during the winter. Only about 1% of Iceland is cultivated. This means that most of the grass and plants the sheep feed on is wild.

### The Réttir (Round-up)

Farmers gather their flocks in the autumn. Systematically, they round up the sheep all over the country. There is practically no place in the wilderness of the highlands of Iceland where sheep cannot be found during the summer—except maybe on the glaciers. The round-up is conducted on horseback or on foot with the assistance of sheepdogs. The entire process may take up to a week and, during this time, participants stay overnight in mountain huts, where they pen in the sheep they have gathered so far, then hang up their damp clothes, uncork their hip flasks and swap stories and songs.

When the search is over and all the sheep are accounted for, the fat frisky lambs, ewes and rams are herded down to the lowlands and into a corral called a 'réttir', where they are identified by their earmarks and sorted into the correct pens, belonging to individual farms.

The réttir is a popular event across the country and most Icelanders like to take part in it, be they bureaucrats or bankers, school-children or teachers, sailors or seamstresses. Some travel companies offer foreign travellers the opportunity to participate also.

After the sheep have been herded into

the correct pens they are divided up. Those destined for the slaughterhouse are removed from the flock. Those destined to live graze on fields on or near the farm, until November, when they are housed for the winter.

Sheep used to be sheared before they were released to roam the pastures. Nowadays, most farmers shear them in winter when they are indoors, as this wool fetches a higher price.

### A Valuable Resource

Wool was one of the country's most important exports during the Middle Ages (along with dried fish, known as stock fish). It became the basis of a valuable export industry again in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The fleece of the Icelandic sheep, which varies in colour from white through grey and browns to near black, is made up of two layers. The inner layer of short, fine fibres, called 'thel' was used for knitting delicate laces, underwear and baby clothes while the coarser, longer, outer fibres, called 'tog' were used for warm and water resistant winter garments. Today the soft spun 'lopi wool' is used in traditionally patterned hand knitted sweaters, the most popular souvenirs from Iceland.

- AMB



# TENDER IS THE MEAT

*It is Lamb-season in Iceland when the year's fresh meat is celebrated throughout the country*

Icelanders love their lamb and autumn is the traditional lamb-season with the 4–5 month-old livestock being slaughtered after roaming the highlands throughout the summer. Closer to game than farm-animals, the meat is exceptionally tender, its texture fine and nutritious enough to have carried many an Icelander, adult and child, through relentlessly harsh winters.

## Traditional Quality

When producing high quality meat, you need unpolluted raw materials and Icelandic sheep farmers can guarantee as much.

Sheep farming in Iceland is as old as the

settlement of Iceland itself. To this day farmers are rearing their sheep by a method established by centuries of tradition, with most farms still family-owned and operated. The breed is still the same as in the time of the Vikings—sturdy small animals, well adapted to the environment.

## The Protective Cold

Much of Iceland's lamb production is simply based on sustainable harvesting of the bounties of nature. The use of hormones is prohibited and antibiotics are strictly regulated. The Icelandic weather, clean air and an abundant supply of fresh mountain water make the use of pesticides and

herbicides unnecessary. The cool climate protects the land against many diseases and pests which plague agriculture in warmer latitudes. Due to Iceland's geographical isolation and agricultural regulation, which prohibits the importing of live animals, many common animal diseases are unknown in Iceland.

The lambs are entirely reared outdoors. Their natural diet of sedge, willow, thrift, mass campion, and berries makes the Icelandic lamb instantly recognizable for its delicious and distinctive taste.

## Nutritional Facts

In an environment where consumers are

increasingly conscious of their health, food must be safe to eat, pure and nutritious. For these reasons, Icelandic lamb meat is becoming recognised throughout the world for its healthy nutritional value and unique taste. The Icelandic sheep is a direct descendant of the sheep first brought to the island by the Viking settlers. It has not been crossbred by importing other breeds.

The cold climate influences the composition of the plants the sheep graze on. The lambs also move freely through extensive wild pastures in pristine mountainous landscapes. This, and the young age at slaughter (4–5 months), gives the meat unique quality and properties. The average carcass weighs around 16 kg (35 lbs). The muscle has a high

proportion of Omega-3 fatty acids and iron, giving the meat its wild game flavour. The distinctive taste is a result of the wild pastures; the grass and the aromatic and spicy herbs on which the lambs graze.

Some subtle differences have been noted between the flavour of meat from lambs grazing in the highlands, the lowlands, and by the seashore. The meat is very tender and has a fine texture due to its high amount of red muscle fibres, which is influenced both by the breed and its grazing habits. The tenderness is enhanced by electrical stimulation and strict control of chilling rates.

And the best thing about the Icelandic lamb: It is the perfect match to any kind of herbs and spices.

- SS





# WEST *Iceland*



#WESTICELAND

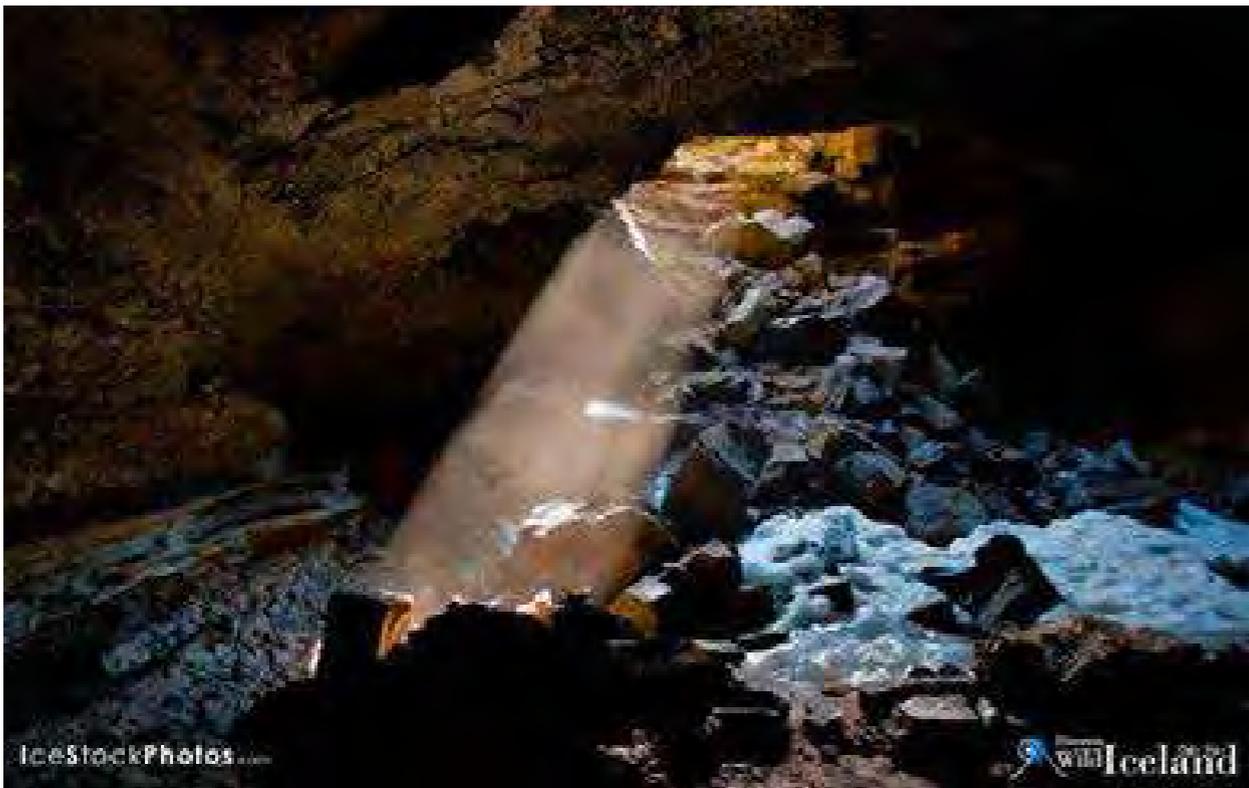
The beauty and variety of Icelandic nature is everywhere in the West of Iceland. Magnificent views overlooking mountains and glaciers, fertile regions, colourful birdlife, abundant rivers and lakes, fjords and bays, along with gushing

geothermal activity. Land and history form an unbroken whole as the setting for sagas like Sturlunga, Egil's Saga, Eyrbyggja and Laxdaela, not to mention the rich folklore and tales of adventure. Tours bring history to life as museums and historical sites abound.

Amarstapi or Stapi is a small fishing village at the foot of Mt. Stapafell.



Glanni waterfall in Norðurárdalur – Borgarfjörður – Iceland.



Stefánshellir cave lies in West Iceland in the Hallmundarhraun lava field. This lava field was created during the eruption in 930 AD and contains several large lava fields. Some of the the largest and deepest caves in Iceland are found here. Stefánshellir is around 1,520 metres long.

# SJÁVARPAKKHÚSIÐ RESTAURANT & BAR

*Splendid Seafood in Stykkishólmur*

Despite its humble beginnings as a fish packing plant, or perhaps because of it, Sjárvarpakkhúsið is fast becoming known in this part of Iceland as one of the places to go for straight-out-of-the-boat fish and seafood dishes. It's a small unpretentious place, decorated with an unmistakably minimalist Icelandic flair. There's no hiding behind pompous decor or gaudy frills - the beautifully presented food takes centre stage, as well it should.

Specialties include generous portions of blue mussels in white wine dependent on availability, scallops cooked to perfection, and a hearty fish soup. Top it off with a local craft beer or glass of wine and you have the makings of a great meal out. Musically endowed patrons have been known to spontaneously break out into song on the in-house piano or guitar, and a few times a month local musicians pop



in for an evening jam session of spirited Icelandic folk music or whatever strikes their fancy.

Built over 100 years ago, Sjárvarpakkhúsið boasts the more recent addition of a large veranda that overlooks the harbour where colourful fishing vessels of every size are neatly arranged. The cosy ambiance, the authenticity of the picturesque setting and the succulent food all add up to an

excellent dining experience right here in Stykkishólmur. Please see Sjárvarpakkhúsið's website below for opening hours, daily specials and more.

-EMV

**Sjárvarpakkhúsið Restaurant & Bar**

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www.sjarvarpakkhusid.is

## GOLFING IN THE DALES

*Golf balls on the greens replace cow herds in the pastures*

After farming for over 44 years, first with his father and later with his son, Bjarni, with his wife, Sigrún, were faced with a choice: retire and quit or... pioneer something new. They sold their livelihood and poured their everything into a bold new idea. They built a golf course, a club house with massage facilities and a jacuzzi and a restaurant on their farm in the beautiful Reykholtsdalur. The restaurant also has excellent facilities for small conferences and meetings for up to 60 people.

Golfers are always looking for new courses to challenge their skills. Iceland is becoming well known as an interesting location to play. The par 70 course is enjoyable for anyone interested in the sport, regardless of their skill level. They have a guesthouse with both made-up beds and sleeping bag accommodation, bathing and cooking facilities. It is open all year for travellers to enjoy each season, providing a lovely place to



relax in and enjoy the beautiful nature, with its waterfalls and hills and the rich historical sites of the entire Borgarfjörður area. Close by is Snorrastofa, the medieval culture centre, with its library and museum. Now, less than 2 hours from Reykjavík on road no. 518, is a 9-hole golf course, complete with putting green and driving range for all the world to enjoy, the result of Bjarni and Sigrún's tenacity and vision.



**Nes in Reykholtsdal**

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www.nesreykholt.is

-ASF



## FRESH FOOD IN A HARBOUR TOWN

*Just a stone's throw from Reykjavik, there's a lot to see and do in Akranes*

West Iceland is known for its hot springs, rivers, black sand beaches, quiet fishing towns, and a glacier, accessible on foot. Just 40 minutes outside Reykjavik, a trip to the west is ideal for those with limited time who want to enjoy some of the countryside.

Travellers who want to visit an authentic, small Icelandic fishing town should spend some time in Akranes. With just 6,900 residents, Akranes is charming, tranquil, and yet has a lot of outdoor activities and a great campsite. After a day, Galito Restaurant is the ideal place to sample fresh, local food, in a warm and cosy atmosphere.

### Galito Restaurant

Galito is a favourite among locals and travellers alike. The 13-year old family business focuses on fresh fish, homemade sauces and local ingredients in its inventive, tasty dishes. The chefs buy fresh fish daily and source local, seasonal vegetables

whenever possible. Guests can choose from the restaurant's fine dining menu options such as tender lamb, beef tenderloin, or fresh Icelandic fish such as salmon, catfish and pan-fried cod. Galito also offer a good bistro menu which includes salads, sandwiches, burgers and pizza, along with a good variety of starters and desserts and several healthy dishes such as Naan sandwiches and Jamaican jerk chicken.

In May, Galito begins offering sushi made from fresh salmon, shrimp and tuna, an exciting first for the restaurant. The same owners have operated the restaurant since it opened in 2003 and they are proud to be the top choice among locals.

### Outdoor Activities

Akranes really comes alive during the summer. Locals love to spend as much time outside as possible. Visitors can enjoy one of the town's two swimming pools, tee off at the Garðavöllur 18-hole golf course, stroll along the golden sand beach,

or rent bicycles to explore the charming town. Hiking Mount Akrafjall is an easy climb with a spectacular view from the top, especially on clear days when you can see Snæfellsjökull. The mountain can be reached by the road no. 51 and is 11 kilometres east from the town.

### Akranes Lighthouse

Akranesviti, the Akranes Lighthouse, is delightful to visit any time of year. Away from bright lights, tourists and town folk catch a display of the Northern Lights dancing in the sky in winter. In the summer, you can see locals picnicking outside the lighthouse, and visitors can climb to the top during opening hours. Built in 1947, the lighthouse has been used to host concerts and art exhibitions in recent years. -JG



**Galito**  
 Stíllholt 16-18 • 300 Akranes  
 +354 430 6767  
 galito@galito.is  
 www.galito.is





## TOKENS OF ICELAND: HANDCRAFTED JEWELLERY

*Oddný Braga designs timeless pendants inspired by Iceland's nature*

Tokens of Iceland is a handmade jewellery line that evokes four distinct Icelandic features—magma, glaciers, auroras, and hot springs. Created and designed by Oddný Braga, Tokens of Iceland is a dynamic brand that is the perfect souvenir from an idyllic Icelandic holiday.



Oddný Braga.

Each necklace, with its own unique stone, is handcrafted in the West Iceland town of Borgarnes. The jewellery, which is made with natural mineral pearls wrapped in Sterling Silver, represent the geology and uniqueness of Iceland. The Magma below the ground, the Glaciers shaping the land, the Aurora Borealis lighting up the sky and the Hot Springs boiling below the very rocks we walk upon.

### Molten Magma

Iceland is a volcanic island constantly in flux, with magma breaking through fissures and periodic eruptions that reshape the rocky landscape. Iceland's land is made up of igneous rock, most of which is basalt, which forms from cooling magma. Most of Iceland's volcanoes are fissures, like the 2014 Holuhraun eruption, where lava pours out of the cracks

in the earth's crust. Holuhraun produced fountains of lava shooting out of the earth. Oddný created the Magma pendant to reflect the fire-like intensity of the eruptions and the cooling magma left behind.

### Gorgeous Glaciers

Like the air, Iceland's water is perfectly pure and that could, in part, be credited to the island nation's vast glaciers. Ice covers about 11% of the country, mostly in the form of Iceland's largest glaciers, Vatnajökull, Hofsjökull, Langjökull and Mýrdalsjökull. Travelers love to explore the icy expanses by hiking, snowmobiling and even visiting ice caves. The Glacier pendant has a pure, crystal clear feeling that reminds us of Iceland's gorgeous glaciers.

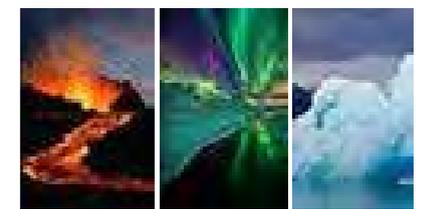
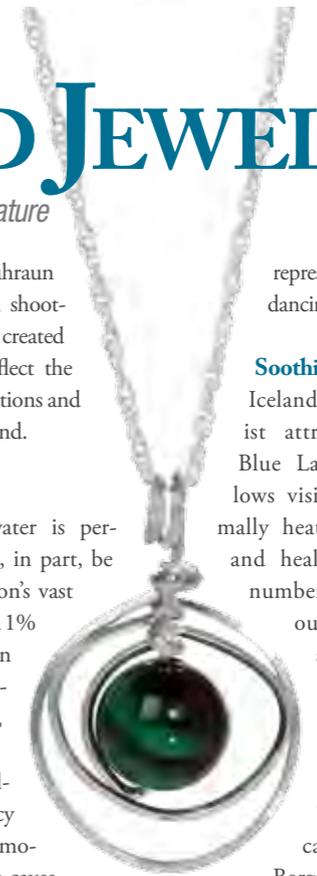
### Haunting Aurora Borealis

The biggest winter attraction in Iceland is the Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis). People travel from around the world to catch a glimpse of the green, white, blue and red lights dancing in the night sky. Tokens of Iceland offer a striking green stone pendant that

represents the movement of the dancing green lights.

### Soothing Hot Springs

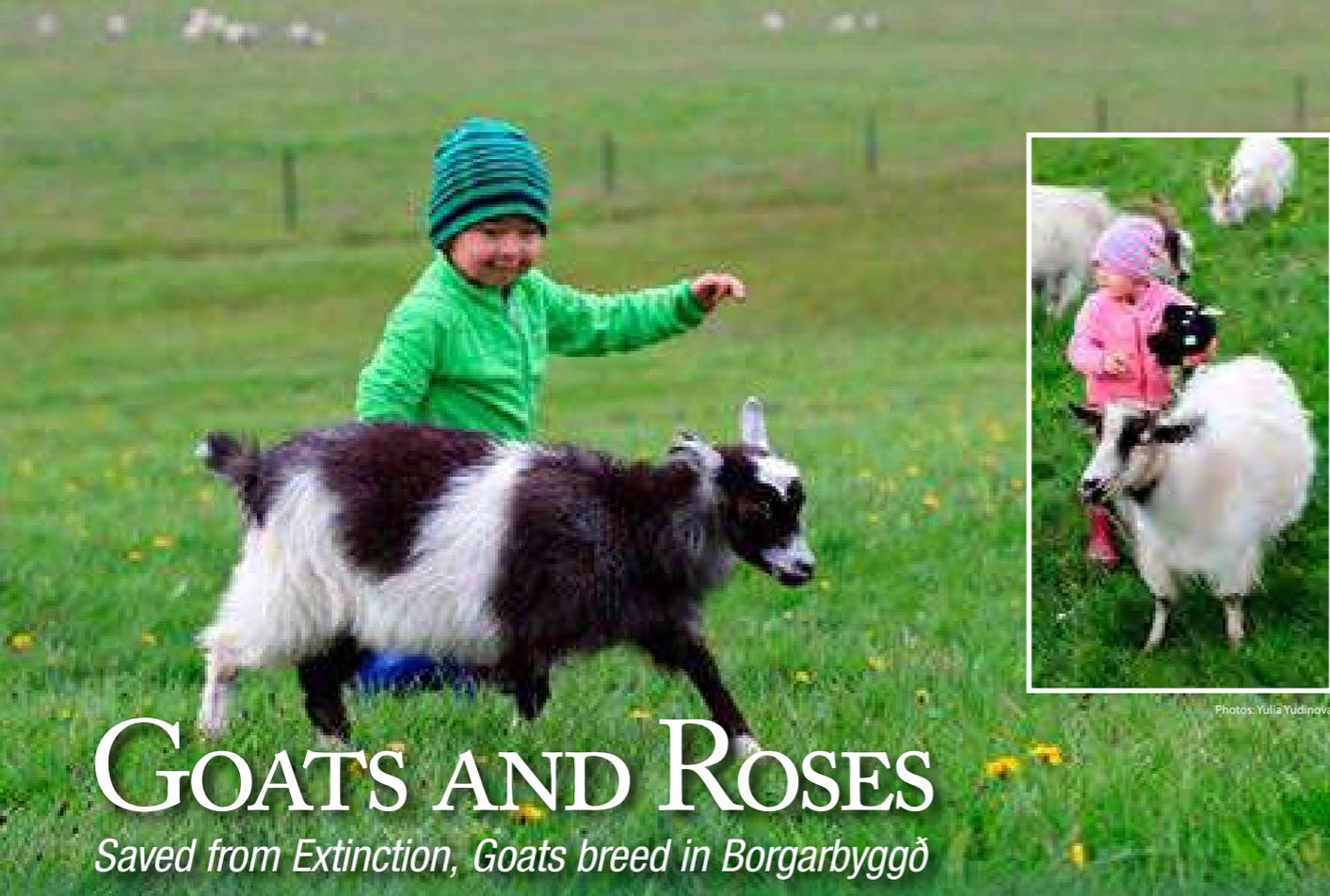
Iceland's waters also serve as tourist attractions. The man-made Blue Lagoon near Grindavík allows visitors to bathe in geothermally heated water, which soothes and heals the skin. There are a number of hot springs throughout the country that locals and tourists enjoy. Tokens of Iceland's blue Hot Springs pendant captures the striking blue colour of the Blue Lagoon. Tokens of Iceland pieces can be purchased at Kristý Borgarnesi and are also available online at: [www.tokensoficealand.is](http://www.tokensoficealand.is)





**Tokens of Iceland**  
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Photos: Yulia Yudinova

# GOATS AND ROSES

Saved from Extinction, Goats breed in Borgarbyggð

The Icelandic goats at Háafell in Borgarbyggð are the oldest and purest goat stock found in Europe today. Their arrival dates back to the Settlement of Iceland, around 930 AD. For centuries, they were the main source of food for the islanders but, due to a long climate cooling period during the Middle Ages, they were replaced by sheep with their coarse wool being better suited for long periods of freezing cold weather. Since then, the emphasis has been on the sheep, resulting in the goats becoming nearly extinct in Iceland.

Today there are only 800 in the country, so they are still an endangered species.

The farmers at Háafell, Jóhanna and Þorbjörn, were running a traditional



Icelandic farm with cows and sheep until 2000 when they decided to focus solely on

goat farming, after working to increase their goat herd for eleven years.

In 1999 they had adopted the last four goats without horns left in Iceland, which contributed to their decision. "The goats are very likeable,

playful and more like pets than life-stock," says Jóhanna. From her stock, she makes ointments, soaps and fine cashmere wool; from the skin, inner soles, hats and cases for cognac flasks. Then, in the autumn, she sells the goat meat—which is as rich of protein as beef and has as little fat as chicken.

Another attraction at Háafell is Jóhanna's Rose Garden. With 180 types of roses – which is no mean achievement in the harsh Icelandic climate, along with lavender, violets and herbs and grasses from the moor – she makes bath-salts and scrubs. Her little homestead shop is both interesting and original. Háafell can be found on Facebook under "Geitfjársetur" (Icelandic) and "Save Háafell goat farm" (English). Háafell Goat Farm is on Facebook as Geitfjársetur and Save Haafell Goat Farm (a group). -SS



**Háafell Goat Farm**  
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## HOT FROM THE OVEN

Geiri's Bakery fed Walter Mitty incognito



Considered by some to be one of the best bakeries in Iceland, Geirabakari of Borgarnes is a well-known pit stop for those making the journey north. Light lunches of soup and sandwiches, slices of traditional cakes and pastries, excellent coffee and the exceptional view are all a part of the charm.

Popular treats include 'love balls' - similar to the traditional Icelandic 'kleinur' but with raisins and 'snúðar' - sweet cinnamon rolls iced with a layer of chocolate. Geiri's Bakery made headlines as the location that was used for 'Papa John's Pizza' in the movie 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty' and relevant clips from the film are on display in the windows of the bakery.

Open daily Monday - Thursday, 7.00 a.m. - 5.30 p.m.,  
Friday 7.00 a.m. - 6.00 p.m., weekends 8.30 a.m. - 4.30 p.m.

Digranesgata 6 • 310 Borgarnes | +354 437 1920 | geirabak@internet.is



## AMAZING RIDES

Suitable for any rider, accomplished or not

Emphasising high standards of personal service, the Stóri Kambur horse rental is a family owned business offering short trips for small groups. Known for their welcoming and friendly demeanour, the guides at Stóri Kambur make visitors feel both secure and comfortable, whether they are accomplished riders, ready to gallop at full speed on the beach surrounded by the magnificent nature, or simply first time riders, children and adults alike.

If you are looking to experience the full range of the 5 gaits of an Icelandic horse with tremendous views of a glacier, waterfall, beach, and lush green meadows, this is your best bet. Groups of up to ten people are perfect.

Open from 1 June – 15 September.

Stóri Kambur • 365 Snæfellsbær | +354 852 7028 | www.storikambur.is



### Multicultural Menu

The menu has everything from a simple kids' menu and traditional European food, to Mexican and Indian food. You can have your regular sandwiches, pastas and pizzas, hamburgers and steaks - but there is also a surprising variety of dishes available, including soups, dedicated gourmet dishes for vegetarians, and various Mexican and Indian dishes.

This impressive menu is complemented with a good selection of beverages and desserts, and a healthy dose of hospitality. -SF

## GAMLA KAUPFÉLAGIÐ

Restaurant and Bar in Akranes

Gamla Kaupfélagið in Akranes (The Old Cooperative) is a really nice restaurant and bar in the small town of Akranes. Less than an hour's drive from Reykjavík, along Highway 1, you will find this historic old town by the beautiful west coast of Iceland.

Please drop by for fantastic food and service at modest prices in a really cosy setting, right in the midst of town - surrounded by welcoming locals.

Akranes is a very popular tourist destination, and all the travellers with their tents and campers make this a really merry place during the summer. Gamla Kaupfélagið is located in the heart of the old town of Akranes, which puts it within walking distance of all the major lodging and camping places.

The restaurant is also a bar and a café, and there is outdoor seating for those beautiful summer days. The weekends are made special with extended opening hours and live music.



**Gamla Kaupfélagið**  
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www.gamla kaupfelagid.is





# WELCOMING GUESTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD

*Surrounded by powerful glaciers and beautiful sights*

The magnificent two-story building of Hótel Húsafell is located in an area characterised by rich history and natural wonders such as lava formations, mountain springs, hot water, rushing glacial rivers and extraordinary animal and birdlife.

### Luxury All Around

Opening their doors to visitors from around the world, Hótel Húsafell did just that on the 15th of July 2015. Designed as an outdoor activity centre for the Borgarbyggð area, the building offers facilities servicing hikers and others involved with activities such as caving, angling

and glacier tours. Connected to a square that opens to the swimming pool, the golf course, the service centre, and the bistro, Hótel Húsafell also offers an exciting location for meetings and conferences. On either side of the centre are two buildings with thirty-six spacious rooms, including six deluxe rooms, each with a living room, grand bathroom, shower, double sink and bath tub.

Hótel Húsafell only uses 100% pure energy produced on the site. The electricity comes from small hydro power plants which are driven by crystal clear spring water. Additionally, the hot water heating up the hotel and geothermal



baths comes from nearby mountains. Guests are encouraged to benefit from this natural wonder by soaking in the steaming water, as this long-held Icelandic tradition will leave everyone feeling fresh and completely invigorated.



### Húsafell Area

Known for its mild weather, the region offers surroundings and activities which cater to all groups of people; regardless of whether guests prefer to relax, have an action packed adventure or spend time with family outdoors. The land of Húsafell reaches up to the Eiríksjökull and Langjökull glaciers and stands in the middle of the Hallmundarhraun lava field which was formed in an eruption in 930. The place is sheltered and often enjoys good, mild weather.

The unusual Hraunfossar waterfall, with pristine, clear water flowing from the lava into the Hvítá river, and the powerful Barnafossar falls are close by. There are interesting lava tubes in the lava which can be visited and many good walking paths in the area. Some are marked on a map in the service centre.

In the hinterland is Arnarvatnsheiði, an area with abundant good fishing lakes and the remote Kaldidalur valley connecting Húsafell to Þingvellir National Park.

A short distance away is the centre for glacier activity in Langjökull. Fancy marrying in an amazing ice cave? That can be arranged!

### Musical Art in Stone

For those interested in Icelandic art and music, the artist Páll Guðmundsson lives and works on the premises. He has carved many faces on rocks in the gorge behind the farm and with his amazing ability to work with stones, he even worked with the Icelandic band Sigur Rós as a musician - with a unique idiophone, a large xylophone-like instrument he made of stones and is called Steinharpa.

### Location and Hours

The hotel is located an hour and forty minutes' drive from Reykjavík while the drive from Keflavík airport is about two hours and twenty minutes. Wireless internet is free

for guests at the hotel and breakfast is served in the restaurant from 8:00 to 10:00 am. The restaurant is open from 8:00 - 10:00 am, 11:30 - 18:00 pm and 18:00 - 22:00 pm. Then the bar is open from 11:00 pm to midnight. Geothermal baths and hot tubs are on the premises, free of charge and open all day for hotel guests - even open outside formal hours upon request!

Hótel Húsafell, truly an amazing experience surrounded by Icelandic nature at its greatest.

-SP

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# PLUNGING INTO HISTORY

## The Settlement Center in Borgarnes Takes You on a Trip Through Time

Some 1100 years ago, Iceland was a place covered with impenetrable forests and dangerous bogs, and it took a bunch of bold men to cross the rough North Atlantic Ocean, to discover the remote island and determine to settle there, in order to start a new life. They were the first to name rivers, mountains and places that are world famous today, and still many farms are able to trace their history back to the days of the settlement. As the most important source for Iceland's history rates the saga collection, a ring of exciting stories around these first settlers. Experiencing Iceland thoroughly means paying tribute to their achievements, which made the country what it is today.

### A Warehouse Turns Into Exhibitions

In 2006 an Icelandic couple, actor Kjartan Ragnarsson and news reporter Sigríður Margrét Guðmundsdóttir, decided to dedicate a project to the settlement's story. They found a charming old warehouse in Borgarnes in West Iceland



and started building up two exhibitions on the bold men who followed their curiosity into the unknown.

Provided with an audio guide available in fifteen languages, visitors find themselves in an elaborate labyrinth that displays history in the most exciting way. Step on a moving boat and get a feeling of how it must have been to cross the ocean in a nutshell! Listen to stories, while bodies preserved in glass silently watch over you. On

the lower floor the exhibition on saga hero and settler's son Egill Skallagrímsson takes you right into the story, with Egill's spirit joining your steps.

### Art Turns Into Life

Visual artists from Iceland and abroad contributed their work to both exhibitions, making perception a unique experience. Each audio tour takes 30 minutes, returning the visitor into daylight with the urgent desire to learn more. The Settlement Center's shop serves as a treasure chest regarding books on saga literature, as well as viking themed handicrafts and woollen items created by local artists. Take your time to finish your visit with a dinner in the cosy restaurant that perfectly catches the house's atmosphere and boasts a range of sophisticated Icelandic food at reasonable prices.

-DT

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## HISTORY BROUGHT TO LIFE

The Snorrastofa Cultural and Medieval Centre is in Reykholt

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

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

Snorri was a wealthy and powerful chieftain in the age of unrest and civil war preceding Iceland's loss of independence. He was murdered by his enemies in his home on the 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 - 30<sup>th</sup> September), 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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# SHAPED BY THE BAY

*A Place to Launch Out from 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 – almost making the whole town a museum in itself.

Stykkishólmur is viewed as one of Iceland's most charming towns by many Icelanders. The town's close proximity to Breiðafjörður bay

contributes largely to its character, surrounding it with exclusive natural beauty. So likewise, the town's historical significance, as a former centre for trade and commerce centuries ago, and a seat of government. The inhabitants have consciously made an effort to preserve the town's old spirit, by retaining its appearance and maintaining old traditions from the bay area.

Visitors have the chance to experience this when dining out in Stykkishólmur, where they'll get fresh ingredients from the bay and surrounding area, served on plates made by local chefs from local ingredients.

## Sail Away in Breiðafjörður Bay

If you only have time to partake in one activity while you're in Stykkishólmur, a chance to go sailing in Breiðafjörður bay is not to be missed. There are numerous professional guides available in the area that will happily provide you with this unforgettable experience.

A calming cruise navigating the stunning islets gives a unique opportunity to view the splendid wildlife in the area close-up – such as the seals and the colourful seabirds inhabiting the holms, and the distinctive puffin – from just metres away. You will have a chance to taste the freshest sushi you will probably get

in your lifetime. A common practice is to invite guests to sample whatever seafood delicacy comes up when the nets are pulled, such as sea-urchin or scallops, while sailing between the seemingly countless islands and enjoying the quiet grandeur of the scenery.

## A Trifle of Culture

History and culture are prominent in Stykkishólmur as the town has three museums. In the 'Norwegian House', the oldest two storey timber house in Iceland, 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 19th century.

## A Library of Water

Stykkishólmur also prides itself on fine museums that represent the two prevailing elements of Icelandic nature: fire and water, in both original and conventional ways. In the case of water, 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 specimens 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 not only learn about everything connected with volcanoes, eruptions and other geological matters, but can also see how these strong forces of nature have been expressed in art throughout the centuries, in Iceland and around the world.



## The Perfect Base

Accommodation and services are plentiful in Stykkishólmur, with options ranging from a quality campsite, budget hostels and high-class hotels.

You'll find quality restaurants, a supermarket, golf course and an amazing swimming pool, in which the water has received a quality certification from Institut Fresenius, two hot pots with water straight from the earth and an excellent waterslide. -VAG



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# EVERYTHING VOLCANIC

*World-renowned volcanologist, Haraldur Sigurðsson, creates Iceland's most comprehensive volcano museum*

**S**næfellsnes is considered the jewel of the west coast, in part, because the region has a taste of everything Icelandic. If you're looking for mountains, they're there. If you want to attempt a glacier walk, Snæfellsnesjökull awaits. If you're interested in volcanoes, Eldfjallasafn Volcano Museum in Stykkishólmur is the place to visit. The museum showcases works of art, old and new, which depict volcanic eruptions, as well as artefacts, and volcanic rocks. The museum focuses on volcanoes around the world.

### Volcanic hot spot

Iceland has a high concentration of active volcanoes due to its location on the



divergent tectonic plate boundary of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, and also because it sits over a geological hot spot. The island has 30 active volcanic systems, of which 13 have erupted since the settlement of Iceland in 874 AD. The most recent eruptions occurred in 2014 at Holuhraun near the Bárðarbunga system and the



eruption under Eyjafjallajökull in 2010 that produced an enormous ash cloud.

### Riveting museum

Diverse aspects of volcanoes are presented at the Volcano Museum, from the science, geology and their environmental effects to how they appear in art and literature. Talks



are given daily in the museum in English and Icelandic about volcanoes and their effects, as well as information on geology for people with little or no previous knowledge of volcanoes. For visitors who would like an in-depth tour of the geology behind volcanoes, the museum offers geology excursions that visit a number of dramatic locations along the Snæfellsnes Peninsula.

### Passionate curator

The world-renowned volcanologist Haraldur Sigurðsson created the Volcano Museum to share the wealth of knowledge he has accrued. Haraldur was born in Stykkishólmur in 1939, completed a BSc degree at Queens University in Belfast in 1965, and received his PhD from Durham University in England in 1970.



He worked at the University of the West Indies from 1970, conducting research on Caribbean volcanoes. He served as professor of volcanology at the University of Rhode Island for 40 years. His research has been principally in volcanology, both on land and on the ocean floor. He has worked in Indonesia, Italy, West Indies, USA, West Africa, Greece, South and Central America and elsewhere, but Iceland remains firmly his home where the Volcano Museum is close to his heart.

-JG

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# WHERE THE ADVENTURES BEGIN!

## Reykjavik Excursions' Wonders of Snæfellsnes Tour

The stunning landscape of the Snæfellsnes peninsula has captured the imagination of people all over the world, ever since Jules Verne wrote the famous science fiction novel "Journey to the Centre of the Earth".

Should you be feeling a little adventurous, Reykjavik Excursions can help you get in on the act and experience some epic adventures to call your own. The comfortable coach heads north from the BSÍ bus terminal in Reykjavik at 08:00 sharp.

Our guide is full of interesting details about life in Iceland and here are some

of the highlights from my recent trip with Reykjavik Excursions 'Wonders of Snæfellsnes' Tour.

### Seals at the seashore

We are first headed to one of the destinations along the peninsula's south coast—Ytri Tunga—to see if we can spot any grey seals, which are known to congregate along the shore. We set off again on a little walk down to the sea and are lucky enough to be greeted by a small group of seals that watch us warily. It's amazing to see seals in their natural habitat like this!



### The blowholes at Arnarstapi

It is a very picturesque place, a lava-field-meets-sea kind of place resulting in some impressive natural architecture not found anywhere else in Iceland. There are three circular cliffs, known in geology as blowholes, where fulmars fuss over egg-sitting duties while the waves crash inside the cliffs, making for a very impressive sight indeed.

A statue of the half-human, half-troll Bárður Snæfellsás, stares out to sea; he is the guardian spirit who watches over the peninsula, we are told.

After checking our wallets, we decide, as a treat, to have lunch at Hellnar at the cutest little café. Fjöruhúsið, located right next to the beach. They offer good prices on home-made cooking, seafood (excellent fish soup), fresh bread, pastries, cakes and waffles with jam and whipped cream. Seating is available both outside on the balcony or inside, enjoying the spectacular view.

### Djúpalónssandur—Dritvík

A bit of history, mixed with jagged lava formations and miles and miles of wild, windswept coast, is a recipe for some striking visuals at Djúpalónssandur, where we pile out of the coach to take in the dramatic scenery.

The black stone beach is littered with rusting pieces of wreckage from a British fishing trawler from Grimsby that ran aground here in 1948. The now deserted beach at Dritvík was once a major fishing station in the summer months, with up to 600 workers living there. This is also where



you will find the well-known 'lifting stones' by which hopeful fishermen of old used to test their strength and thereby gauge their suitability for life at sea.

### Travelling the north shore

Along the north shore of the peninsula, we travel over moss-topped lava fields called Berserkjahraun, or 'lava field of the Berserkers' that have certain energy of their own.

It's a rather intangible feeling but nevertheless present, lending a measure of excitement and intrigue to the rugged landscape.

We stop to gaze at the freestanding and iconic Kirkjufell mountain at Grundarfjörður fjord before continuing our journey back towards Reykjavik.

### South bound to Reykjavik

They say that Snæfellsnes Peninsula is Iceland in miniature; you can find a little bit of everything there and, if your time is limited, this tour is a great way to see what Iceland is all about.

Tours with Reykjavik Excursions are available all year long with variety of departure times. Further information and descriptions of all tours can be found at [www.re.is](http://www.re.is).

-EMV



# BIRDS IN.. BREIÐAFJÖRÐUR

*The Mystical Bay with Marvellous Birdlife*

Breiðafjörður is an expansive and shallow bay located on the west coast of Iceland. The bay is the largest area of shallow waters and beaches in the country, and rich wildlife can be found both above and below its surface. The area has greater tides and tidal currents than elsewhere in Iceland, and it is believed that about a quarter of the country's beaches are located in Breiðafjörður. The bay has more diverse benthic species than have been detected elsewhere in the country. While folk belief holds that the islands in Breiðafjörður are infinite, estimates put the number at approximately 2,500. Breiðafjörður was once a great source of food and numerous islands were inhabited. The islands are now mostly deserted, with only two which are inhabited year round—but many houses are maintained and used as summer dwellings.

The birdlife in Breiðafjörður is unique and one of the most important in Iceland and the whole of the North Atlantic. Breiðafjörður is protected according to law, in addition to being identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International. The outpost of Breiðafjörður to the north and west is Látrabjarg, the largest bird cliff in the North Atlantic.

The microcosm is characterised by birds which are wholly dependent on marine life, and many of them nest in large colonies. Furthermore, the beaches in Breiðafjörður are an important stop for migratory birds on their way to and from wintering grounds east of the Atlantic and breeding grounds in Greenland and the Arctic Islands of Canada. The reason for this rich bird life is an abundance of food, which is based on an interplay of landscape, significant tides, and the fertility of the sea.

As an example of the importance of Breiðafjörður to birds, one can mention that two thirds of the Icelandic White-tailed

Eagle population and the vast majority of Great Cormorants and European Shags nest by the bay. By far the world's largest Razorbill colony is on the Látrabjarg bird cliffs, and about one third of the Common Eider population is in Breiðafjörður. The largest Glaucous Gull breeding grounds in Iceland are in Breiðafjörður, and the bay is also home to large colonies of Northern Fulmars, Black-legged Kittiwakes, and Arctic Terns. In addition, a large part of the world populations of Brent Geese, Red Knots and Ruddy Turnstones pass through the beaches of Breiðafjörður in the spring and autumn.

The White-tailed Eagle is known as the king of Icelandic birds. This majestic bird of prey was almost extinct in Iceland in 1960, but BirdLife Iceland was able to save the population with its fight against narrow-mindedness and ignorant views. When the population was at its lowest, it managed to prevail in Breiðafjörður, which was and still is its main habitat in Iceland. Currently, the White-tailed Eagle mostly nests on islands and islets and on low peninsulas and cliff edges, but during the population slump, it nested quite a lot on steep, unscalable mountainsides. The eagle is wholly protected and its nest may not be approached unless permitted by the Ministry for the Environment. The Sæferðir company, which sails from the town of Stykkishólmur, has a permit to sail near an eagle's nest and show tourists this magnificent bird.

The Atlantic Puffin is one of the most common birds which nest in Breiðafjörður, nesting in tight colonies on grassy islands which are plentiful in the bay. It dives for fish and, in late summer, it is often seen in flight carrying sand eels for its young. The Puffin is very popular with tourists and Breiðafjörður is a good spot for viewing it.

The Baldur ferry stops on the island of Flatey on its trips between Stykkishólmur and Brjánslækur. A day can be spent on the island between ferry stops or a longer period if preferred. The bird life on Flatey is special and diverse and well worth paying attention to as many birds on the island are unusually tame. Prominent along the coast of Flatey are the jet Black Guillemots sporting white wing patches, red legs and the inside of their mouth is bright red. Their main source of food is butterfish which they hunt in the seaweed along the shore. Puffins are quite common under Lundaberg cliff and on the islands around Flatey. Other prominent sea birds are Shags, Fulmars, Kittiwakes, and Eiders. The Snow Bunting sings its wistful song from rooftops or rocky outcrops. The Red-necked Phalarope swoops and swirls on most ponds and pools but can also be seen at sea, while its cousin, the Red Phalarope, may also appear on the beach. Redshanks call from fence posts, Common Snipes drum overhead, and Arctic Terns dive at unwelcome visitors on the nesting grounds.

One cannot discuss the birds of Breiðafjörður without mentioning the Látrabjarg bird cliffs, even though it is not within the area covered by laws on the protection of Breiðafjörður and even though it is a different IBA. Látrabjarg is the largest bird cliff in the North Atlantic, and it is home to hundreds of thousands of sea birds: Fulmars, Kittiwakes, Razorbills, Common Guillemots, Brünnich's Guillemots, and Puffins. Bjargtangar is the best place in the world for photographing Puffins; in the evenings, they are so tame that you can almost touch them, and nowhere else in the world can you take their portraits using a wide-angle lens!

-JÓH

Happy birdwatching!



*Puffin with food*



*A playful pair of Red-necked Phalaropes*



*Black Guillemot on Flatey Island*



*Brünnich's Guillemots at Snæfellsnes*



*A pair of Black-legged Kittiwakes with their chick*



*A Common Eider drake on display*



*A White-tailed Eagle in flight in Breiðafjörður*



*A male Snow Bunting on Flatey Island*



*Breiðafjörður is the domain of the Glaucous Gull*



*European Shag in Breiðafjörður*

# REAL LIFE FANTASY FROM BREIÐAFJÖRÐUR BAY

Láki Tours takes you to meet the whales and more



Refreshments are great quality, soup of the day is always available and the menu offers anything from pizzas to paninis to fishpies – over to a wide range of cakes and the coffee is marvellous!

Láki Hafnarkaffi can also be found on Facebook, as well as Láki Tours.

## Hótel Framnes

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. The restaurant at Hótel Framnes is open from January to the middle of October between 18:30-21:00 and winter opening times vary according to demand, so please contact the hotel for details.

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

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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, catching a sight of them is a real experience. Láki Tours offers you just that, leaving from Ólafsvík in the summertime (Summer Whale Watching) and from Grundarfjörður in winter. (Winter Whale Watching).

## 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.

## Sea-angling and Bird Watching

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 that 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 as the roughly 2 hour tour from Grundarfjörður on Láki, is an experience that many want to repeat. During the summer months, when 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.

Last but not least, there are special one hour-puffin and seabird tours only in the summertime, leaving from Grundarfjörður. A slow sailing on Láki offers the maximum potential to see these furry creatures in their nesting environment as nature reserve on a nearby island, Melrakkaey attracts hundreds of puffins and other seabirds. One should really check Láki Tours out on Facebook, where beautiful photographs tell half the story and "diaries" following every trip are on display.

## Stay by the Bay

While Láki Tours are an amazing experience, the area has more 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. Then, open since early 2015, Láki Hafnarkaffi café is another treat and just the place to visit after a whale watching trip.



# ERPSSTAÐIR – ARTISANAL DAIRY PRODUCTION

*A Direct Contact to the Country*



Given Icelanders' affinity for dairy products you'd be surprised by the relatively short history of artisanal production in the field. The farmers of Erpsstaðir in Dalabyggð saw there was a growing demand, and since starting production in 2009 their products have quickly become highly sought after and now loyal customers don't mind taking drives to Erpsstaðir for a taste of the country life and stocking up on unique and lovingly made ice creams, cheeses and skyr.

Erpsstaðir is a relatively large dairy farm which lies close to the beautiful Búðardalur valley around 140 km from Reykjavík, or a one and half an hour's drive. There is a small shop connected to the cowshed where customers can sample the selection, as well as take a closer look at the animals and the production process.



## A Delicate Process

Erpsstaðir's ice-cream, called Kjaftæði, quickly found its way into the heart of an ice cream crazed nation and got the ball rolling. Þorgrímur Einar Guðbjartsson, owner and dairy expert, says that he's always on the lookout for innovations and never afraid to try new things. Erpsstaðir has thus increased its selection to include a variety of cheeses and skyr products. Their "Greek" cheese has been a staple for a while and the Cumin cheese is now in steady production. The Bóndabiti, a pure havarti cheese, is a new delicacy and the tiny, but powerful, Galti, white mould cheese is the latest addition to the selection.

## No Compromises

Þorgrímur says working on such a small scale offers many advantages, including never having to compromise when it comes to quality



control. "Making cheese is a delicate process and it's important to be able to have complete control over it. If the cheese we're making is not ready or good enough, we don't put it out to the customer. I look at it like a craft and a passion, but instead of craft items, I make cheese."

## Life on the Farm

Erpsstaðir also offers visitors a chance to get up close and personal with the Icelandic country life. Guided tours to the farm are available by booking and those who want the full package can rent a stand-alone fully equipped house and experience life on the farm. "We feel as if people had been looking for a direct contact to the country and many of them seem to find it here. Many of our guests who only book one night thus tend to regret not having booked more nights when they discover what life here has to offer," says Þorgrímur.

Erpsstaðir's products are also available in Frú Lauga on Óðinsgata in Reykjavík, as well as in the farmers' market in Borgarnes. *-VAG*

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# WESTFJORDS

## *Iceland*



#WESTFJORDS

The 'Lonely Planet' guide put Westfjords on its list of the top 10 regions of the world to visit in 2011 and the area won a 'European Destination of Excellence' (EDEN) award. A very sparsely populated region of Iceland, it is home to the Arctic fox, a dizzying variety of birdlife and a nature that is simply breathtaking. With precipitous cliffs that plunge almost

vertically to the deep blue seas below, its multitude of beautiful fjords, its hot springs, pure streams and waterfalls, it's a place for the nature-lover to be awed by its silence and tranquility, pierced only by the birds. The mystical Breiðafjörður bay, with its countless islands is home to all kinds of sea life and tours out into the bay will visit islands covered in birds, with some offering sea fishing.



Skeiðseyri sandbar in Ósafjörður.



Borðeyri Village, Hrítafjörður.



Gjögrabót is a bay in Patreksfjörður.



An old fisherman's shack in Gjögur.

# ARE YOU UP FOR AN ADVENTURE?

*Iceland Backcountry Travel makes your wildest (backcountry) dreams come true*



Do you fancy venturing off the beaten path with the wind in your hair? Or rather, shivers of excitement in your soul? Iceland Backcountry Travel can offer you just that. Guðmundur Valdimarsson, who founded the company in 2013 on his wife's 50th birthday, is an expert at extreme driving, hiking and hunting all over Iceland. Armed with his powers, sitting behind the wheel of one of his Super Jeeps, he drives his customers around for an unforgettable and inspiring experience.

### Create Your own Adventure

In the comfort of the jeeps, controlled by experienced drivers, adventurous travellers can create their own customised Icelandic adventure, whether it is enjoying traditional fare and decadent desserts made by local

restaurants and bakeries or hiking to the top of Kaldbakur (998 metres/3,274 feet), the highest mountaintop in the Westfjords.

They can view unique and breath-taking vistas, landscapes, and waterfalls, discover sea life, birds and animals in their natural habitats, experience the summer midnight sun or the exhilarating northern lights in the winter. Drive on the high and narrow winding roads of the mountains or simply relax, year round, in the calming natural hot springs.

### Once in a Lifetime Experience

With his love of nature, certification in both First Aid and CPR, firearms instructor licence and award winning marksmanship along with his loving wife's support, Guðmundur can't go wrong!

For private tours, hikes or a customised journey, don't hesitate to contact Iceland Backcountry Travel for a once in a lifetime experience.

-SP



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Dynjandi Waterfall, Westfjords, Iceland. Dynjandi (also known as Fjallfoss) is a series of waterfalls located in the Westfjords (Vestfirðir), Iceland. The waterfalls have a cumulative height of 100 metres (330 ft).

## SIMA HOSTEL AND SEA ADVENTURES

*An Authentic Small Town Experience*



Heading out from a tiny Icelandic fishing village into the Westfjords on a forty year old fishing boat is an experience not soon forgotten. The joint venture of SIMA Hostel and Sea Adventures offers this unique, authentic experience in the village of Flateyri by Önundarfjörður fjord. Flateyri still has the feel of a fishing town, even though the golden years of small-town fishing have long since passed. You'll find small open motorboats

sailing in and out of the harbour. One of them is a preserved fishing boat from 1974, owned by the Westfjords Heritage Museum – on which you're invited to go sea angling or to catch the evening sun reflecting on the waters. The fjord is, of course, closely connected to Flateyri's identity and going out on its placid waters, guided by a local sea captain, is the perfect way to get a feel for the place – its culture, nature and history.

Depending on the weather and season, you can catch fish, check on crab traps or just take in the tranquility and stillness of the fjord, which the locals proudly claim to be one of Iceland's most beautiful.

The SIMA Hostel is located in a renovated post and telecommunications office and the interiors of the upper floor are based on the original design, whereas the lower floor has a more modern feel. Owned and operated by locals, the cosy and clean SIMA hostel offers a variety of rooms with splendid views on the top floor. Cosy living- and dining rooms and self-service kitchens provide guests with an opportunity to share and experience Flateyri's many offerings.



## BREATHTAKING LANDSCAPES & MUSEUMS OF FUN

*The Virtually Untouched Nature of Vesturbyggð is a Treat for Every Visitor*

Vesturbyggð, the southern part of the Westfjords is, without doubt, one of the most spectacular areas in Iceland. With breathtaking, tranquil fjords and a mountain road along Barðaströnd, the south coast, the area provides a view over Breiðafjörður and its countless islands.

The journey starts at Reykhólar where the Icelandic eagle resides, a lovely village with a number of galleries, museums and tours around the Breiðafjörður islands. A real treat is the wholesome seaweed bathing pool, an excellent way to relax and nourish your skin before driving west along Barðaströnd.

### Beach On Fire

Be sure to stop by at Hótel Flókalundur and take a walk up to the most beautiful camping site in Iceland with a view over Vatnsfjörður, where the ferry crossing Breiðafjörður docks. On your way to Patreksfjörður is Rauðisandur (Red Beach), where the sand is indeed red, giving the illusion of being on fire.



Patreksfjörður is an old fishing town with quite an history—and a Pirates Museum. A brand new three star hotel with a restaurant opens in May 2013, adding to various accommodation possibilities available, both hotels and hostels. Patreksfjörður is a wonderful town to observe fishermen working and have guided tours of the fish factories and buy the freshest fish available.

### The Largest Coastal Cliffs

Látrabjarg is the westernmost point in Iceland—and indeed Europe. It is 441 metres high and spans 14 kilometres, making it the island's largest coastal cliff with fabulously rich bird-life and a hiking trail along most of the steep cliff-top. Created by eruptions and sculpted by the raging sea, Látrabjarg has been used for farming since the arrival of the first settlers in the area.

There are several places to stay nearby. Nice and quiet and just a short distance away is Hótel Látrabjarg. Hotel Breiðavík is a great place for watching the sunset



and strolling along the vast beach. Further north from Breiðavík, across the moors is Hænuvík, where the seabird life can be viewed close up.

On the way back towards Patreksfjörður is an excellent museum at Hnjótur, specialising in the life of seafarers and fishermen, telling stories of disasters and rescues and their affect on both families and communities. The film, 'Rescue at Látrabjarg' is shown in English and German.

### Of Monsters and Music

Bíldudalur by Arnarfjörður is another village full of surprises with a Monster Museum and a Music Museum. Nowhere in Iceland have there been as many sea monster sightings as in Arnarfjörður. The Music Museum is privately owned. Just knock on the door and the owner will gladly show his collection. A short distance from Bíldudalur, in Selárdalur, is an exceptional outdoor museum created by the builder and sculptor, Samúel Jónsson.

Travelling north, visit the Dynjandi waterfall, considered one of the most beautiful waterfalls in Iceland. It is actually six waterfalls in one and is called, 'The Diamond'. -SS



# BEAUTY IN REMOTENESS

*History and Nature go hand-in-hand in Árneshreppur*



When heading to the magnificent Westfjords peninsula of North Western Iceland, approaching Árneshreppur County is one extraordinary journey.

## How to get there

This least populated community in Iceland is served by Gjögur Airport, with year round scheduled flights by Eagle Air. From Reykjavík to Árneshreppur, flying takes only about half an hour—the ideal trip—especially in the wintertime, as the road connecting the region to the rest of Iceland can be closed for weeks during winter, leaving transport by air the only option.

## You visit for the landscapes and the life

With Árneshreppur boasting some of Iceland's most astonishing landscapes, hiking trails and walking paths are truly enjoyed in this unique nature.

Then the geothermal swimming pool at Krossnes is surely both dramatic and scenic definitely something not to be missed.

## Small but sufficient services

A bank, co-op and a café serve this bustling little community; Sparisjóður Strandamanna Bank in Norðurfjörður is open every

weekday but Wednesday from 13-16. The Steingrímsfjörður Co-op has a petrol station as well as a great variety of products for sale. Then Café Norðurfjörður, one of the most northerly cafés in Iceland, offers a varied menu of delicious national dishes. Árneshreppur has also a great community centre, ideal for any type of celebration.

## A trip back in time

For local history, Kört Museum has an impressive display of old artefacts from the area and offer arts and crafts for sale. Another example of notable work dating from the past is the creation of eiderdown duvets and pillows. Gathered by hand, the eiderdown is then cleaned and processed by people with decades of experience in this field.

One characteristic of the area are the two herring factories, built in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, one in Ingólfshöfði and one in Djúpavík, a mute reminder of the times past.

## Accommodation

For accommodation, Árneshreppur has several good options. The beautifully located Hótel Djúpavík offers accommodation, breakfast and is famous for its delicious food.

Finnbogastaðir School Hostel has sleeping bag accommodation with cooking and sanitary facilities, open from June until the end of August.

Urðartindur Tourist Services offers excellent summer house rental rooms with privat facilities and a campsite.

The Iceland Touring Association, another great option, owns a hut in Valgeirsstaðir, with a dining room and a kitchen and accommodation for 20 people.

Bergistangi Guesthouse has two bedrooms available, each with comfortable beds for three people.

The old Meat Freezing Plant (now renovated as a hostel) serves up to 28 people and has cooking facilities.

Finally, Ófeigsfjörður Tourist Services offer a campsite and even luggage transportation, from June until the end of August.

Any traveller interested in the diversity of Icelandic nature and nation should not miss the opportunity to visit this phenomenal area of the north.

-SP



# PARADISE FOR NATURE LOVERS

*Untouched nature and fjords filled with herring*

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 Hótel Djúpavík from early spring till autumn.



## Old factory and dormitory

Hótel Djúpavík was promptly 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 ford to another but others use cars, kayaks or boats to get from place to place. The staff of the hotel provides 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 Djúpavík area. This summer there will be an exhibition called "The Factory" featuring many photographers from all over the world. There are guided tours provided daily at 10 am and 2pm and the Factory also hosts art and photo exhibitions during the summer.

-JB





Mývatn is a shallow eutrophic lake situated in an area of active volcanism in the north of Iceland, not far from Krafla volcano. The lake and its surrounding wetlands have an exceptionally rich fauna of waterbirds, especially ducks. The lake was created by a large basaltic lava eruption 2300 years ago, and the surrounding landscape is dominated by volcanic landforms, including lava pillars and rootless vents (pseudocraters).

# NORTH *Iceland*

Summer in the North is characterised by the midnight sun. You can play golf, go seal and whale watching, horse riding, hiking, swimming, fishing, river rafting, bird-watching, camping or simply enjoy the disparate forms of nature. The region wears a different coat in winter, when you can ride horses on the frozen lakes in Mývatn under the Northern Lights or ski the slopes just minutes from Akureyri town centre. Northern Iceland is probably Iceland's most diverse region—in every sphere. Nature varies from the mystical area around Mývatn Lake, a birdwatching paradise, to the awesome horse-shoe canyon of Ásbyrgi, the thunderous waterfalls at Goðafoss and Dettifoss, Askja's calderas and volcanoes, or islands

like Drangey, to name a few. The region is bursting with vibrant history, just waiting to be enjoyed. Museums are found in almost every town, with fascinating insights into fields such as the seals at Selasetur in Hvammstangi or the Whale Museum in Húsavík to the turf house of Glaumbær farm in Skagafjörður. Then Skagatrönd, home to the Museum of Prophecies is known as the country music capital of Iceland. In Hjaltadal valley in Skagafjörður is Hólar, formerly the episcopal see and site of the first printing press. Siglufjörður hosts the Folk Music and Herring museums. Blönduós has several museums, as does Akureyri, the largest town of the north, along with its art galleries and rich culture.



#NORTHICELAND



Hverfjall (also known as Hverfell) is a tephra cone or tuff ring volcano in northern Iceland, to the east of Mývatn, Iceland.



Goðafoss is one of the most spectacular waterfalls in Iceland. It is located in the Bárðardalur district of North-Central Iceland at the beginning of the Sprengisandur highland road. The water of the Skjálfandafjót river falls from a height of 12 metres over a width of 30 metres.



Svarfaðardalur, North Iceland.



Laufás in Eyjafjörður is located by the estuary of the river Fnjóská and is a renowned church site and chieftain's residence. The site still has a vicarage and many remarkable clerics have served there. The farm is a good example of a wealthy vicarage in earlier times.



Goðafoss is one of the most spectacular waterfalls in Iceland. It is located in the Bárðardalur district of North-Central Iceland at the beginning of the Sprengisandur highland road. The water of the Skjálfandafjót river falls from a height of 12 metres over a width of 30 metres.



## THE MOST VALUABLE SERVANT

*A Journey Back in Time—with a Treasured Animal*

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

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



the museum places much emphasis on personal service. Visitors are guided through the exhibition and thereby given the opportunity to ask questions and chat. The exhibition is actually set in an old barn and guests are allowed to touch all the objects.

In addition, there is plenty of reading material, film footage and photographs to make the experience as vivid as possible. Guests also get to visit a nearby barn to meet the Icelandic horse ‘in person’ and can even mail a letter the way people did when horses were used by postmen. You



write the letter with a feather pen and are taught to fold it in the custom of old. You then stamp it with the centre’s seal and send it off to your loved ones. The centre is, at its core, an educational institution for research and communication of knowledge about the Icelandic horse and as such, accepts donations from those interested in supporting their work. —KB

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# SKAGAFJÖRÐUR'S TREASURE TROVE

*The rich heritage of the past is preserved to be enjoyed*



Skagafjörður Heritage Museum has exhibitions in four places: The old turf building at Glaumbær, Heritage House in Sauðárkrókur, Emigration Centre at Hofsóss and The Icelandic Horse History Centre.

Glaumbær turf farmhouse, with its many rooms, pieces of furniture and utensils is perhaps the most interesting exhibition for foreign visitors. "It is my favourite because visitors can walk into the building and explore each one of the rooms and its contents," says Sigríður Sigurðardóttir, the chief curator of Skagafjörður Heritage Museum.

### The Curator's Favourites

The Glaumbær turf farmhouse represents the final stage in the evolution of the Icelandic turf farmhouse, an evolution that is unique to Iceland.



"The evolution of the Icelandic farmhouse was influenced by the local lack of timber and its use to heat houses, the lack of locally available building material, and shortage of capital to spend on imported materials. Iceland is the only country in the world where you'll find a passage turf and stone house with A-framed wooden gables," says Sigríður.

### The Sum is Greater than the Parts

Research plays an important role at the Skagafjörður Heritage Museum. "We have a wide range of expertise in different fields.

There's a special department which is dedicated specifically to preservation, restoration and research. Our research is primarily archaeological, ethnological and historical in nature, which reflects the interest and education of the different specialists.

The current staff includes two archaeologists, ethnologist, a geographer, and a historian with further specialisations in human osteology, philosophy and ethnography.

Skagafjörður is a treasure trove when it comes to heritage studies and we strive to make our research available to laymen and specialists alike. We've looked at diverse topics such as the health and diet of ancient populations, settlement development, the church history, the craft of turf building and the history and development of horse-gear to name but a few things," says Sigríður.

### Four generations of watchmakers

The Heritage House in Sauðárkrókur is another one of Sigríður's favourite exhibitions within the museum. "The museum pays homage to blacksmiths, carpenters, saddle

makers and watchmakers". Yes, you read correctly—watchmakers.

The Danish king visited Iceland in 1907. Young J. Frank Michelsen was in the king's entourage. He returned to Sauðárkrókur in 1909 where he set up a shop selling jewellery, clocks and watches. Today, the fourth generation of Michelsen watchmakers have a shop in Reykjavík where they sell their own quality brand-name watches.

### Look at the Polar Bear

A stuffed 2 metre tall polar bear in a glass cage greets visitors at the Heritage House in Sauðárkrókur. "Visitors love looking at it, especially the children," says Sigríður. The 20 year-old male polar bear on display swam to Iceland from Greenland in June 2008. Sadly, it had to be put down after it

made a gesture to attack photographers and the general public who out of curiosity ventured too close.

"The interest in the animal was quite understandable because polar bears are a rare sight in Iceland." -SHV

### OPENING HOURS

The Heritage House  
Open 12-19, 1th June – 31th August  
Glaumbær Farm  
Open 9-18, 20th May-20th September



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# THE KLONDIKE OF THE ATLANTIC

## Siglufoður Remembers its Golden Age

Siglufoður is a small fishing town on the north coast of Iceland, about one hour's drive from Akureyri (sometimes referred to as the Capital of North Iceland). The town, which is a part of the Fjallabyggð municipality, is flanked by rugged mountains and blessed with a history that is quite literally rich. The town was once nicknamed the Klondike of the Atlantic – a reference to the famous gold producing region in Alaska. The gold in this case was an abundance of 'the silver of the sea', the herring, which gave the town its second nickname: The Herring Town. Today Siglufoður is a haven for hiking, sailing, fishing, skiing and other activities. You will also find a nice swimming pool there and a 9-hole golf course.

### Golden Age of Herring

The golden age of herring lasted just over 100 years, from 1867 to 1968. Icelanders generally refer to this era as the 'herring adventure'. The country was still impoverished and essentially an undeveloped Danish colony at the time, but the resulting economic boom helped to turn Iceland into a developed country – that ultimately led to its independence.

Initially, the boom was mostly confined to several towns in the north of the country, but later it also moved to towns in the eastern fjords. At times, the export of herring accounted for up to half of the country's total export income.

Siglufoður was at the forefront of this economic boom, and often the herring exports from this one town alone provided more than 20% of the country's total export income. As one would expect, given any kind of gold rush, the town blossomed and grew rapidly, fostering a colourful culture that is still remembered and honoured today.

### The Herring Era Museum

Siglufoður's ambitious Herring Era Museum is the largest industrial and marine museum in Iceland. It has five exhibition buildings, totaling 2,500 square metres, and it is most likely the only one of its kind in the world.

The town itself is a piece of history and the museum has essentially endeavoured to rebuild a part of the old town as it was during its heyday, complete with herring boats, a herring port, boatyard, and a herring factory. In addition, it puts on live re-enactments.

It won Iceland's Museum Award in 2000, and the Micheletti Award in 2004 as the best new industrial museum in Europe.

The museum is open daily from May through September, but can be visited any time of the year by request. Annually the Herring Era Museum welcomes about 22,000 visitors who travel to Siglufoður by car, bus or as passengers on a cruise ship. On special occasions the local herring girls re-enact the gutting and packing of herring into barrels, the same way it was done in the old days. This is followed by a dockside ball where the accordion player takes care of the music and visitors are welcome to join in on the fun!



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# WHERE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE MEET

One might think that life in a small remote fishing town would result in a reserved population vary of outsider influence. This is not the case in the town of Skagaströnd in the north-west of Iceland, where international artists mingle freely with local fishermen, creating a unique atmosphere where the past meets the present without judgment.



### Fish Is Life

Like many Icelandic towns Skagaströnd's history is centered around fishery, which is very much a part of Skagaströnd's identity today. The harbour is usually bustling with life with boats coming and going, people and forklifts moving about trying to get the fish from the boats and to the stores as quickly and securely as possible. Just watching the harbour life is an activity in itself, enjoyed by locals and visitors alike - just be careful not to get in the way. There is also a pleasant coffee shop, Kaffi Bjarmanes, in a renovated old house right by the seaside just across from the harbour, giving an excellent view of the harbour life, the ocean and the ever-watchful seabirds around.

### What Does the Future Bring?

The first documented settler in Skagaströnd was a woman named Þórdís who resided there in the late 10th century with substantial influence in her community. She was known to be a spirited and fierce woman, with the gift of prophecy, who made no compromises when it came to dealing with powerful men at the time and is noted as such in several of the Icelandic old Sagas. Although the people of her time might have been glad to be rid of her, present day inhabitants of Skagaströnd celebrate her legacy and have opened a museum in her honour.

There visitors are taken through her fascinating life with various exhibitions and artifacts - as well as given the chance to have their prophecy told. Another museum can be found in a charming tiny old house, named Árnes, which gives an impression of daily life in the early 20th century.

### Art and Fish

You might not think that modern day artists and small town fishermen would have much in common, but as it turns out they have co-existed in Skagaströnd with great success for several years now. The Nes Artist Residency was opened in 2008 and has resulted in a colourful atmosphere where past and present traditions find common ground. The mayor of Skagaströnd, Magnús B. Jónsson, says the success of the artist residency is a testament to the positivity and open-mindedness of the people of Skagaströnd. "We have all types of people coming here from all over the world and staying with us for extended periods of time working on their craft and the fact that it has gone seamlessly really says something about our community." Magnús says that the advent of the Nes Artist Residency has livened up the town and the creative atmosphere

has proven to be quite contagious. "Now it is not at all uncommon to have all sorts of happenings and events that would have seemed strange before, but are considered part of everyday life here in Skagaströnd." The town itself is also decorated with creative art. You'll find a very striking exhibition centered on the old Nordic gods made from scrap metal, carefully selected to represent each item. Loki, the god of mischief and deception, is for example made from an old manure spreader and Odinn, the highest god of all, is made from scraps from a power station. The Sunwatch is also a quite striking piece, made from four basalt columns that guide sunrays according to an old Icelandic time-telling tradition.

### Plenty to Do

A popular activity is hiking to the top of the mountain Spákonufell or along the sea cliffs at Spákonufellshöfði, which is where Þórdís resided and some even claim that her face can be seen petrified in the mountain.

Detailed trail descriptions and maps are available in town. You'll find a traditional Icelandic swimming pool in town, with the obligatory relaxing hot pot, a nine-hole golf course and Borgin, a restaurant in a unique log house with a maritime theme.

-VAG

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The widely popular ice cream store, Brynjuís in Akureyri.



Down by the harbour in beautiful summer.

# AKUREYRI HEART OF THE NORTH



The dozen inhabitants in 1786, clinging to the side of Eyjafjörður, Iceland's longest fjord, probably never imagined their brave struggle would ultimately result in 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 available 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 horse riding tours, boat trips, bird watching—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—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 venues, music of all genres, theatre 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 individuals, Akureyri offers such a wide range of activities, events and opportunities, it maximises 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 jaccuzzi 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 both 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 island of Hrísey, with its powerful healing energy and Grímsey, straddling the Arctic Circle, see volcanoes 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 drive twice a day between Reykjavik and Akureyri. The trip from Reykjavik to Akureyri takes about 6 hours,

although in the summer time you can choose a longer route over the highlands if you wish to turn your trip into a journey rich with sights and natural beauty.

The city 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. -ASF

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



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North Iceland's landscape is a thrill for photographers as the nature is quite astonishing. Hvítserkur, a 15 metre (49 feet) high basalt stack located in North Iceland is definitely a natural wonder.



## DINE WITH THE SADDLER

*One of the oldest houses in Akureyri has opened its doors for visitors*

Built in 1906, in what is now the centre of Akureyri's walking street, Kaffi Ilmur started out as a saddler's shop. Later, it became a goldsmith's, overlooking the fjord before the land was extended and more shops were built.

Today, after extensive restoration, the granddaughter of Ingimar, the saddler, has opened a café, enabling visitors to take a step back in time, surrounded by the original walls, pictures and furniture—as well as the

novel use of the former flooring and roof and some of the artifacts excavated from the area.

With the healthy lunches served upstairs and the delicious snacks served with the drinks downstairs, this is a winning combination that is very attractive to customers. On warm days, you can sit outside at the tables, sheltered from any wind.

It's easy to feel like you're eating with Ingimar, back in the early 1900's. It still

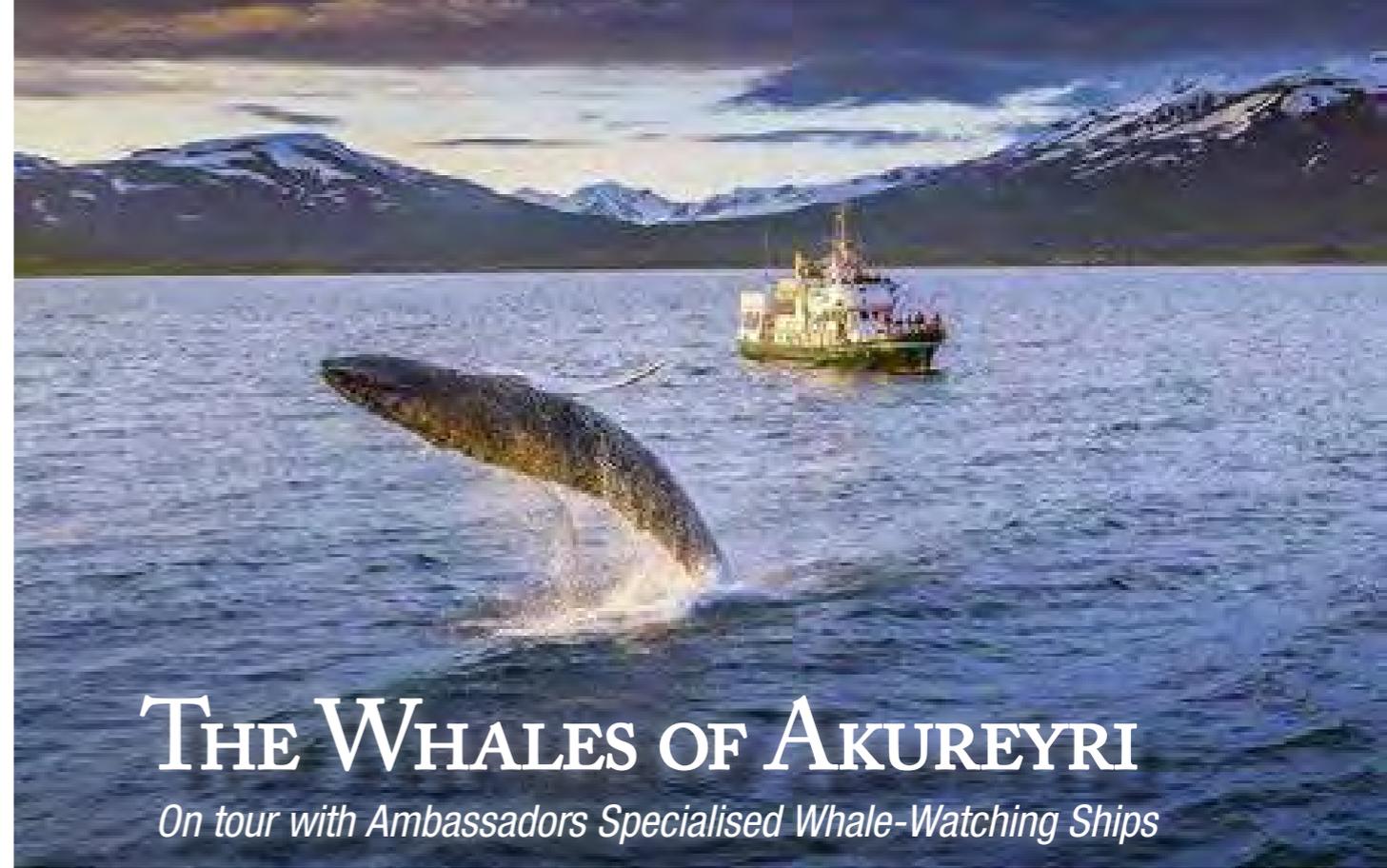
feels like his home. The lunches are designed to be both wholesome and healthy, whilst the snacks are both traditional Icelandic favourites and fresh creations.

It's a lovely spot to take a break from sightseeing or shopping while enjoying Eyjafjörður—the beautiful fjord in which Akureyri lies.

-ASF

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# THE WHALES OF AKUREYRI

*On tour with Ambassadors Specialised Whale-Watching Ships*

In their fourth year of scheduled tours, the Ambassadors whale-watching ships offer cruising through prime whale viewing areas in first class comfort on board. Departing daily, starting at 9:00 am, from Torfunefsbruggja harbour right in the heart of Akureyri - next to the Hof cultural house.

### The Whales' Home

At the fringe of the Arctic Circle, Akureyri is an area of outstanding natural beauty and home to all the species of whales found around the country. Dramatic landscapes, rich history and the wealth of species that choose to make it their home should place it on the „bucket list” list of anybody with an interest in the natural world.

Eyjafjörður, particularly, is home to Humpback Whales—gigantic animals that 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 Boats

As the name Ambassador refers to its function of connecting whales and humans,



it has great viewing facilities to do just that. Custom built for whale watching, the Ambassadors fast, stable and safe boats are led by professional guides that help to enrich their guests knowledge and understanding of the fjord's ecosystem, geology, history and folklore. Tours take roughly three hours, and being protected from winds and weather by the mountains, ensures that it's calmer than the open sea. Depending on the season there are number of departures per day.

### Tour Fact Sheet and Reviews

- Different whale watching platforms.
- 360° panorama from top deck.
- Commentary through on board sound-system.

- Heated indoor cabin with toilet facilities.
- Comfortable cushioned seats, tables and ample space.
- Light snacks, sandwiches, coffee, beer and soft drinks available on board.

While Ambassador tours seem like the perfect day-tours, the reviews on their website are a confirmation of that. In general, the customers feelings are like this; *“It was very impressive. I really did not expect to see that many whales! I recommend this tour to everybody.”*

- NNH/ASF

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# THE HIGHLANDS IN NORTH EAST ICELAND

*An enchanting wilderness awaits those willing to take the challenge*



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

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

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

## Near and Far Highlands

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

Mývatn area and the highland tract in the eastern part of Langanes point.

All these areas offer diverse landscapes and panoramic views of the surrounding scenery, an invigorating experience that inspires the traveller with a 'joie de vivre'.

The far highlands signify the highland terrain north of Vatnajökull glacier. Some would call this 'the real Icelandic

highlands' containing a large number of locations to enthrall those who love the wilderness and its adventures.

## The Highlands, in their stark beauty

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



Herðubreið mountain has been called the queen of Icelandic mountains.



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

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

In olden times, a common route between north and south Iceland lay across the rocky desert of Sprengisandur where Kiðagil was a popular place of rest, a kind of mountain oasis. The memory of this resting place has been rendered immortal by the following lines from a well-known Icelandic ballad by poet

Grímur Thomsen:

*If Kiðagil I could descend  
I'd give my best steed to that end.*

Dyngjufjöll mountains are located to the north of the Dyngjujökull glacier, which extends north from Vatnajökull. This is a barren mountain cluster encircling the 50 km<sup>2</sup> Askja caldera. Subsidence in Askja's south-east corner has formed a smaller caldera now filled by Öskjuvatn, one of Iceland's deepest lakes, with a maximum depth of 220 metres. The Víti crater next to Öskjuvatn was formed in a

huge explosive volcanic eruption in 1875. The warm water in the crater is suitable for bathing and is popular with visitors.

## Queen of the Mountains

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

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

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



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

# ICELAND'S WHALE POPULATION IS CHANGING

*Researchers find significant change in whale numbers in Iceland's waters*

The whale populations around Iceland are changing in both location and size, and some researchers attribute the changes to rising sea temperatures. Whales are a familiar presence and cetaceans are important predators in Icelandic waters with a total of 23 species recorded of which 12–14 species are considered regular inhabitants.

The different species that have been seen off the coasts of the island include blue, fin, minke, pilot, humpback, sei, orca, sperm, bottlenose, beluga, and narwhal whales as well as white-beaked dolphins, white-sided dolphins and harbour porpoises.

## Dramatic changes

Researchers have monitored the distribution and abundance of cetaceans in the Central and Eastern North Atlantic regularly for nearly 30 years. They have been studying the changes in their distribution and abundance around Iceland—and the changes are significant.

There have been some changes among baleen whale numbers. Over the past 30 years, some stocks have grown, others have decreased, and others have moved to different waters. In fact, significant changes in the distribution and abundance of several whale species have occurred in the

North Atlantic during this time period. The abundance of humpback and fin whales has increased from just 1,800 to 11,600 and 15,200 to 20,600, respectively, in the period 1987–2007. Fin whales and humpbacks have increased in number since 1987, when more exact counting of their numbers began. At the same time, blue whales have moved into more northern waters, which is attributable to warming sea temperatures further south. In contrast, the abundance of minke whales along Iceland's coasts has decreased rather dramatically from around 44,000 in 2001 to 20,000 in 2007 and just 10,000 in 2009.



## Physical variables affecting numbers

The physical variables impacting cetacean numbers include ocean temperature, depth and salinity. The increase in fin whale abundance was accompanied by the expansion of their distribution into the deep, vast waters of the Irminger Sea. The distribution of the endangered blue whale has shifted north during this period. The habitat selection of fin whales was analysed with respect to physical variables, and the results suggest that their abundance was influenced by an interaction between the

physical variables of depth and distance, but also by the sea surface temperature and height. However, the changes in cetacean distribution and abundance may also be a response to their food supplies, as capelin populations move further north and the sand eel population has collapsed.

## Minke whales

The estimates of minke whales from 1987–2009 around Iceland varied widely. Their numbers increased appreciably between 1987 and 2001. However, the survey in

2007 revealed a reduction in minke whale abundance to less than half that of 2001 and an extra aerial survey conducted in 2009 showed even further decline in numbers. Thus, the decrease in common minke whale abundance in the Icelandic continental shelf area seems to be related to the decrease in the abundance of their preferred prey species, sand eel in the southern part and capelin in the northern part. The trend is concerning.

## Reasons for change

Significant oceanographic changes have occurred in Icelandic waters since the mid-1990s, including a rise in ocean water temperature. Although the exact causes remain unclear, these changes appear to have caused a northward shift in the distribution of several fish species, a decrease in krill numbers and a total collapse in the sand eel population off the coasts of Iceland. Considerable changes in distribution and abundance of several whale species are apparent from the series of cetacean surveys dating back to 1986.



# 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 Red-necked Phalaropes*



*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



*A drake Harlequin Duck*

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 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.

- JÓH



*Pair of Harlequins on the fast flowing water of River Laxá*

# 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 reaches of the River Laxá; these species breed nowhere else in Europe but Iceland.



Great Northern Diver calling

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 Reykjahlíð

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 Reykjahlíð 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 Reykjahlíð, 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



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

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 in the reeds right by the path, and a range



An aggressive Long-tailed Duck drake

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 Álfagerði, 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

Images by © Jóhann Óli Hilmarsson



# EAST *Iceland*

**T**iny, tight-knit communities extend a warm welcome here. A well-developed infrastructure, with regular flights from Reykjavík to Egilsstaðir, the main hub of the area, enable visitors to enjoy the beauty of the region. The ferry from Europe docks at the 19th century town of Seyðisfjörður, making the East a good starting point for a holiday. Tours of all types take visitors to Europe’s largest glacier, stark highland mountains and sweet-smelling heathlands and, for fishing and kayaking, to mirror-smooth fjords. The hiking nature-lover can discover countless spectacular routes, with frequent waterfalls and reindeer sightings.

The beauty of this area has drawn artists and designers to the little towns, which have developed their own cultural flavour, many with a strong European—and especially, French or Norwegian—influence. There is a long history of folklore here. Borgarfjörður eystri is known as the capital of the elves. It’s also an area of hiking trails and birdwatching, with puffins being especially plentiful. Brilliantly coloured semi-precious stones are found in the mountains and Petra’s Stone Museum in Stöðvarfjörður holds probably the world’s largest private collection. The numerous hotels, guesthouses and camping areas attest to the rising popularity of the area.



#EASTICELAND



Djúpivogur is a small town and municipality (Djúpavogshreppur) located on a peninsula in eastern Iceland, near the island of Papey and on the fjord Berufjörður.



Hamarsfjörður in the evening sun.



Strýta Farmhouse.



The town of Seyðisfjörður has flourishing art scene, hiking trails and beautiful waterfalls.

# STUNNING ÞÓRSHÖFN



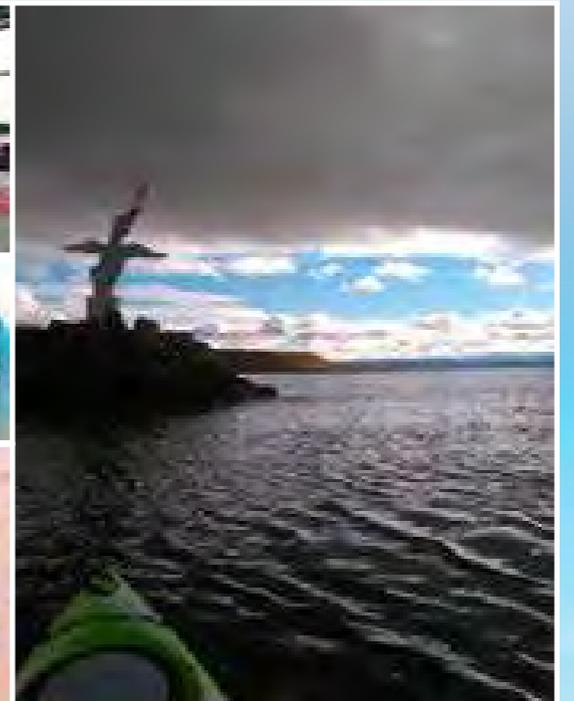
*Visit this northern village for outdoor activities and a terrific meal at Bárán Restaurant*

Þórshöfn is a charming fishing village on the coast of the Langanes Peninsula, a beautiful slice of northeast Iceland. Travellers love to visit the village for its remoteness. Þórshöfn is as far as you can get from Keflavik International Airport—so no crowds of tourists—just nature, rich birdlife and a variety of outdoor activities.

Langanes is a 40km long, narrow peninsula with a sloping coastal landscape with steep sea cliffs that is ideal for birdwatching and photography. Here, you are likely see puffins, gannets and terns.

Bárán Restaurant, which is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, is one of the best restaurants in the north. The cosy restaurant has a warm, friendly atmosphere and focuses on fresh, local ingredients, emphasising fish and shellfish from local fishermen. Diners can also enjoy soups, salads, sandwiches, burgers and pizza. There's an outdoor deck overlooking the harbour that's an ideal spot to enjoy a meal and a beer. In fact, Bárán has an impressive beer menu, with more than 17 beers from Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

Bárán Restaurant's owners operate kayaking tours in Þórshöfn and Langanes, as well as to Skálar and Fontur. Many different sea birds,



seals and sometimes, whales can be seen while sailing the crystal clear water from May to August. It's possible to fish during the tour and the restaurant can prepare your catch to your liking. Put Þórshöfn on your itinerary. -JG



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# Vopnafjörður



## 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 Skjól fjörur,

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 wooden houses surrounded by rocky cliffs and islets, lies on the small Kolbeinstangi peninsula. It was one of Iceland's major commercial harbours in the 18th and 19th 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 19th and early 20th 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 20th 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 the Selá. -NNH/ASF





## EGILSSTAÐIR – CENTER OF EAST ICELAND

*Where natural beauty and scenic attractions are characterised by forests*

Fljótsdalshérað region on the East Coast of Iceland is home to a progressive, energetic society, in harmony with the special environment of the area. Famous for its natural beauty and pleasant climate, often resembling that of the European continent, Fljótsdalshérað is characterised by forests—rather exceptional in Iceland.

The landscape is amazingly diverse, reaching from sandy estuary shores (Hérðassandar) and steep ocean cliffs to mountains and the great Vatnajökull glacier. It is adorned with raging waterfalls, tranquil lakes and picturesque rivers contributing to the many scenic attractions making it so favourable for outdoor recreation.

### Plentiful nature

Fljótsdalshérað has numerous enjoyable hiking routes through forests and open areas and trips into nearby mountain ranges are popular regardless of the time of year. It offers a rich selection of fauna, outstanding opportunities for bird-watching and a unique chance to view reindeer in Iceland. Berries and mushrooms grow plentifully. Anglers seek out the lakes and rivers for trout or salmon fishing while sportsmen enjoy one of Iceland's most exciting hunting areas. It is also home to the huge Kárahnjúkar Hydroelectric Power

Plant—an excellent example of human innovation and engineering.

Fljótsdalshérað is a friendly community of 3,500 inhabitants, living in several communities. Amongst them is the lovely Egilsstaðir by the Lagarfliót lake, which is home to Iceland's most renowned water monster, Lagarfliótsormur (The Lagarfliot Wurm). First sighted in 1345, the monster is adored by the Icelanders and thus, has never had a reason to move away. After reigning for several centuries, the Wurm appears to have a kindly disposition, filling those who sight him with joy, rather than fear—and he is not shy of attention. There are numerous sightings of the Wurm each year and he has already earned his fame on YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OmyyHyya64>

Find out on  
[www.visitegilsstadir.is](http://www.visitegilsstadir.is)

### Popular destination

The inhabitants of the region of Lake Lagarfliot have an annual festival in late August named after the monster. Called Ormsteiti, it is a full week of exhibitions, concerts, celebrations and gatherings with a little bit of carnival style. The lake monster, of course, is in the spotlight the whole week, appearing or not.

Throughout the year, Fljótsdalshérað is a popular destination for Icelanders as well as foreign tourists. The area has excellent amenities for the visitors who can enjoy splendid restaurants and hotels while enjoying the various cultural and natural features.

All hotels and guesthouses in the area can be recommended—and the camping sites are also well equipped and very nice.

Make sure to check out Fljótsdalshéraðs website; [www.visitegilsstadir.is](http://www.visitegilsstadir.is) -SS



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Egilsstaðir



# HÚS HANDANNA - THE ENTRANCE OF THE EAST

*TIC and Local Art and Design*

**E**gilsstaðir 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 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 Center. 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.

### Food Souvenirs

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 quite a few in Hús Handanna, perfect for tickling your tastebuds. -SP



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# THE EAST ICELAND HERITAGE MUSEUM

*Appreciating the life and times of a bygone era in East Iceland*

**T**he East Iceland Heritage Museum in Egilsstaðir showcases life as it was in the bygone era of Iceland’s rural society where self-sufficiency was essential to survival.

On display is a traditional ‘baðstofa’ -or communal living/sleeping room, taken from an authentic Icelandic turf house that was inhabited until as late as 1964. Visitors are encouraged to step into the ‘baðstofa’ and experience the nostalgia of life as it was in days gone by.

The museum prides itself, however, on its permanent reindeer exhibition.

Found only in East Iceland, the rather shy and sometimes elusive wild reindeer have a mystical air about them and contribute to the area’s sense of identity. With their numbers on the increase, it is possible to see them as they descend from

their feeding grounds at higher elevations in summer, to lower elevation grasslands nearer the coast in winter.

The Heritage Museum guides visitors through the history of the reindeer settlement in Iceland, their behaviour, characteristics and habits, a look at hunting regulations and, in short, everything you need to know about reindeer in Iceland. This is a unique opportunity to learn about these fascinating creatures, via a variety of displays and multi-media presentations that bring the exhibit to life.

The exhibition commemorates two the reindeer enthusiasts, Helgi Valtýsson, writer, and Eðvarður Sigurgeirsson, photographer and filmmaker. In an effort to shed light on the plight of the Icelandic reindeer, the pair tracked the movements of various herds from 1939 to 1944.

Eðvarður’s film, “In Reindeer Territory”, is available for viewing at the exhibition.

Visitors are also invited to watch a new documentary about Icelandic reindeer and a short animated film based on a section of the book, Independent People by Halldór Laxness, a twentieth-century Icelandic writer and Nobel Prize winner. -SP

**Admission: Adults (18+) 1,000 ISK**  
**Opening hours: 1 June to 31 August**  
**Mon-Fri: 11:30-19:00.**  
**Sat-Sun: 10:30-18:00.**  
**Winter: Thur-Fri: 11:00-16:00**

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# BREIÐDALSVÍK – THE HIDDEN GEM OF EAST ICELAND

*Hótel Bláfell and Travel East Company join forces to make your visit memorable*

Cosy Hótel Bláfell lies by the harbour in the tiny fishing village of Breiðdalsvík, on Iceland's fjord-strewn east coast. The family-run, log cabin style hotel is imbued with the scent of fresh pine that greets you as you enter. In the common room, guests relax on lovely sprawling leather sofas with a nice cup of tea, or make use of the free wi-fi. Choose between any one of 41 recently renovated standard, family or deluxe rooms, all with private bath, TV and telephone. The hotel is known for its down-to-earth home-style cooking, offering guests a full menu of satisfying traditional



Icelandic and international favourites. Owner Friðrik Árnason and his staff are more than happy to help with suggestions of what to see and do in the area.

## The Old Co-Op Café, Mini-Market and Tourist Information Centre

The village's former general store, known as The Old Co-Op has been renovated into a charming supermarket and café, complete with a wide selection of groceries and souvenirs, plus a tourist information centre and free wi-fi.

The interiors have been decorated with recycled and vintage findings from the local area and pay tribute to the history of the house and its connection to the village. This gives The Old Co-Op an old-fashioned and cosy feel. The café menu has light dishes ranging from sandwiches to salads as well as home-baked breads and pastries. Everything is freshly made – a trademark of the restaurant at Hotel Bláfell.



Photo: Páll Jökull

## A Most Fascinating Museum

The Old Co-Op is also Breiðdalsvík's oldest building, dating from 1906, and houses the district's heritage and geology museum. Here, the lives and works of two of Breiðdalur's most famous scholars are showcased: Stefán Einarsson, prolific writer, linguist and grammarian and the world-renowned British volcanologist Dr. George P. Walker who spent many years doing research in and around Breiðdalur valley. Both men received the distinguished Order of the Falcon, Iceland's highest honour, for their work.



## The Broad Valley of Breiðdalur

Breiðdalur valley shares in the rich heritage of East Iceland that is often overlooked by mainstream tourists. As one of Iceland's hidden treasures, the wide and verdant valley is just begging to be explored. Uncountable waterfalls descend from Breiðdalur's many peaks, and a 'private' waterfall is to be found on just about every farm in the valley.

## Discover East Iceland with Travel East

What better way to get to know East Iceland than with Travel East, the tour company that knows the area best? Travel East is run by a small team of local tour guides who were born and raised in East Iceland and have extensive experience in mountain guiding as well as in search and rescue work.

Travel East offers small group tours with a focus on slow travel and personalised guiding.



An exciting way to experience East Iceland in winter is with Travel East's 'Super jeep' tours. Super jeeps are specially modified 4x4 vehicles that are able to easily navigate the Icelandic winter landscape. The company offers a selection of unforgettable highland adventures where you will see some of the most unique and unspoiled winter landscapes in Iceland.

If catching the Northern Lights is on your 'must see' list of things to do whilst in Iceland, be sure to ask about Travel East's very popular Northern Lights tour. In summer, check out Travel East's-Sea-day tour that allows you to step back in time aboard a traditional oak fishing vessel and sail around the islands of Breiðdalsvík bay. You can get to try your hand at sea angling,



and should you so desire, your catch can be expertly prepared for dinner by the chefs at Hótel Bláfell. Observe seals in their natural habitat on nearby islands and enjoy the spectacle of thousands of puffins that nest in the area on this fabulous summer sailing day tour in Breiðdalsvík bay.

Enchanting East Iceland welcomes you!

-EMV

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Common Shelduck, drake



Northern Shoveler, pair



Sanderling in summer plumage



Black Guillemot



Red-throated Divers displaying

# A BIRDWATCHER'S PARADISE

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

The municipality of Djúpivogur (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 Djúpivogur. The coastal lowlands are sparsely populated by sheep farmers, and most of the inhabitants live in a small fishing village, Djúpivogur.

The area around Djúpivogur 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 Djúpivogur, 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 Djúpivogur 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 Djúpivogur.

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 Djúpivogur is [www.birds.is](http://www.birds.is)

*Text and photos Jóhann Óli Hilmarsson.*

# THE GATEWAY TO EAST ICELAND

## Djúpivogur Municipality is Cittaslow

Located on a peninsula in south eastern Iceland, near the island of Papey and on the fjord Berufjörður, lies the beautiful town of Djúpivogur.

The whole of Djúpivogur municipality (Djúpavogshreppur) is enclosed by magnificent nature as fjords cut into the coast and waves of the North Atlantic Ocean crash on the shores. Surrounded by a variety of small islands, skerries,

with vegetated valleys - and even a few glaciers.

An area, perhaps isolated, but bursting with amazing history and great stories. Where nature awareness is a big part of life and the community is not ready to accept the fast lifestyle accommodating larger places.

Where an air of serenity occupies the land and the living.



is available for those longing to enjoy nature on foot. Extensive development has taken place in the region for the past years and will continue - as paths, signs and other landmarks are being prepared and put up.

Large groups of reindeer are around for a large part of the year and seals can be found sprawling around the coastline.

Nature conservation in Djúpivogur is an important topic – the community being the first municipality to protect invertebrate fauna, e.g. the *Agabus uliginosus*, which is a species of beetle native to the Palearctic, including Europe.

While the area is widely known for its cultural and natural sites, Teigarhorn has to be the most famous nature conservatory. It is renowned worldwide for its zeolites and the sight of the crystals in their natural

### Nature at its Richest

Nature plays a big part of life in Djúpivogur. Birdwatching is extremely popular as wetlands offer diverse birdlife, hiking paths are all over and a special, well detailed map



rocky points or rock reefs, the location offers a refreshing look at Icelandic nature. Family friendly sand-beaches, both black, light and slightly red in colour, exquisite waterfalls, magnificent mountains along



surroundings is quite amazing. The area of Teigarhorn is preserved since 1975, when declared a national monument and protected by the Nature Conservation Act.

Djúpivogur municipality's most famous artwork is the Eggs of Gleðivík, which is an outdoor artwork made by the Icelandic artist Sigurður Guðmundsson. The artwork consists of 34 eggs, one representing each of the species of local birds. The eggs are all similar in size except for one, which is the largest one and belongs to the red-throated diver, the characteristic bird of Djúpivogur.



### History Every Step of the Way

In Djúpavogshreppur, history is at every footstep. The old Icelandic sagas mention the existence of Irish monks called Papar living on the island Papey before the settlers came, as well as the wintering of the Norwegian viking Ingólfur Arnarson and his foster brother Hjørleifur in Álftafjörður fjord. Ingólfur Arnarson later became the first permanent settler of Iceland. Treasures have been found in the area by Bragðavellir, containing Roman coins since 300 A.D, shedding a light on Roman ships arriving on the shores of Iceland. More recent sources reveal the arrival of merchants from

Hamburg settling in Djúpivogur in 1589, the terrible abductions of many of the area's residents by pirates from Morocco and Algeria in 1627, and a flourishing fishing industry in Djúpivogur.

### Cittaslow - Live in the Moment

Djúpavogshreppur has been part of the Cittaslow movement since 2013 and its residents are known for being both grounded and mindful of their surroundings. Cittaslow is an organisation founded in 1999 in Italy, which goals include improving the quality of life in towns by slowing down its overall pace, focusing especially on a city's use of spaces and the flow of life and traffic

through them. Cittaslow is part of a cultural trend known as the slow movement and their logo is a promise of quality. The Local Supporters of Cittaslow - Djúpavogshreppur use the Cittaslow logo as a seal of approval for products preferably originated in the county, whether it is food, craft or something else.

### "Forget Reykjavík, this is the Real Iceland"

With a population of roughly 450 people, the local families flourish.

Djúpivogur schools are Green Flag Schools and great emphasis is placed on creating an attractive and supportive community where eco-friendly businesses are supported.

In summing up life in Djúpivogur, one poignant phrase written by an enthusiastic blogger comes to mind:

*"Forget Reykjavík, this is the Real Iceland".*

-SP





# SOUTH *Iceland*

The wealth of South Iceland lies in the variety of geological, historical and nature sites along with the long list of activities that can be experienced in the region. This region has geological wonders such as Geysir; the waterfalls of Gullfoss, Háifoss, Skógafoss, Systra and Seljalandsfoss; Þingvellir, where the tectonic plates crack the Earth; Europe's largest glacier, Vatnajökull; the Kerið caldera; world-famous volcanos like Hekla, 'the Gateway to Hell', Lakagígar, Laki, the notorious Eyjafjallajökull and the Katla Geopark; fantasy sites like Þórsmörk and Jökulsárlón.

Here are historical sites like the world's longest-

running parliament at Þingvellir; museums, churches, the Stöng settlement, the Saga centre and villages like Eyrarbakki. Activities abound. Tours take you to all the sites, including the glaciers. Horse riding tours are popular. Try the riverjet, boat trips or kayaking; scuba diving in clear waters, fishing or caving. Independent travellers can try hiking and cycling, camping or caravanning. Winter activities are just as thrilling. Fortunately, there is plenty of accommodation available throughout the region from camping to high-class hotels and restaurants to suit every taste. A developed infrastructure helps you get the most from your trips.



#SOUTHICELAND

Vestra-Horn, a 454 metre-high mountain and an interesting geology site composed of unstratified plutonic rock, mostly gabbro but with some granophyre. East of the mountain is a strange-shaped outcrop called Brunnhorn that stretches out to sea.



Ice Cave in South Iceland.



The wreck of a plane at Sólheimasandur.



Twilight over the Glacier Lagoon.



Traveling South Iceland is nothing short of an amazing experience.



## ÁRNESINGA FOLK MUSEUM

*Where history of community and culture become one*

Filled with old memories, Húsið (“The House”) at Eyrarbakki was built when danish merchants were allowed to overwinter in Iceland for the first time. Transported to Iceland in kit form in 1765, it is a timber structure, comprising two storeys and an attic. The extension to the west of The House is known as Assistentahúsið (The Assistants’ House) while north from the Assistants House is the „Egg House“ formerly used for a large collection of birds and eggs in 1890-1926, now used as an exhibition space.

Today these buildings house the Árnésinga Folk Museum where visitors can experience

past items and learn about the remarkable history of the building. Merchant families lived in the House for almost two centuries over which period the House was the centre for art and European culture in Iceland; fashion, music and literature spread from there throughout the country.

The House underwent repairs and alterations during the period 1979 to 1995, with the objective of restoring it to its original form, then purchased by The Icelandic Treasury in 1992 and opened it to public in 1995 as The Árnæssýsla Folk Museum.

Exhibitions in the House have been designed to show the building at its best. The museum is inevitably affected by its environment, and so part of the museum focuses on the House and its inhabitants. Another museum worth the visit is Sjöminjasafnið á Eyrarbakka, the museum of maritime history in Eyrarbakki. It can be found near the House. The museum takes the visitor back to old times in a small Icelandic fishing village. On display is a fine collection of artifacts connected with fisheries, crafts, social and cultural life of the common people during the last 150 years. -SP



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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 langoustine cracker and fork that come with the dish.

The menu was created and developed by the French chef Jacques DuPont and his many dishes such as the beautifully presented 'Mix of Whole Langoustine and Tails' and the famous 'Black Magic Sauce' have been very successful. Paired with one of Humarhöfnin's specially selected wines, you are in line for an



absolute feast. Also on the menu, the arctic char is a delight. The crème brûlée, made from local eggs and imported Madagascar vanilla will have you swooning and you might want or need to order a double portion.

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

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

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## EATING WELL IN HÖFN

*Kaffi Hornið Hits the Spot*

**K**affi 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.

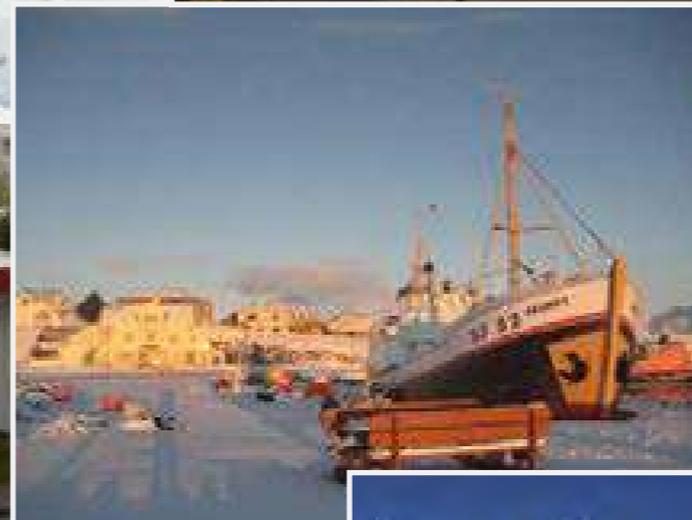
**Not to be missed**

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. -EMV

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# SLEEP UNDER THE GLACIER

*In the Town of Höfn, You'll Sleep Below the Mighty Vatnajökull*



In the kingdom of the Vatnajökull region, silence and grace surround the harbour town of Höfn, as scenic views of the glacier astonish passers by. The domineering presence of Europe's largest glacier leaves people quite amazed—especially when they learn of the community in Höfn living in such close proximity to this huge sheet of ice.

Despite its name, which indicates a fjord, Hornafjörður itself is a very large lagoon with a blend of fresh and glacial water. The town of Höfn in Hornafjörður, located on a peninsula in this south-eastern part of Iceland is surrounded on three sides by the

sea, with beaches on the long shoreline on the south-east. Sand bars and glacial rivers spread across the area with many shifting lagoons.

## Transforming Old into New

In early Spring 2011, Halldór Birgisson and Cristiane Oliveira started remodelling an old building. It has now been completely rebuilt as a stylish accommodation in the Höfn Inn Guesthouse. The restoration was completed perfectly, thanks to dedicated builders and the outcome, according to both guests and owners, is truly excellent. Located beside a petrol station on Route 1, this

new property offers 24-hour check-in, free Wi-Fi and parking. Rooms are particularly large—including one sufficient for a family or group of four—with a character all their own, shaped by colourful art on the walls and seats moulded to look like hands.

The floor gives the feel of walking on a smooth pebbled beach, being made from stones found on Höfn's beaches.

This sense of style originates with owner, Cristiane, who hails from Brazil, who wanted to add something different to the décor. All the rooms have an en-suite bathroom, wireless Internet access, flat-screen TV and DVD player. The breakfast

buffet includes cereals, bread, cold cuts, along with hot and cold drinks.

## A Guesthouse in Town

Guesthouse Hvammur is another beautiful guesthouse—owned by the same couple since 1999—in the centre of the town, with views over the harbour and glaciers to the west.

There are 20 single, double or triple rooms and some which can accommodate a family. All rooms have cable TV and washbasin.

## Hiking the Wilderness

The area surrounding Höfn has some of the most stunning nature in Iceland. Vatnajökull National Park and Jökulsárlón Glacier Lagoon are less than 1 hour's drive.

Many great hiking locations are in the area and most mountains other than the very highest can be safely hiked in good weather. Northeast of Höfn is Lónsöræfi, a wilderness which is one of Iceland's great hiking areas—perfect for day-long hikes. Lónsöræfi is a part of Vatnajökull National Park, but not easily accessible from any other part of the park.

Staff, both at Guesthouse Höfn Inn and Guesthouse Hvammur are more than happy to help arrange activities such as hiking, horse riding and bird watching. Höfn is the perfect place to base from when visiting South Iceland and the staff at both guesthouses are pleased to be of service. -SP

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# VISIT VATNAJÖKULL

Europe's Largest Glacier Region

The region directly beneath the Vatnajökull glacier is a 260km long, narrow stretch of land that reaches from the west of Skaftafell National Park to the town of Höfn on its eastern border. The lives of people in the region have been shaped and moulded according to the dictates of nature. Until as recently as the 1970s, it 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 on farms scattered throughout the region.

## A Photographer's Dream

Driving through this enchanting 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, excluding the polar icecaps. It boasts the highest elevation in Iceland: Hvannadalshnúkur at 2,115 metres 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 under 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

Do not forget the not-to-be-missed annual fireworks extravaganza at Jökulsárlón in the middle of 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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## DISCOVER AN ICE-BLUE WORLD

Jökulsárlón Boat Tours tours Jökulsárlón Glacial Lagoon

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

## Sail Among the Icebergs

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

## A Waffle with a View

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

## The Show of Fire and Ice

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



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

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

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

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# THE SIMPLE LIFE OF THE ICELANDIC COUNTRYSIDE

Should you happen to be travelling on a tight budget during your holiday to Iceland, then finding inexpensive accommodation can sometimes be challenging. The newly opened Ljósafossskóli Hostel with its down to earth simplicity in the heart of the Grímsnes district near Þingvellir, caters to all those who must be mindful of expenses.

### Reminders From the Past

Originally built as a boarding school in the 1940s, this former centre of education served up to 50 pupils in its heyday. Once overflowing with chattering students, the now quiet building retains a certain stature with its wide passageways and graceful curving stairways, giving it an unpretentious and typically Scandinavian look and feel. Brightly coloured stained glass windows in the main foyer were crafted and installed by the students themselves and stand out against the stark white walls, serving as a charming reminder of the guest house's pedagogical past.



### The Premises

A modern wing was added in 1994, and it is here that you will find a fully equipped kitchen that guests are welcome to make full use of, as well as a spacious dining hall which overlooks a well maintained indoor football (soccer) pitch/ basketball court, also free for guests to use.

Ljósafossskóli Hostel is ideal for school groups and offers bunk bed and twin bed sleeping arrangements in private rooms on the first floor and more bunk beds in the downstairs dormitory. A large family sized room that sleeps up to six is also available. A buffet style continental breakfast is served in the dining room and is included in the room price. All rooms have shared facilities.

### Ás Holiday Home

For those who prefer more spacious and private quarters, Ljósafossskóli Hostel also offers a fully furnished 4 bedroom/ 2 bath house, "Ás Holiday Home" which sits just a hundred metres from the main building. Completely refurbished in a modern and relaxing style, the house is perfect for families and includes a self-contained kitchen, bed linens, towels, sleeping up to 8 people. Ljósafossskóli Hostel is well situated with easy access to nearby natural attractions—Geysir–55km, Þingvellir –20km, Selfoss–20km, Reykjavík–70km and around 100km from Keflavík International Airport. -HP

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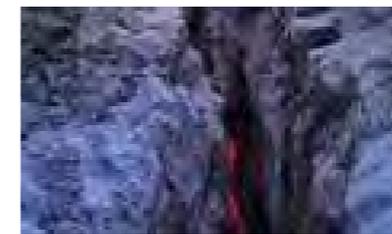
## A FOUR STAR TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

South Iceland Tourist Information Centre, Hveragerði

Located inside Hveragerði's Sunnu-mörk shopping centre, the spacious Tourist Information Centre is one of the most interesting and informative in Iceland.

Open all year round, it is home to a riveting geological exhibition detailing the aftermath of the 6.3 earthquake that shook the town on 29th May, 2008.

The free exhibition shows the damage



to buildings and the environment and contains an earthquake simulator that allows visitors to experience for themselves how a 6.6 earthquake feels.

### A shopping centre on two continents

While the ground was being prepared for the building of the shopping centre, a large crack running deep in the earth was discovered on the site. Instead of moving to another location or scrapping their plans, it was decided to build the shopping centre right over the rift that was discovered to be a part of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge.

The exposed crack is now visible through glass panels in the floor, creating a very unique natural feature to the centre.

### A post office within

Inside the Tourist Information Centre you will find a variety of useful detailed maps and brochures from around Iceland as well as helpful personnel who are on hand to answer your questions or even help you organize your trip around the country.

Glossy coffee-table books about Iceland are available to purchase, as well as souvenirs and postcards that can be sent on the spot from the post office conveniently located right inside the information centre.

- EMV

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 www.hveragerdi.is

# JÖKULSÁRGLJÚFUR VATNAJÖKULL NATIONAL PARK

*Shaping the landscape from glacier to sea*



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

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

merging with the sea in Öxarfjörður bay. On its long journey, the river has carved numerous channels into the highland bedrock and, to the west of Hólsfjöll, it cascades from a tall rocky ledge, forming the huge Dettifoss waterfall, plunging

into magnificent canyons which extend all the way down to the bridge over the river on highway 85. The canyons (Icelandic: gljúfur), which take their name from the river, Jökulsárgljúfur, are approximately 25 km long, half a kilometre wide and in several locations, they extend to a depth of over 100 metres.

### Awesome beauty

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

### Vatnajökull National Park

A National Park was established in Jökulsárgljúfur canyons and the



© Gunnar Jóhannesson



© Frank Bradford

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

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

Among renowned pearls of the park, in addition to above-mentioned waterfalls are Vesturdalur, Hljóðaklettur, Hólmatungur and Ásbyrgi. All those natural phenomena—canyons, gullies, and rock formations of diverse shapes and sizes are

primarily formed by volcanic activity and huge glacial melt water floods in Jökulsá.

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

### Great hiking trails

The National Park is ideal for walks and outdoor recreation, especially for those who are not in a hurry, since a number of days are needed to learn to enjoy the

richness and diverse character of the area. There is a marked footpath through the park, between Dettifoss and Ásbyrgi which takes nearly two days to traverse. However, many shorter routes can be selected, radiating out from the park's main destinations.

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

# HIGH ON NATURE IN ÁRSALIR

You Get the Kick with Kolbrún in Vík



Kolbrún is also an artist and a poet. She is not always traditional in her work. She uses, for example, driftwood from the beach by Hjørleifshöfði. She is also a teacher and advocate for protecting the natural environment and promoting local sustainable development. So you can say that Kolbrún is a woman with many faces. *-KB*

I am a nature freak and I try to assist my guests, who are interested in exploring the beautiful and powerful nature in Vík í Mýrdal and surrounding areas," says Kolbrún Hjørleifsdóttir, the owner of the Ársalir guesthouse in Vík í Mýrdal. And Kolbrún truly can. She guides people around the area and also through the Katla Geopark.

protect the natural environment, promote local sustainable development, introduce local culture and place a strong emphasis on nature tourism. The geopark is 9542 sq km or around 9.3% of the total area of Iceland with a population of around 2700.

Katla is Iceland's most powerful volcano which sleeps under the thick ice blanket of Mýrdalsjökull.

Katla Geopark is Iceland's first geopark and it opens up a natural wonderland to the visitor. A top priority of the park is to

### Personal and Friendly Atmosphere

Ársalir is designed by the most famous architect in Iceland, Guðjón Samúelsson. It was built in 1947 and stands by the Víkurá river. The interior is much like it was in the old days.

There are 10 rooms available, with made-up beds and sleeping bag accommodation, either in dorms or in double rooms. Some of the double rooms with made-up beds can be changed into triples. Breakfast is served and guests can also use the kitchen to prepare a meal and sit together.

"I try to give my guests as much service as I can. The atmosphere in the kitchen is often very friendly and the discussion lively", says Kolbrún.

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 +354 487 1400  
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 kolbrun@vik.is  
 www.visitvik.is/listings/arsalir-gesthouse

Photos: Þórir N Kjartansson



# SUÐUR-VÍK RESTAURANT

Food, Culture, Nature and History Combined



Every visitor has a unique take on what makes a destination interesting; some come for the nature, others for the food, some for the culture and history and others for the people. The stately Suður-Vík restaurant in Vík í Mýrdal combines all of these and more with splendid views over picturesque rock pillars in the ocean, locally-made delicacies, historical building and being a local family owned business.

### Making History

The house itself is positioned on a hill with a panoramic view. It's one of Vík's oldest houses, built in 1902. The house has been owned by the community for decades and has been an integral part of the it during that time. It has been utilised as a music school, retirement home, kindergarten and various other communal uses. The interiors capture the building's history with romantic furniture and

decoration, which makes for a very peaceful and warm place to be – with a rich sense of history in the air.

You might say Suður-Vík imaginatively blends past, present and different cultures, as the restaurant is based around local materials and traditions with a modern twist, with the welcome addition of Thai influences.

The restaurant is owned by local brother and sister Óðinn Gíslason and Þorgerður Gísladóttir, and Óðinn's wife Phatharawadee Saithong, most often called Ben, who brings the influence of her Thai origins.

### The Best Pizza in the County

The family tries to gather local materials and do business with local producers whenever possible – everything from getting fresh, locally caught fish, locally made ice cream and picking their own rhubarb for the traditional Icelandic rhubarb porridge.

The pride of Suður-Vík is their pizza, which they claim is the best in the area – a claim many of their customers support; there are even those who make a three-hour direct drive from Höfn just to get a pizza at Suður-Vík. Other staples include the always popular steak sandwich, which Ben says has been developed to perfection by the kitchen staff, and of course, various quality Thai dishes to add welcome variety to a small Icelandic town.

Suður-Vík is open from 12:00 noon to 10:00pm, offering lunch and lighter dishes as well as an elegant evening dining experience, a welcome experience for weary travellers looking for culture, history, nature and of course exquisite food. *-VAG*

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# BIRDS OF SOUTHERN ICELAND

*A Birdwatcher's Paradise*

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

## Lagons and glacial sands

Hornafjörður and Stakkfjörður are shallow fjords or coastal lagoons on either side of the village of Höfn. The area is home to large numbers of birds all year round. Not only is it an important staging area on migration, but breeding birds are well represented in spring and summer. It is also the region's main wintering area for birds. A rich mosaic of wetlands stretches from Höfn all the way west to the glacial sands of Breiðamerkursandur.

The bird life of the great glacial sands of the south coast has a character all of its own. It is the kingdom of the Great Skua and is home to the largest colony of this

charismatic species on Earth. Wherever there is sufficient water, vegetation sprouts up and attracts a range of birds. The spectacular Skaftafell National Park contains woodlands and a variety of species.

## Freshwater hotspots

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

## Dales, highlands and lakes

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

There is a huge Arctic Tern colony at Vík and a smaller one at Dyrhólaey.

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

Another key birding location in the highlands is the chain of lakes called Veiðivötn. This beautiful and unusual landscape has been shaped by repeated volcanic activity and most of the lakes



Images by © Jóhann Óli Hilmarsson

are located in craters. Great Northern Divers are particularly common, and other breeding birds include Whooper Swan, Pink-footed Goose, Scaup, Long-tailed Duck, Harlequin Duck, Ringed Plover, Purple Sandpiper, Arctic Tern and Snow Bunting. Barrow's Goldeneye winters here and has recently bred.

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

Two of the larger lakes in the area, Apavatn and Laugarvatn, along with adjoining wetlands and rivers, are among the best sites for ducks in southern Iceland.



Barrow's Goldeneye, Common Goldeneye and Goosander winter here. Harlequin Ducks breed locally and hundreds of Scaup, Tufted Duck and Red-breasted Merganser stop off on passage and are also common breeders.

## Lake Þingvallavatn

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

## Ölfusá River

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



for migrants such as Knot, Dunlin, Sanderling, Turnstone, Brent Goose, Eurasian Wigeon and various other ducks.

On either side of the estuary of the Ölfusá river there are two large wetlands: BirdLife Iceland's reserve at Flói on the east bank, and Ölfusforir on the west bank. Both are large expanses of pools and lakes which attract numerous birds in the breeding season and on passage alike. The Red-throated Diver is the characteristic bird of the Flói reserve and Dunlin and Black-tailed Godwit are particularly common here. Ölfusforir is an excellent birding location in winter, attracting large flocks of Teal, Mallard and Goosander, as well as Iceland's largest concentration of Grey Heron.

-JÓH



# THE MYSTERIOUS HÓTEL LAKI

*Light, Elves and Volcanoes*



**H**ótel Laki, located in the countryside in the South of Iceland, offers many possibilities for an unforgettable stay.

The Hótel has large vertical and panoramic windows which flood the spacious dining area and other areas with natural light. On the horizon, the gargantuan Vatnajökull glacier dominates the landscape, to the guests' delight.



### And There Was Light

The Hótel's remote location blissfully eliminates all light pollution from urban areas. This is a fortunate quality as it allows the natural light in the spectacular surroundings to shine undisturbed; the light nights in the summertime as well as the stunning northern lights in the wintertime.

Hótel Laki recently added a viewing platform where guests can observe the

great aurora borealis in a glass dome on the roof of one of the Hótel's wings. Can you imagine enjoying such an amazing view in the comfort of warmth, wrapped in blankets and perhaps sipping on a cup of hot cocoa? Photographers and the more adventurous travellers can step outside onto a large balcony to fully take in the phenomenon.

If you are afraid you will sleep in, just ask the Hótel staff to wake you up once



the northern lights make their grand appearance. Hótel Laki is family run and the owners have occupied the premises, Efri-Vík, since 1968. Initially they were traditional farmers but evolved into the travel business in 1973. They started building Hótel Laki in 2005, right beside their old home, and are continuously making improvements to add to the guests' comfort. Today, the Hótel has sixty four rooms in different categories as well



as fifteen summer cottages. The family is currently in the process of building a house in the style of the Icelandic turf farmhouse, for guests to enjoy.

### Birdhouse and Telescope

To bird lovers' exhilaration, a bird house is located by a nearby lake where plenty of information about the Icelandic birdlife is to be found. There is also a telescope in the house to allow for live bird watching of the rich birdlife



in the vicinity. There you can also buy a fishing licence.

Only 500 metres from the Hótel is a mysterious place which is believed by many to be an elf dwelling. A number of people claim to have seen various hidden spirits on the site. Believe what you will, but know with certainty that you can indeed read up on those mystical creatures on a vibrantly displayed monument, dedicated to them.

Equally close by is another historical site dedicated to the history of volcanic eruptions in Iceland, where visitors can view layers of ash dating back 1000 years and find an abundance of information on volcanic eruptions. The renowned natural pearls of Skaftafell National Park, Jökulsárlón, Ingólfshöfði and Laki are also in close proximity of the Hótel, so if you are planning to do some hiking during your stay in Iceland, the Hótel is sure to suit your needs.

The nearest urban area is Kirkjubæjarklaustur where you will find both recreational and necessary services, such as a swimming pool, post office, bank, supermarket, healthcare centre and information centre among others.

Hótel Laki is open all year round. -KB



**Hótel Laki**

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# ICE CAVE ON TOP OF A GLACIER

Reykjavík Excursions takes you on a tour into the ice

Iceland is famous for its volcanos, glaciers and hot springs. It is possible to experience all of those things any time of the year, but during the summer months you get the added bonus of 24-hour daylight. The summer of 2015, a man-made ice cave was opened on top of Langjökull glacier. It gives people the chance to go to a permanent winterland as well as see it from the inside.

Reykjavík Excursions offers two different tours to Langjökull's new man-made ice cave. The Langjökull Ice Cave Experience and Langjökull Ice Cave, Gullfoss, Geysir & Þingvellir. The glacier is Iceland's second largest and covers an

area of about 950 km<sup>2</sup> and at the highest point rises about 1200 m above sea level.

Both tours start at BSÍ bus terminal where you will be driven through the beautiful Húsafell and up to the mouth of Langjökull. On the way to the top of the glacier, you will change into a specially modified monster truck. It is important that travellers dress well because it can get very cold on the glacier even in the summer time.

The main difference between the ice cave and other natural ice caves is that this one is at the top of a glacier while the natural ones are at the edges of glaciers and are formed by glacial rivers or hot springs.

When you arrive at the top of the glacier you will see the opening of the ice tunnel and on days with clear skies the view from the top is great. Inside, the walls are lit up with led lights which have been embedded in the ice. In the tunnels you will get the chance to read interesting information about the glacier, glacial exploration and research and the effect that global warming has on the glacier. It is a once in a lifetime experience to see a glacier from the inside. There's even a cave room which can be rented for weddings, parties, meetings and other events.

## Enjoy the Golden Circle Afterwards

After Langjökull Ice Cave Experience, you get to see the rugged desert of Kaldidalur valley, which is in stark contrast to the lush Húsafell, before heading back to Reykjavík.

If you join the Langjökull Ice Cave, Gullfoss, Geysir & Þingvellir tour you will visit some of the most popular natural pearls in Iceland after seeing the ice cave. A drive through Kaldidalur valley will take you to Þingvellir, Gullfoss and Geysir, which make up the Golden Circle. The bright summer nights give those sites a different look.

Þingvellir National Park became a UNESCO heritage site in 2004 and has a special place in the heart of Icelanders. It is the place where the world's first parliament was founded and is the only place where you can see the Eurasian and North-American tectonic plates above sea level. Part of the national park is Lake Þingvellir, which is the largest natural lake in Iceland. The water in it is mostly made of melt water from Langjökull, but it has taken the water around 20 to 30 years to trickle through the lava fields to the lake. This makes the water very clean, cold and nutritious which explains the varied plant and animal life in and around the lake.



Gullfoss is one of the most famous waterfalls in Iceland. It is three tiered and falls into a deep canyon which at some angles makes it look as if it vanishes into the earth. The waterfall is fairly powerful and thus it is important not to go too close to the ledge. But due to the spray off from it, you can usually see one or two rainbows above it.

You will also stop at Geysir in Haukadalur, which is only a few minutes away from Gullfoss and from which other geysers got their name. The area is named after the now mostly dormant Geysir, but a smaller geyser, Strokkur, erupts approximately every eight minutes. Strokkur can reach up to 20 m in height. Apart from Strokkur, there are over 40 other small hot springs,

fumaroles and mud pots in the area.

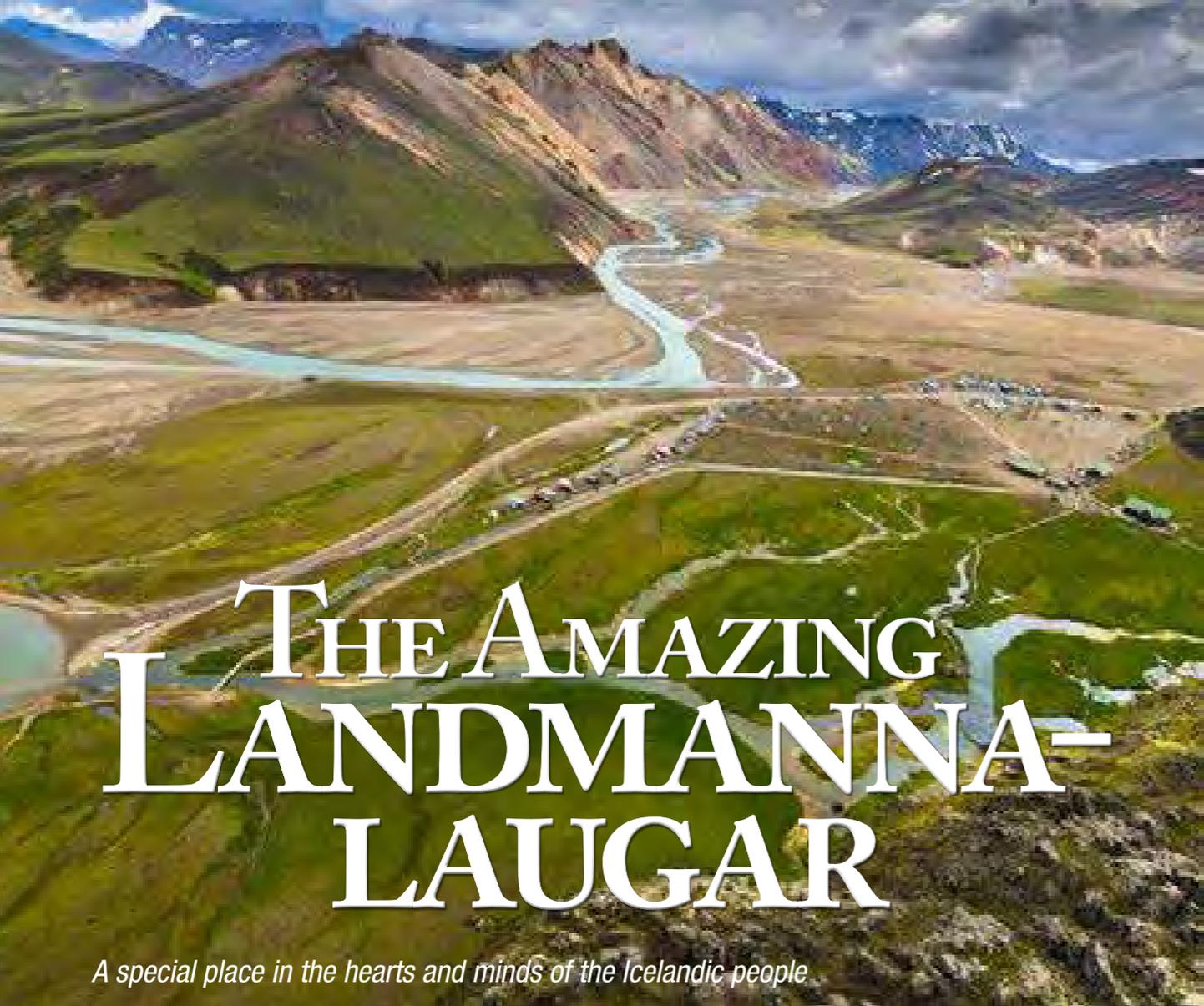
Reykjavík Excursions is one of Iceland's oldest travel companies. On offer are many different day tours and everyone should be able to find something that suits them. With its decades-long experience and respected travel guides, you can not find a better company to travel with.

Tours with Reykjavík Excursions are available all year long with variety of departure times. Further information and descriptions of all tours can be found at [www.re.is](http://www.re.is).

-HDB

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# THE AMAZING LANDMANNALAUGAR

*A special place in the hearts and minds of the Icelandic people*

Landmannalaugar is a part of Fjallabak Nature Reserve and is one of the most beloved outdoor recreational areas in Iceland. It is an active geothermal area in a valley between tall rhyolite mountains displaying amazing colours ranging from pink to green.

Landmannalaugar's famous natural pool nestles under the Laugahraun lava field dating back to 1477. The natural pool attracts hikers and day visitors.

Landmannalaugar is a popular tourist attraction and a hub for the famous Laugavegur hike between Landmannalaugar, Þórsörk and Skógar. This otherworldly place in the Icelandic wilderness is only about 4 hours drive from Reykjavík.

## What to do in Landmannalaugar

The first and most important thing to do

when arriving in Landmannalaugar is to test the water in the geothermal pool. For some hikers coming over the 55 km Laugavegurinn hiking route, it is like the Promised Land. Visitors may also want to try horse riding and perhaps, at some stage, buy a cup of coffee or some other basic needs in the highland shop located in two old American school busses in summer. Finally, there are some great hikes in Landmannalaugar to last visitors a few days.

## How to Get There

The highland roads leading into Landmannalaugar usually stay open from mid-June through to the end of August — even the end of September, unless it snows. In summer, there's a regular daily highland bus service from Reykjavík, as well

as guided tours. The bus departs from the BSÍ bus terminal in Reykjavík at 08:00 in the morning. Check the website at [www.re.is](http://www.re.is). Once in Landmannalaugar, it stops for about two hours, before returning to Reykjavík. The round trip takes about 12 hours.

In winter, visitors can join a guided tour in a modified 4x4, generally referred to as a 'Super Truck' or 'Super Jeep'.

All of the three roads leading to Landmannalaugar are mountain roads, or F-roads (the F stands for Fjallavegur, which means mountain road). Car insurance is either nonexistent or very limited when driving on F-roads. Drivers who get stuck in an un-bridged river must pay for the entire damage. One road, the F208 from the north, has no rivers until the very end—right next to the Landmannalaugar campsite and



## Where to Stay

Ferðafélag Íslands (Iceland Touring Association), founded in 1927, built the first hut in Landmannalaugar in 1951. The current building is from 1969 but has been enlarged and improved since. The hut is 600 metres above sea level and stands right next to Laugahraun lava field and the popular geothermal spring. The building has two floors. Downstairs there's a large common room for sleeping, kitchen, entrance and storage. Upstairs there are three common rooms and one private room. The hut sleeps 75 people at a time in bunk-beds, and mattresses. The hut is heated and gas is used for cooking. Basic utensils for cooking are available, such as pots and pans, cutlery etc. If you're planning to stay there, it is important to book ahead.

Please contact Ferðafélag Íslands via their website: [www.fi.is](http://www.fi.is).

*Near the main hut there's an shower block with toilets and shower facilities. There's also a campsite on a rocky plain which is very popular in summer.*

Landmannalaugar has a special place in the hearts and minds of the Icelandic people as generations have enjoyed the area, largely due to the pioneering efforts of Ferðafélag Íslands. -SV

geothermal spring. There's parking and a pedestrian bridge to the other side. The F208 is the safest option for regular cars.

Landmannalaugar can also be reached by bicycle, on foot or by horse. Biking is an inexpensive option but can be difficult because of the weather and road conditions. The scheduled busses accommodate bicycles for a modest fee. The gravel roads are suitable for good mountain bikes. Hiking trails are suitable for experienced bike riders with excellent quality mountain bikes and sense of duty not to leave tire marks in nature. It is possible to rent Trek mountain bikes in Reykjavík. Check [www.Reykjavikbiketours.is](http://www.Reykjavikbiketours.is) for more information.

Hiking is another favourite way to reach Landmannalaugar. Almost everyone who arrives there on foot comes via the popular Laugavegur hiking trail from Þórsörk Nature Reserve. The hike usually takes 3-4 days and covers 55 km in the mountains. Competition fit mountain runners cover the distance in 4-5 hours.

The annual Laugavegurinn marathon is scheduled for 13<sup>th</sup> July 2013. A handful of horse riding companies offer riding trips to Landmannalaugar in summer. It has been possible to join a guided horse riding tour in Landmannalaugar for the last few years.



# HOTEL SELFOSS

*A Spacious, Modern Hotel on Iceland's South Coast*



**B**ig hotels are not exactly a dime a dozen in Iceland and certainly a rarity outside Reykjavík. So it was a pleasant surprise to spend time in one of South Iceland's oldest and largest hotels on the banks of the beautiful Ölfusá River. The drive south-east over the Hellisheiði heath from Reykjavík brings you straight to the town of Selfoss, and it is here, just over the bridge, that you will find the genteel and firmly established Hotel Selfoss.

### The times, they are a'changin

Originally built in 1986 and with a fraction of the rooms that it boasts today, the hotel continues to steadily upgrade in order to meet the needs of the recent wave of travellers who have been flooding into the country in the last few years. Little by little, new additions and refurbishments have been undertaken and in the spring of 2016, a whole new top floor with twenty-eight stylish rooms was completed.

With a grand total of 139 rooms spanning 4 floors, Hotel Selfoss is easily the largest hotel in south Iceland. Standard features in every room include: en-suite bath, satellite tv, wi-fi, coffee and tea making facilities, minifridge, hairdryer and mini-safe. The 28 brand new and elegant 4th floor rooms, with exceptional views over the river or town, come with additional features such as king



sized beds, mini fridges, and of course, top-notch, en-suite bathrooms.

### The friendly folks at Riverside Restaurant

Dinner at Hotel Selfoss' Riverside Restaurant is always a pleasure; white linen tablecloths lend a graceful note to the dining experience and the views over the river and beyond are nothing short of superb, no matter the season. The menu offers an array of well-chosen Icelandic specialties—creamy bisque de langoustine, goose carpaccio, a very tasty and tender rack of lamb—among



other tempting choices. The restaurant uses, as you can imagine, top quality, locally sourced ingredients as much as possible and everything is overseen by a friendly and professional wait staff who know their stuff!

### Hotel Selfoss' best kept secret

After a thrilling, yet exhausting day exploring Iceland's natural wonders, don't forget to take some down time at the hotel's wonderfully relaxing Riverside Spa. Begin with a glass of wine from the in-spa bar, then move on to the saunas, the raindrop shower, the waterfall shower, the bucket shower or even the ice bath! End with a dip in the geothermal hot tub for the ultimate in the pampered life, Icelandic style.

Hotel Selfoss welcomes you! *-EMV*



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## REFRESHING VÍK

*Halldór's Café satisfies locals and travellers alike*

**G**uests at Halldór's Café are greeted by the scent of steaming soup and freshly baked bread as they walk through the door. Across from Vík's shoreline with its black sand beaches, Halldór's Café emphasis on using only quality ingredient from the locality in their cookery. Whether be it a freshly caught salmon you crave, steaks from grass fed cattle or free range lamb served with accompaniment of locally grown greens - you can be sure that Halldór's

Café will deliver. They also offer a variety of lighter meals; soup of the day and light salads, and those with a bit of a sweet-tooth will not be let down, as the menu includes home-baked cakes and home-made ice cream from a local farm. Originally, Halldór's Café was a general store, built in 1831 to meet all of the needs of Vík. Today, it continues to satisfy patrons with its menu, which has something for every taste, with a local produce, where possible.

Halldór's Café supports artists with a rotating display of local talent featured on its walls, and serves up steaming cups of coffee and cake. Open all year round, the café is ideal for meeting and greeting old friends or new acquaintances. Summer opening hours are from 11:00 to 22:00 or 23:00, but winter openings are from 11:00 to 21:00. Be sure to stop at this charming café and get greeted with a welcoming smile and a seductive menu. *-KB*



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## A TASTE OF ETHIOPIA

*Ancient African Coffee and Cuisine in Upcountry Flúðir*

**F**lúðir 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.



### 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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# HEAVENLY HVERAGERÐI

*Skyrgerðin is a charming guesthouse and cozy bistro in the heart of south Iceland*

Hveragerði is a charming town and a hidden gem in the south of Iceland. The town, which is frequently referred to as ‘the capital of hot springs’ is an ideal place for travelers to base themselves to be close to the capital, yet it’s remote enough to enjoy some of the most beautiful nature the south has to offer. Hveragerði is just 20 minutes outside of Reykjavik and is on the way to the famous Golden Circle, where visitors explore geysers, waterfalls and a national park. There is also so much to see and do in the town itself, which makes it a year-round destination. A visit to the hot springs is essential as is stopping by a local greenhouse that produces tasty tomatoes, cucumbers and bell peppers, among other fruits and vegetables. Skyrgerðin is the perfect place to visit when exploring the beautiful south.

### Welcoming Accommodation

Skyrgerðin Guesthouse has airy rooms with plenty of light and minimalist décor. The rooms are fresh, welcoming and cozy with

comfortable beds, classic furniture and walls painted with subtle hues. The guesthouse is everything travelers dream about when booking warm, intimate accommodation in a countryside getaway. The guesthouse building has a rich history. It was built in 1930 with a skyr factory on the ground floor and apartments for the staff on the second floor. Since 1947, a hotel and a restaurant



had been operated in the building and it has been a cultural meeting point for locals for decades.

Skyrgerðin’s Café & Bistro has a delightful menu with something for everyone. Guests will find light courses like grilled cheese sandwiches, butternut squash soup, taquitos, salads, fries and onion rings, and chocolates. Main courses include tender lamb soft



tacos, chicken and fennel with skyr dressing and veggie lasagna with vegan cheese for vegetarians. Other tasty options include salads, burgers, and sliders.

### Hveragerðurinn Geothermal Park

Tourists visit Hveragerði for two main reasons—nature and hot springs. The hot springs beckon visitors from around

the world and the central geothermal area is situated in the center of town. The natural phenomenon is mesmerizing to watch as water bubbles to the top of the water’s surface. It’s a constant reminder that Iceland sits on a hotbed of natural, geothermal energy. Follow the path that treads between geysers and hot pools, and at the end of the walk, you can soak your

feet in one of the hot springs. During the winter, it’s possible to see the majestic northern lights dancing and flickering in the sky if the conditions are just right. -JG

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# EXPERIENCES TO REMEMBER

Reykjavík Excursions' tours explore the wealth of South Iceland

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

## Seeing the South

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

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

Another reason to take the tour is that everything is already pre-arranged for you, so there is no time wasted trying to find your

activity, make sure you have the right clothing and equipment, etc. You can see at a glance what you will need to bring and what will be provided. They also provide basic training, where necessary, for your safety.

## Glacier Adventure

Though the Icelandic winters can appear harsh and unwelcoming, they offer unforgettable opportunities for outdoor activities. *The Glacier Snowmobile Adventure tour* takes you up to the top of Mýrdalsjökull glacier, where you are invited to explore it's surface by snowmobile for a full hour. Standing on top of a glacier is a truly rewarding experience, where you are surrounded by snow and ice as far as the eye can see. Another icy expedition is the hiking tour *Take a Walk on the Ice Side* on Sólheimajökull glacier. This is considered a relatively easy hike with special crampons up on to an ice field where a wonderland of ice sculptures, ridges and deep crevasses awaits discovery. For those who wish to combine staple tourist attraction with exciting winter sports the Gullfoss - Geysir & Langjökull Snowmobiling tour is the perfect solution. Started by visits to the unique Gullfoss and Geysir and followed by an adventurous snowmobile ride on Langjökull glacier, Iceland's second largest glacier.



## Take a Walk on the Ice Side

You remember that volcano that hit the news in 2010—Eyjafjallajökull? Well, there are more volcanoes hiding under the glacier surface covering Iceland. Sólheimajökull, the southernmost glacier in Iceland, with ice up to about 200 meters thick has a secret! As its glacier tongue extends from the great Mýrdalsjökull glacier you should know that Mýrdalsjökull glacier partly covers the volcano Katla, one of Iceland biggest volcanoes! Walking around Sólheimajökull spectacular surroundings surely gives you a thrill!

On the way home, you will visit Skógafoss and Seljalandsfoss—two beautiful, but very different, waterfalls.

## The South Shore Adventure

For a nature-lover, this tour takes you all the way down the coast to the picturesque village of Vík, with its black sand beaches, strange rock formations at Reynisdrangur, its beautiful, soaring bird cliffs. The tour also stops at the

same two waterfalls as well as the folk museum at Skógar—a fascinating trip back in time, portraying the lives of the local people in past centuries. You will experience one of Iceland's most scenic regions, including the beautiful Sólheimajökull glacier.

## Golden Circle Tour

The famous Golden Circle mainly consist of the three sites; Þingvellir, Geysir and Gullfoss. What these places have in common is a great historical and geological importance for Iceland, but what is maybe the most important fact is that they are extremely beautiful and magnificent.

Þingvellir National Park is one of the most historical sites in the country - the place where the world's first parliament was founded and the only place where you can see the Eurasian and North-American tectonic plates above sea level. Part of the national park is Lake Þingvellir, which is the largest natural lake in Iceland. The water in it is mostly made of melt water from Langjökull, but it has taken the water around 20 to 30 years to trickle through the lava fields to the lake. This makes the water very clean, cold and nutritious which explains the varied plant and animal life in and around the lake.

The beautiful waterfall Gullfoss, one of the most famous waterfalls in Iceland gets its water from Hvítá river, the origins of which lie in Langjökull glacier. Gullfoss falls down into a deep canyon which at some angles makes it look as if it vanishes into the earth. The waterfall is fairly powerful and thus important not to go too close to the ledge. But due to the spray off from it, you can usually see one or two rainbows above it.

You will also stop at Geysir in Haukadalur, and from which other geysers got their name. The area is named after the now mostly dormant Geysir, but a smaller geyser, Strokkur, that erupts approximately every eight minutes. and can reach up to 20 m in height. Apart from Strokkur, there are over 40 other small hot springs, fumaroles and mud pots in the area.

## Skaftafell in the Summer

The Skaftafell National Park is best enjoyed in the summer months. Two tours go to this natural wonder, one that includes a 2-hour glacier walk. Surrounded on three sides by glaciers, the tour provides a view of the highest mountain in Iceland, Hvannadalshnjúkur, where you can walk up to the picturesque Svartifoss waterfall, with its basalt columns. Even in summer, you should bring rainproof

clothing and good hiking boots.

## Jökulsárlón Lagoon

Another summer tour takes you all the way down the south coast to the fantasy Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon. It's further than the other tours so you get to see all their highlights as you go. This is a popular place for photographers and a boat can take you between the icebergs on the lagoon.

## Enjoy All Iceland

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

Tours with Reykjavík Excursions are available all year long with variety of departure times. Further information and descriptions of all tours can be found at [www.re.is](http://www.re.is)

-ASF



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# VAST VOLCANIC HOT SPOTS

Renowned volcanologist Haraldur Sigurðsson explains Iceland's complex volcanic systems.

Iceland's volcanoes are a growing source of tourism for the country, as travellers want the unique experience of scaling their summits or seeing them in action. When there is an eruption, local travel companies offer jeep, coach, helicopter, and plane tours to get the best views.

Most of Iceland's volcanoes are fissures, such as the 2014 Holuhraun eruption, where lava burst out of cracks in the earth's crust. Holuhraun produced fountains of lava shooting out of the earth, delighting photographers and keeping volcanologists busy to see if the nearby massive Bárðarbunga volcano would erupt. So far, it hasn't.

The three most active volcanoes on the island are Katla, Hekla, and Eyjafjallajökull, which erupted in 2010, bringing air travel

to a halt, with a large ash cloud restricting travel for days. Icelanders have learned to adapt to eruptions and most of them are situated away from populated areas. In the case of the 2014 Holuhraun eruption, the surrounding region near Vatnajökull was evacuated as locals, tourists and animals were moved from the area. The main threat was airborne toxins and those close to the region who were sensitive to them were advised to stay indoors and turn up their heating.

## Ask the Expert

When looking at the science behind Iceland's many volcanoes, there is no better source than volcanologist Haraldur Sigurðsson, Director of the Volcano Museum, who has been researching the island's active and dormant volcanoes for more than 40 years.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Iceland's volcanoes is that Bárðarbunga is currently sitting on top of one of the earth's hot spots. "It's often said that Iceland is on the mid-Atlantic ridge, and that that's the main reason for volcanic activity, but that's actually a misconception," says Haraldur. "The much more important feature is the hot spot."

This hot spot began under Siberia approximately 250 million years ago, making it the oldest hot spot in the world. "The tectonic plates of the earth are floating on top of the earth's mantle, like a raft on water, but the hot spot is still in the same place," says Haraldur. "Now it is simmering below us. Once Siberia was over it, then Baffin Island, after that Greenland and now Iceland."



Haraldur Sigurðsson

Scientists have identified some 40–50 hotspots around the globe. Of these, Hawaii, Réunion Island, Yellowstone Park in the United States, Galápagos, and Iceland sit over those that are currently most active.

A hot spot is an area in the Earth's mantle where a column of hot magma rises up to melt through the crust, resulting in volcanic activity. The term 'hotspot' is also used when referring to the location on the Earth's surface where such volcanism has been taking place. In 1963, scientist J. Tuzo Wilson proposed the idea that volcanic chains such as the Hawaiian Islands result from the slow movement of a tectonic plate across a fixed hot spot deep beneath the surface of the planet.

## Iceland's recent eruptions

The size and scale of Iceland's eruptions unsurprisingly vary. For instance, the largest eruption in Iceland's recent history was in 1783 when Lakagígur, a volcanic fissure in the south of Iceland, not far from the canyon of Eldgjá and the small village of Kirkjubæjarklaustur, erupted. The system erupted over an eight-month period between 1783 and 1784 from the Laki fissure and the adjoining Grímsvötn volcano, pouring out an estimated 14km<sup>3</sup> of basalt lava and clouds of poisonous hydrofluoric acid and sulphur dioxide compounds that killed over 50% of the island's livestock, leading to a famine which then killed about 25% of Iceland's population.

The Laki eruption and its aftermath caused a drop in global temperatures, the sulphur dioxide causing crop failures in Europe and, possibly, droughts in Asia. The eruption has been estimated to have killed more than six million people globally, making it the deadliest eruption in history.

By contrast, the most recent eruption of Holuhraun in 2014–15 was small. The eruption began in three craters, compared to the 130 craters of Laki, with no explosive activity. Hardly any ash was emitted in the Holuhraun eruption, compared to the 0.9km<sup>3</sup> ejecta volume of Laki and 0.1km<sup>3</sup> ejecta volume of Eyjafjallajökull. While the highest lava fountains Holuhraun only reached approximately 100 metres, in Laki they were estimated to have reached a height of 1,400 metres.

Furthermore, in the first month of the Holuhraun eruption, the average daily SO<sub>2</sub> emission was 20,000 tons, or 600,000 tons in one month while, during the eight months of the Laki eruption, an estimated 120 million tons of SO<sub>2</sub> were emitted, or an average of 15 million tons per month.

Iceland's active volcanoes are each quite different, and are consistently monitored to give early warnings of eruptions and researched providing more insight into what triggers them and their aftermath.

# THE HIDDEN PEARL OF ICELAND

Dine on Rare Arctic Char at Icelandair Hotel Klaustur

**A**waiting your arrival in the beautiful and peaceful village of Kirkjubæjarklaustur, sits 'The Hidden Pearl of Iceland' as many guests have affectionately renamed the place.

Whether you are driving, hiking, or travelling in a large group through the South of Iceland, an authentic Icelandic gourmet dining experience can be yours to enjoy at Icelandair Hotel Klaustur.

This modern hotel is nestled between two majestic glaciers and near several renowned natural wonders of Iceland, such as: Jokulsarlon, Skaftafell, Lakagigar, and Landmannalaugar. The reason why guests call Icelandair Hotel Klaustur 'The hidden pearl' is because of its in-house restaurant which serves succulent gourmet dishes made with top quality Icelandic ingredients, including the rare fresh water fish, Arctic char.

Rare Arctic Char is the main ingredient in Icelandair Hotel Klaustur's own fish soup and many other popular gourmet dishes.

Arctic char is a cold-water fish which is closely related to both the salmon and the lake trout. It is one of the rarest fish species in the world and can only be found in deep, cold, glacial lakes. In Kirkjubæjarklaustur, the Arctic Char is farmed in a free flowing stream that comes from pure oxygen-enriched glacial spring water which filtered through layers of natural lava rock originating from the Vatnajokull Glacier.

The char is fed high quality capelin fish meal enriched with soy protein, Omega 3 fatty acids and mineral supplements. At Icelandair Hotel Klaustur, it is prepared fresh daily by a knowledgeable chef as the primary ingredient in both main courses and starters.

## Fire and Ice

The restaurant also has a really nice balcony that offers a spectacular view of Vatnajokull Glacier. Often guests find themselves in complete tranquillity out on the veranda as they take in this view while snuggled in comfortable lounge chairs, enjoying the warm summers or mild winters.

Desserts are also a speciality, and the combination of Iceland's two contrasting elements of fire and ice is portrayed in perfect harmony by joining hot rhubarb soup with

cold vanilla ice-cream, served with fresh mountain berries. This combination creates a wonderful balance of sweet and sour flavours with hot and cold temperatures and is a perfect way to indulge the senses.

The restaurant can seat up to 150 guests at a time and opening hours are:

*Lunch; 12:00 till 16:00*

*Dinner; 19:00 - 21:30 (1.June -15.September),*

*18:30-21:00 (16.September - 31. May).*

Leisure activities in the area include, but are not limited to: a nearby swimming pool, a golf course, hiking, glacier tours and sightseeing.

Furthermore, Icelandair Hotel Klaustur offers guests a choice between 57 comfortable modern rooms and is perfect for singles, couples or large groups.

**For more information about Klaustur Char feel free to visit the official website. [www.klausturbleikja.is/](http://www.klausturbleikja.is/)** - ÓB



# NOURISH

## BODY AND SOUL

*Reykjavík Excursions takes you to bathe in the water and drink in the dance*

Winter in Iceland can be a magical experience totally unlike the summer. It's as if you're entering another land and another time.

Icelanders have learnt long ago that they can take full advantage of each season and enjoy them all to the utmost and that is something they take delight in sharing with visitors. Wouldn't you like to take home stories that stretch the credibility of your listeners? Stories such as bathing in sub-zero temperatures in waters so warm you could relax for hours, all the while enjoying a light show overhead that bathes the landscape in mystical colours.

### Simply the best

This is what Reykjavík Excursions offers. Leaving in the early evening, the tour first passes through the UNESCO

World Heritage Site of Þingvellir National Park before driving over the moors, often covered in snow, to Lake Laugarvatn.

Here you'll find Laugarvatn Fontana geothermal baths, the steam baths and hot pools that have been enjoyed by generations of Icelanders. Now, the whole facility has been completely renovated and rebuilt into a work of art.

### Fulfilling your senses

With pools of different sizes and temperatures, you can relax and let the waters soothe you while enjoying the night sky. Relaxing in Laugarvatn Fontana's open air geothermal baths and is both extremely enjoyable and fills up your energy.

In wintertime - on many nights - if you

are lucky, it's as if an ethereal ballet company is performing in the skies above for your pleasure, as the different colours and shapes of the northern lights swirl and play overhead. In summers guests bathe under the midnight sun on bright summer nights.

After this food for the soul and spirit, you can enjoy food for the body, too, with delicatessen from the local style buffet in Laugarvatn Fontana's restaurant, Laugarvatn Fontana leves you with a nourished body and satisfied soul.

### Guides bring the history and land to life

Whether you are seeking the tranquil seclusion and purity of Iceland's nature reserves, or would rather like to experience some really hot adventure in fire and ice, you can be sure of enjoying the

most comfortable and safest travel with Reykjavík Excursions.

Since the old days of gravel tracks they have put a special emphasis on the professional education of their multilingual tour guides, to give visitors an insight into every aspect of the places touched by the tour.

Wherever they travel, they strive to leave you with the best possible memory of your time in Iceland.

Tours with Reykjavík Excursions are available all year long with variety of departure times. Further information and descriptions of all tours can be found at [www.re.is](http://www.re.is).

-ASF



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# THE ENCHANTED ISLAND

*Hotel Borealis, a Countryside Hotel with Style and Soul*



While travelling in Iceland during autumn, the weather and the sun's changing light create a unique atmosphere in the countryside. Famous poet Rilke found appropriate words for this time of contemplation and retreat: "Lay your shadows upon the sun-dials, and o'er the isles allow your winds to vent".

### In The Nature's Heart

Hotel Borealis, just a few kilometres from the charming town of Selfoss, offers the serene silence of an elegant countryside retreat while activities and bustling life are at hand within short distance. The welcomingly neat white houses have been tastefully furnished by blending last century's Icelandic antiques with modern style and prove to be so cosy that you might never want to leave! Offering 20 comfortable rooms with bathrooms, cosy bungalows for families and a small villa, Hotel Borealis is able to meet the needs of individuals and groups and makes a perfect place for a romantic wedding.

Hotel Borealis serves well as a calm retreat for writing a book or contemplating the



magic of the Icelandic range of light. When the autumn sun pours out her golden beams on heather and red leaves, nearby Þingvellir National Park turns into an enchanted island. Cuddle yourself in a traditional wool sweater and get ready for a walk through Iceland's

famous former parliament site, discover Gullfoss waterfall and Geysir on a day trip, try golfing on the nearby course, or fishing in lake Úlfljótsvatn. And with daylight slowly fading away, return to Hotel Borealis for a marvellous dinner that is served on antique tables in the spirit of good old Icelandic hospitality. The chef prides himself on using only local products such as highland lamb, arctic char from lake Þingvallavatn and vegetables grown in the area's greenhouses for his vaunted venue.

### Enjoying Northern Lights

When darkness returns in autumn, northern lights start illuminating the night skies, and as Hotel Borealis is situated far away from light pollution, darkness will make them shine even brighter. And there is nothing like soaking in the hotel's hot tub after an exciting day, with northern lights dancing above you! -DT



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One of the most popular hiking areas in Iceland, Þórsörk park is a valley situated between the rivers Krossá, Þröngá and Markarfljót.



## HARMONIOUS HJARÐARBÓL GUESTHOUSE

*A Personal Touch in a Special Part of South Iceland*

Hjarðarból Guesthouse is a family-owned business situated in a beautiful part of the Ölfus district, which has the feel of being far from the bustle of Reykjavík, but it is just a short drive away.

The guesthouse offers 21 comfortable rooms ranging from doubles to family accommodation, and the owners debuted a hot tub facility on the property this past summer that was a huge hit among guests. Taking a soak after a long day of exploring the

region is an ideal way to relax and recharge for the next day of excursions.

### Delicious Jams

Guests will also find a delicious breakfast buffet with homemade jams prepared by the owner, which is a favourite among guests. Visitors are often thrilled to learn that jams are available to purchase in the lobby, and take a tasty souvenir of their visit home with them.

In addition to a modern building on the

property, Hjarðarból has a structure affectionately nicknamed The Old House, which is the first house ever built in the area. The darling house was built in 1950 and represents the history of the area. The owners are renovating at least four rooms that will be ready by Christmas, focusing on tasteful décor and the comfort of first-time and returning guests.

Consider Hjarðarból Guesthouse for a home-away-from-home experience in South Iceland. -JG

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# A DELIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE IN STOKKSEYRI

*Icelandic Times checks out Fjöruborðið Restaurant*

Chef Eiríkur Þór Eiríksson was busy pouring drinks when we arrived. The well known song *Vorkvöld í Reykjavík*, (a Spring Evening in Reykjavík) was playing softly in the background. A table of tourists who had spent the day exploring a glacier with a guide, talked animatedly over dinner in the front room. The low slung building with pleasantly creaky wooden floors, once serving as the search and rescue building of Stokkseyri, is now one of the most popular lobster restaurants in Iceland, with over 45,000 patrons dining there in 2014.

## 15 tons of lobsters can't be wrong

Fjöruborðið's website says that some fifteen tons of lobster are used annually to make its famous soup, aka langoustine soup. Hmm...impressive statistics but does it really live up to its reputation? After all, there are many fine restaurants right in the capital, so is it really worth the 45 minute drive over a mountain in sometimes dubious weather conditions? Yes! I am happy to report that the soup was sublime. And just forget the word soup, how pedestrian! Chef Eiríkur informs me that it is, in fact, a classic bisque de langoustine.



Whatever name you go by, it was delicious and I would have happily eaten another bowlful had I not needed to move on to taste everything else that was set before me: lobster tails that were perfect in themselves, homebaked bread with various dipping sauces and if, per chance, you are not partial to sea food, there is a wonderfully tender roasted fillet of lamb served with baby potatoes and red wine sauce that is excellent.

A crisp salad made with local produce was refreshing and nicely complemented the seafood and meat dishes. Right on cue as soon as we had finished the lobster tails, our attentive server brought a warm wet cloth for our, by then, messy hands, which was much appreciated.

From the outside, Fjöruborðið appears deceptively small but in fact, it can seat several hundred all told, something that those having a tête-à-tête in the main building would never guess. Facing the ocean out back, a large permanent marquee can seat another 100 or so guests. All that to say, groups are welcome.

Favoured by tour guides who often bring their clients here as the ultimate finish to a perfect day of sightseeing, the restaurant has received several well known personalities such as Prince Frederik of Denmark, the Rockefellers, Clint Eastwood, Martha Stewart, Bette Midler and Cherie Booth (wife of Tony Blair). -EMV



## ELEGANT EATING

*Delicious dishes in the old town of Eyrarbakki at Rauða Húsið*

What is better than a succulent lunch or a seafood dinner on your travels in the southern part of Iceland? The Rauða Húsið restaurant is renowned for its delicious seafood dishes, not least the fresh lobster. You could even take a special day-trip from Reykjavík to Eyrarbakki.

### Old World Village Charm

Eyrarbakki was once one of the most important trading centres in Iceland but has evolved into a charming and tranquil village of less than 600 inhabitants. Many of its houses were built in the early 1900's and the village has maintained a turn-of-the-century, freewheeling charm and atmosphere. Eyrarbakki boasts many beautifully restored fine timber buildings. The oldest of them, The House, built by a Danish Merchant in 1765, now houses the Árnes Folk Museum.

Rauða húsið, The Red House, is one of the most beautiful houses in the village, standing by the coastline. Guests will appreciate the sense of history within the restaurant and its ambience, with its windows and lovely wooden floor. The house is quite spacious and has about 200 seats but is not crowded, making dining both comfortable and suitable for groups. It used to belong to Guðmunda Nielsen. She built its oldest part in 1919, after returning home from Copenhagen where she studied business management. She was considered to be an exceptional lady and opened her retail shop right after building the house.

### Langoustines from the Birthplace of Lobster Fishing in Iceland

Lobster fishing in Iceland was born off the shores of Eyrarbakki in 1954. Icelanders were late to discover the various seafood delicacies. In fact it was not till the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that the locals discovered that not only was the small Langoustine lobster edible, it was delicious!

### Menu Suggestions

One of the most popular dishes besides the lobster which the restaurant is famous for is the

“Catch



of the Day”, which consists of three different seafood dishes prepared from the freshest ingredients available: Lobster soup, with a hint of Cognac topped with coriander cream; Oven baked bacalao in olive and tomatconcasse; Seafood trio with mixed vegetables and potato purée. Or you might even like to taste oven-roasted cod with slowly roasted tomatoes and hollandaise sauce. Pair a bottle of fine wine with any of the menu's offerings and cap it off with one of the Rauða húsið's signature desserts. Serving a variety of delicious fish and meat dishes, guests will find the restaurant's cuisine is a nice mixture of both international

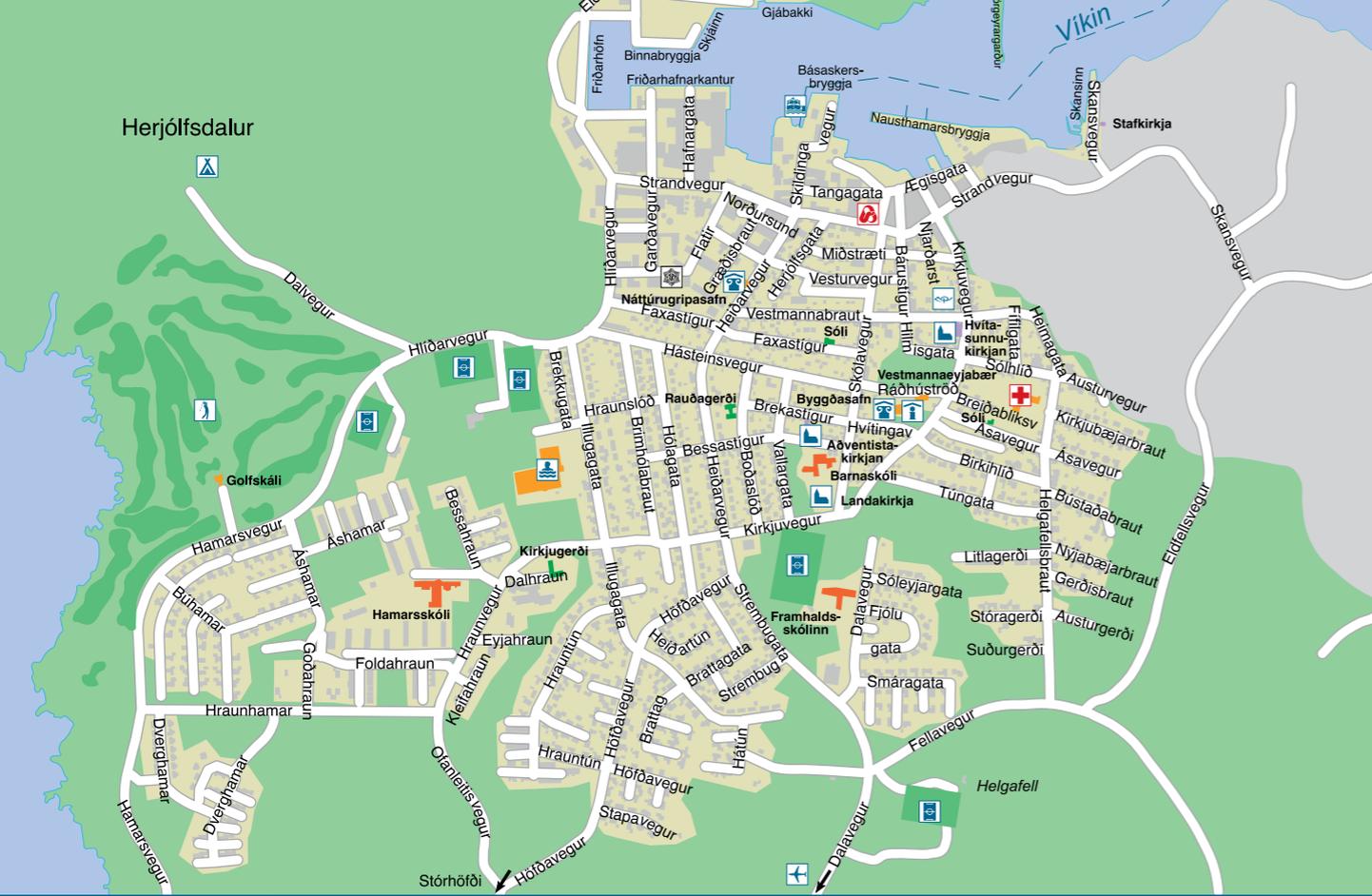
and Icelandic, but local ingredients figure prominently.

### Return to Reykjavík with a Full Stomach

Rauða Húsið is a popular spot for travellers returning to Reykjavík or wanting a pleasant evening trip, as it is just 50 km from the capital, with an easy and beautiful drive.

-AMB





# Vestmannaeyjar



Fish has been dried in Iceland since the time of the first settlers and was hung out to dry on specially constructed wooden frames (called "hjallar" or "trönnur").



The scenery is beautiful if you dare to climb a bit!



Vestmannaeyjar are most likely the largest puffin colony in Iceland!



In the early hours of the morning of January 23, 1973 a large erupting crevice tore open the earth on the east side of Heimaey.



Volcanic mystery at its best.



# THE HOUSE THAT DISAPPEARED

*The Eldheimar Volcano Museum on the Westman Islands*



on the slope of the lava-spewing volcano. Having been fully excavated, it displays life on the day of the eruption and now serves as a memorial for a lost homeland.

In Eldheimar's over 1,000m<sup>2</sup> museum, visitors are presented multimedia shows and exhibitions about the Westman Island's Eldfjall volcano that, in 1973 rose up to a height of 220 metres out of the blue not existing before its eruption. It was similar to the submarine volcano that erupted in 1963 and lasted four years creating the island of Surtsey, south of Heimaey. Nature protection laws protect Surtsey and only scientists are allowed to access the island for research reasons. The island is part of the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage since 2008.

The Eldheimar museum is quite open in both design and guidance in the exhibition halls as well as in the café and shop. It leaves enough space for walking around and contemplating the natural disaster and its impacts on the economic and cultural life of the Westman Islands, creating respect for the determination of its fearless inhabitants, who still brave the elements today. *-DT*

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None of Heimaey's 5,300 inhabitants had ever expected that a volcanic eruption could make them homeless, when on 23rd January 1973, earthquakes started to shake the small island south of the Icelandic mainland. Only hours later a 2,000 metre-long crevice opened just outside the town and close to the church, pouring fountains of lava and ash over Heimaey's houses and streets.

In less than one hour all the inhabitants had been evacuated, without any chance of saving their belongings. Some people never returned to the island.

## Heroes Saving a Home

Two hundred brave men stayed in the danger zone to fight the devastation, and finally succeeded in slowing down the lava flow by cooling it with seawater and thus saved the port. However, when 5 months later, the eruption came to its end, around 400 houses had been completely destroyed.

This volcanic eruption made headlines worldwide, bringing back memories of the Italian town of Pompeii, which in 73 AD, was buried under thick layers of ash and lava from Mt. Vesuvius. Huge parts of the historic site have since been excavated—so people on the Westman Islands rolled up their sleeves and started doing the same.

'Pompeii of the North' deserves its name: 40 years after the disaster some 10 houses have been raised from the ashes, and an impressive museum tops off the excavation site, that had been open to visitors since the very first dig.

## A Museum as a Mirror

Eldheimar's design is unique, rather ominous, and yet austere. It is an architectural masterpiece made of volcanic stone that perfectly mirrors the inexorability and harshness of nature. Its beating heart right in the centre of the building is Gerðisbraut No. 10, the house that had been situated



The beautiful Westman Islands of Iceland are ideal for the adventurous bird watcher.

Photo: Björn Rúniksson

# HÓTEL VESTMANNAEYJAR

*A family friendly oasis in the unique Westman Islands*

Explore the uniquely breathtaking scenery of the Westman Island while staying at the comfortable and relaxing Hótel Vestmannaeyjar. The recently upgraded and renovated hotel offers 43 comfortably furnished rooms, all with en-suite bathroom, TV and Wi-Fi with the option of flexible room arrangements whether you are traveling alone, as a couple or in a family group.

Nearby hiking trails and bird watching areas are within walking distance and for thrill seekers, the hotel offers exciting activities and tours, ensuring that every guest finds an activity to their liking.

Worth mentioning is the hotel's relaxing spa, beauty and massage parlour (with Jacuzzi and sauna). The bar and restaurant offer a delightful area for guests to socialise in and the exquisite, locally sourced food, gives guests a true taste of the Westman Islands.

## Low budget option

Guesthouse Sunnuhóll is managed by Hótel Vestmannaeyjar and provides guests with a low budget accommodation option right next door. Each room can accommodate from two to five people and Sunnuhóll guests are welcome to order



breakfast in the hotel dining room as well as access the hotel's other amenities.

Sunnuhóll is a great choice for those looking for less expensive accommodation, without forfeiting comfort.

*With the renovation of Landeyjarhöfn, transportations to the Westman Islands has drastically improved. The Herjólfur ferry now sails back and forth to the island 5 times a day during summer and 4 times during winter.*



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# RESEARCHING ICELAND'S PUFFINS

*Náttúrustofa Suðurlands studies Iceland's puffin population, and reports dire findings*

**B**irdwatchers are delighted when they visit Iceland, as there are more than 300 species of birds that can be seen around the island. Iceland serves as a stopover for birds migrating between North America and Europe. Popular bird species are Gyrfalcons, Great Northern Divers, Harlequins, and Barrows Goldeneyes.

However, the birds that have become synonymous with Iceland are the adorable puffins, with their black and white bodies, bright orange feet and colourful red, blue and orange beaks. Puffins are remarkable swimmers and divers, able to stay underwater for over 2 minutes and surface with many small fish in their beaks.

While exceptional in water, puffins are known for their uneven landings on land, which is part of their charm. It's possible to see puffins during the summer in many areas including the Westman Islands, Grimsey, the Látrabjarg cliffs in the Westfjords, Hafnarhólmi in Borgarfjörður Eystri, and Papey.

About 7.7 million puffins called Iceland home during the summer months in 2002, but their numbers have dwindled over the last 13 years at an alarming rate. Now only 3.2 million are estimated to remain, according to Erpur Snær Hansen, the Director of Ecological Research at Náttúrustofa Suðurlands (South Iceland



Nature Research Centre). Náttúrustofa Suðurlands was founded in 1996 and has a team of scientists conducting research on environmental and wildlife issues. Erpur has been investigating the puffin population of the Westman Islands since 2007 and has some startling data regarding Iceland's puffins.

If winter surface sea temperatures remain at current levels or higher, Erpur says, then much of the puffin population of south and west Iceland will disappear in the next 10 to 20 years. "We go around Iceland twice a summer to measure chick production," says Erpur. "We also study their diet and environment."

Iceland's puffin population has been

struggling largely due to lack of food. "They predominantly eat two species of fish around Iceland—capelin and sand eel," says Erpur. "The sand eel population collapsed in 2003-2005 and has not recovered yet, and we believe that is a real problem." The main hypothesis the agency is working on is that warmer winter ocean temperatures are lowering young sand eels' survival as they exhaust their wintering energy reserves prior to the spring food appearance. The spring bloom has also been greatly delayed over the same time period. Lack of fat fish has caused famine for some colonies of Iceland's puffins.

The impact is clear. Adult puffins must forage farther and come back with fewer fish for their young. Researchers are seeing



*About 7.7 million puffins called Iceland home during the summer months in 2002, but their numbers have dwindled over the last 13 years, at an alarming rate. Now only 3.2 million are estimated to remain. Suðurlands (South Iceland Nature Research Centre).*



puffin chicks starve, nests are abandoned, and fewer adult birds are breeding.

"This has occurred before," says Erpur, explaining that the population dynamics are linked to a periodic warming cycle called the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation (AMO). Indeed, waters surrounding Iceland warmed for about 35 years, and then cooled off for another 35 years, and puffin populations have correspondingly

dropped, then recovered. However, it appears to be different now.

Ocean temperatures have now climbed as much as two degrees since the last cold period, but similar to the last warm period (1920-1964).

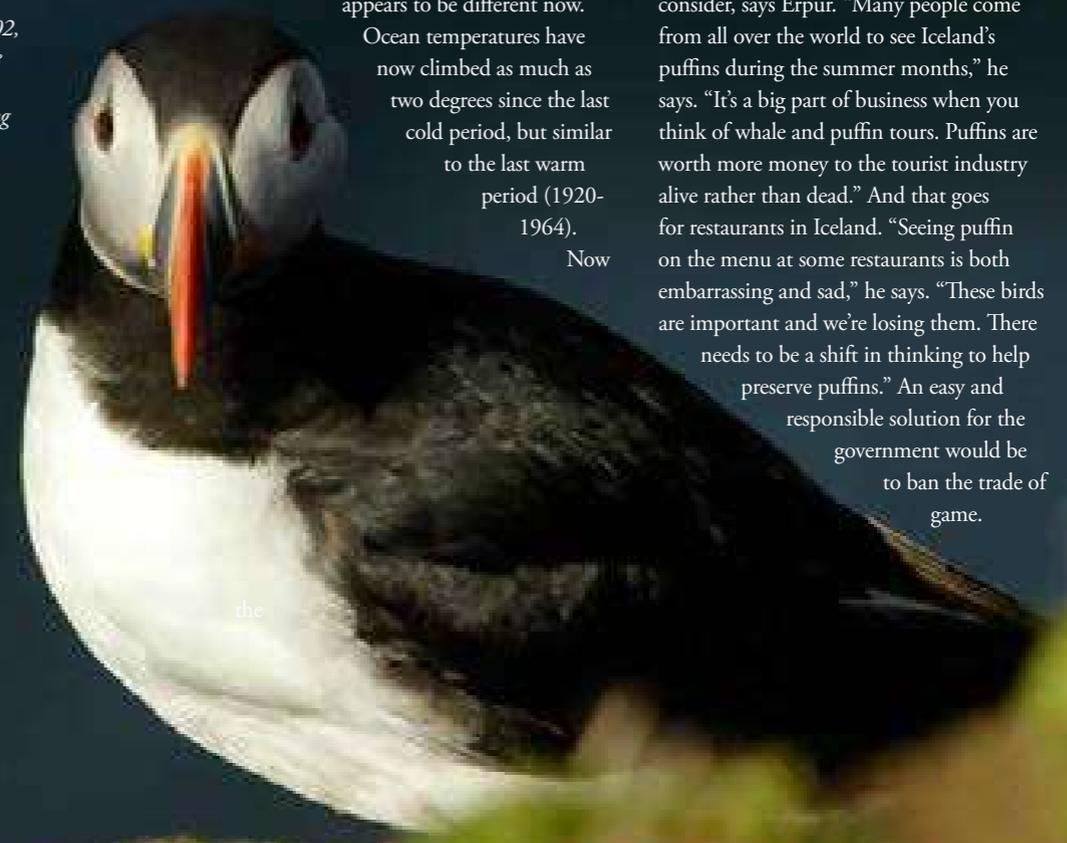
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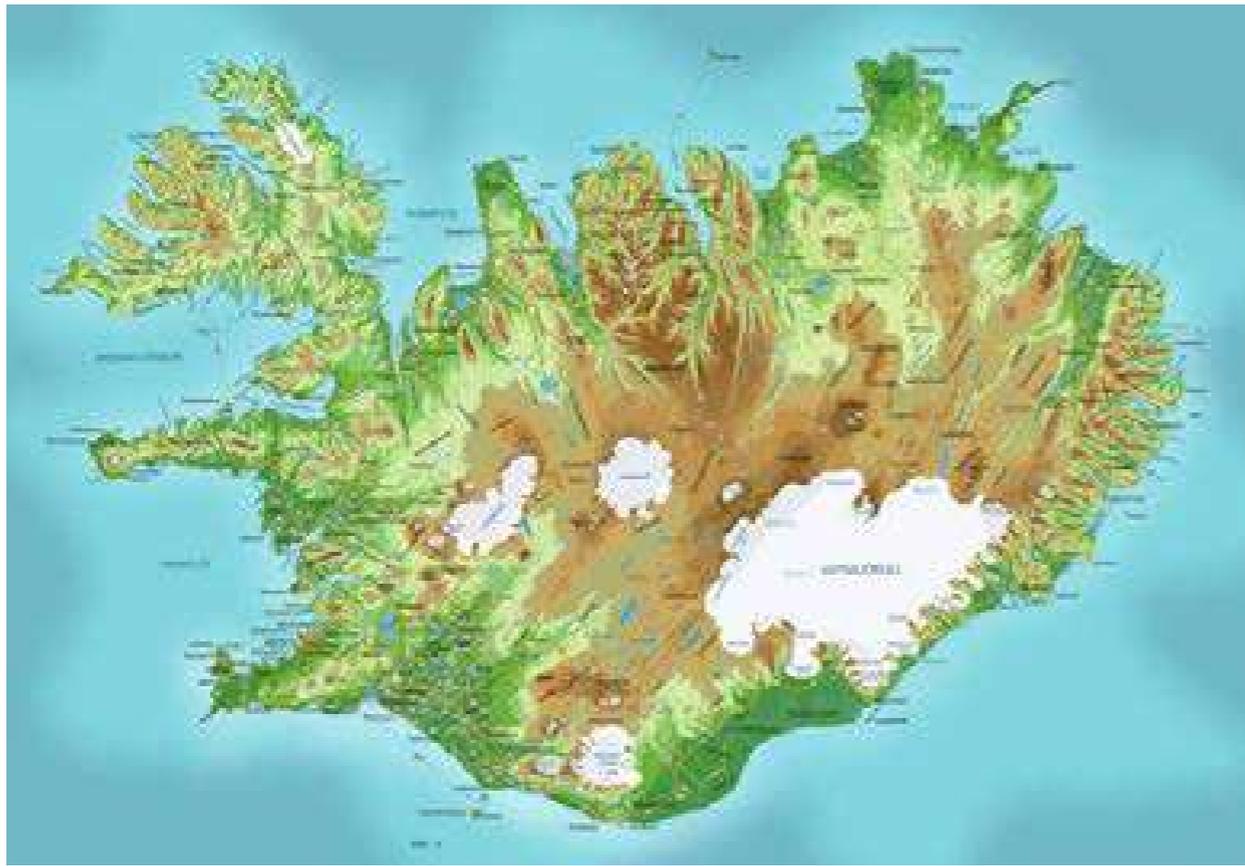
spring bloom is very late but its timing in the last warm period is unknown. The puffin chicks are feeling the impact. Even when the current warming cycle ends, around 2030, it won't perhaps be cool enough, depending on the effects of global warming. "The warming is definitely felt in Iceland," he says. "It makes things happen fast, and the birds are suffering."

Because of the declining puffin population, the government should consider some changes, says Erpur. "The hunting is unsustainable," he says. "We need to rethink our management system and base it on scientific measurements and on being sustainable, similar to the fishing industry here. Something needs to be done."

Puffins impact tourism as well, and that's something the government need to consider, says Erpur. "Many people come from all over the world to see Iceland's puffins during the summer months," he says. "It's a big part of business when you think of whale and puffin tours. Puffins are worth more money to the tourist industry alive rather than dead." And that goes for restaurants in Iceland. "Seeing puffin on the menu at some restaurants is both embarrassing and sad," he says. "These birds are important and we're losing them. There needs to be a shift in thinking to help preserve puffins."

An easy and responsible solution for the government would be to ban the trade of game.





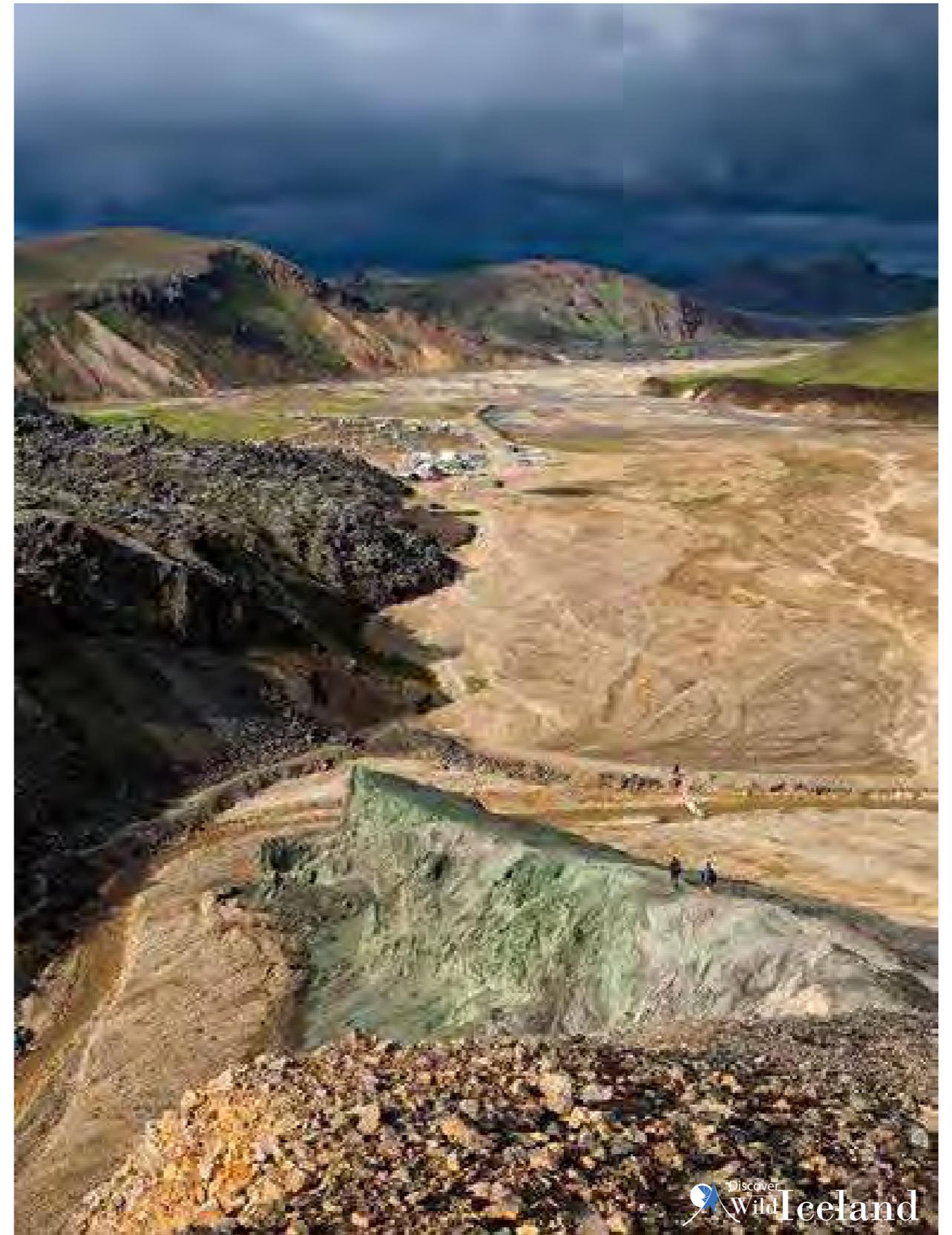
# THE HIGHLANDS OF *Iceland*

Nothing in Iceland prepares you for the stark, desolate, raw beauty of the barren upland plateau called the Highlands. An uninhabited area, The Highlands are completely without towns or villages, just endless plains, glacial rivers and lava fields punctuated by ice caps, volcanoes and jagged mountains. The isolation is the reason why people visit and travellers are humbled by the sublime sight of nature in its rawest, barest form. Historically, trails in the highlands were used as summer short cuts between north and south and myths of ghosts and fearsome outlaws spurred travellers along the tracks with all speed. Today, it is probably wiser to worry about the weather, as conditions can be fickle and snow is

not uncommon, even in mid-summer. The solitude is exhilarating, the views are vast and it is immensely tough but equally rewarding to hike or bike these cross-country routes. Any self-driving, cycling or hiking trip must be carefully planned. There are no roads in the area, just tracks and hardly any bridges across the rivers. Of all the various tracks, only two routes actually cross the whole way between north and south: Sprengisandur (F26) and Kjölur F35). The region is fully accessible only by four wheel drive vehicles. It is also possible to get a taste of this utter isolation in safety on bus tours, where you will discover amazing landscapes, similar to lunar landscapes. Which is the reason why the Apollo astronauts came there to train for moon landings!



#ICELANDSHIGHLANDS





The falls plunge 33 feet in a horseshoe-shaped recess, breaking into as many as six distinct segments depending on how much water is present in the artificially reduced river. During periods of heavier discharge the whole ledge may become covered in water, stretching out unbroken to nearly 200 feet in width.



Sprengisandur.

# TRAVEL INTO THE HIGHLANDS

*Mývatn Tours Take You into the Wilds of North Iceland*



**M**yvatn Tours take visitors up to the highlands of Iceland to the Askja caldera and Viti crater. You will also go through the Herðubreiðarlindir nature reserve area. This tour provides scenes of unforgettable Icelandic nature and geology.

The tour offers trips with 4x4 buses because they go through rough lava fields and

ivers. In the highlands, you will see lunar landscapes, glacial rivers, the deepest lake in Iceland, sand, lava, mountains, craters and a lot more. You will go home with amazing memories of a unique landscape.

You can bathe in the waters in Viti in the middle of Iceland, 1,100 m (3,609 ft.) above sea level, when conditions are good.

### Information about our tours in 2016:

Departure from the Tourist Information Centre in Reykjahlíð (Lake Mývatn Area) at 8 am every day.

- Price: 20.000 ISK
- The tours are daily from 22. June - 7. September 2016
- You can book and buy tickets by e-mail or phone



The tour takes approximately eleven to twelve hours. Please note that food is not included in the price and there are no restaurants or supermarkets on the way, so you have to bring your own food.

Please bring warm clothes and good shoes and bear in mind that the weather can change suddenly, especially in the highlands. Askja is also 1,100 m ( 3.609 ft.) above sea level.

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 www.myvatntours.is

# BETWEEN THE GLACIERS

Breathtaking experiences and stunning hiking treks in Kerlingarfjöll



If hiking is your passion, the challenge of new places is in your blood. This is one reason for the surge in popularity in hiking trips to Iceland. There are just so many varied hikes to take and various levels of difficulty.

Up past the classic tourist sites of Geysir and Gullfoss, the road reverts to gravel as it heads into the highlands of the interior along the Hvítá (White River), up between the Langjökull and Hofsjökull glaciers. This relatively flat territory, forming a large plateau named Kjölur (meaning keel of a vessel). Here, between these glaciers rises a group of mountains, hosting the third largest geothermal area in the interior: Kerlingarfjöll.

Kerlingarfjöll are 80 km from Gullfoss, partly on gravel roads that have been improved for normal vehicles. During the summer months, the Sterna bus company and SBA have regular services there.



This entire trip is one of superlatives as every aspect of the nature cries out for your attention. The different elements play with each other, creating a vista of constantly changing, shimmering colours and forms throughout the day and over the months. The pristine, pure, clean air and the thundering silence of the surrounding mountain peaks draws you into hiking its many trails. Plumes of steam rise from geothermal vents and hot springs over a landscape coloured red, yellow and green by the different minerals and natural chemicals.

## Who is the old woman?

The name, 'Kerlingarfjöll' translates as 'Old Woman's Mountains' and comes from folk tales telling how an old troll woman stayed out too late and didn't make it to her home in the mountains before the sun rose and turned her to stone. A 25 metre-high tuff stone pillar, said to be the troll, gives the range its name. Other folk tales describe the area being used as a haven or sanctuary for robbers and outcasts.

## An Oasis in the Desert

This would be an austere region were it not for the restaurant and cottages situated at Ásgarður, in the green valley at the north

eastern end of the canyon leading from the main geothermal area, Hveradalir. They transform the hiking experience by providing comfortable accommodation for up to 100 people and good food both before the start and at the end of a long day's hike.

Not only that, but the natural hot pool is a wonderful place to relax and soothe sore muscles. In the winter months, it gives the added experience of watching the Northern Lights as they sweep across the sky in a dance that can last for hours, with a totally different performance each night against a backdrop of glistening mountains and glaciers.



It is one of the driest parts of the country yet, during the winter months, it is covered in snow, transforming the scene once again. This is the time to travel by superjeep as Kerlingarfjöll is a very interesting destination in the winter as well.

## See From Sea to Sea

It is little wonder that Kerlingarfjöll is a popular place to stay in summer though, as many people love to enjoy the wonders of nature along with the peace and tranquility it offers. The area is big enough that its solitude is rarely interrupted by another hiker and yet, amazingly, there



is mobile phone access, so you are never far from modern life, should you need to communicate.

From the peak of the 1477 metre-high Snækollur mountain, you can see the seas in both the north and south on a clear day, which makes the summit second to none when comparing the size of area one can see from it.

## Formed in Fire

Born in a volcanic eruption, Kerlingarfjöll is a relatively young range of mountains, unusually created from rhyolite, liparite and both dark and bright tuff stone about 10,000 years old. This is what gives it its constantly changing colouring, depending on the light, the sun and the time of day. When it was being created, there was a glacier covering the mid highlands. In some places, it seems tuff stone burst through the ice, becoming covered with lava.

Kerlingarfjöll is at the centre of a system of volcanoes, with one of the most powerful hot spring areas in Iceland. It is a very active geothermal area still, with plenty of warm streams and pools flowing out from different parts of the mountain range. Some of the geysirs have melted the glacial ice and created impressive arches, caves and ice rocks.

## Melting Treasures

Geologists from many parts of the world come to see its treasures - some of which, according to Dr. Simon Carr of the Dept of Geography at Queen Mary College, University of London, could disappear in a matter of a couple of decades, making it all the more imperative to visit and enjoy its wonders while they are still there.

Until 2000, this used to be one of Iceland's most popular destinations for a summer skiing school but since that time, no lifts have operated as the snows have melted and the glaciers retreated under the effects of the changing climate.

In Spring, the melting snow creates unusual sculptures, swelling the many streams that turn into rivers, flowing in different directions. Amongst them is the mighty Hvítá that gives the Gullfoss waterfall its power and makes it such a magnet for tourists.

Yet, it all begins here, in the area around Kerlingarfjöll.

-ASF





HÚNAFLÓI

BREIÐAFJÖRÐUR

FAXAFLÓI

VATNAJÖKULL

Mýrdalsjökull

Langjökull

Hofsjökull

# IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVING IT

Picture hunting in Iceland with the professional photographer Rafn Sig,-  
Day tours / Photo and Photo Workshop tours / Winter and Summer tours

The soft light of a sunset and dawn's freshness are part of the magic that the island exerts on hunters of the moment. For photographers, Iceland is among the most magical places in the world.

If you like to live your passion for taking stunning pictures under professional guidance, you should get in touch with 'Rabbi' Rafn Sig,- one of the big names among Iceland's photographers.

## Small groups, big chances

Being a professional tour operator, he knows that the best way to elicit secrets from the country is by travelling in small groups. "You have to be relaxed for landscape shooting," says Rafn, "everyone needs his time for a picture. And, after all, you want to enjoy the moment." He offers tours travelling in a comfortable Super Jeep four-wheel drive Mitsubishi, suitable for any highland and low land trip.

He doesn't conceal the fact that photo hunting is still fun for him, even after 30 years of professional work. When he was a boy, he found places of incredible beauty in the highlands. Their special magic had to be captured and a lifelong passion was born. "It's all about loving it," says Rafn.

## Like-minded travelling companions

This professional photographer has published 8 books about Iceland and his pictures have been published all over the world. He likes to share his passion for travel with like-minded people. He offers customized, all year round photo trips and workshops range from a day to a fortnight long.

When you join him in his adventures, he might have a few more secrets to share.

## Treasure Hunting

The winter, with only a few hours of daylight, is a particular challenge to any photographer.

Long twilights, with sunny gold pouring over the hills, and nights when the sky is full of Northern Lights that appear to be closer than anywhere else, are a real treat and best to be enjoyed in a goooooooood group.



Discover  
**Wild Iceland**

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# BEST OF ICELAND

THE BEST INFORMATION  
ABOUT ICELAND AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

BY. EINAR TH. THORSTEINSSON



LAND OG SAGA

## Iceland at Your Fingertips

Just a few years ago, Iceland was called 'Europe's Best Kept Secret' but now the word is out and visitors from across the globe are finding out there are interests for everyone in its diversity, whether the nature, geology, history, culture, design or lifestyle.

This edition of Best of Iceland is packed with valuable information both to introduce Iceland to new travellers and offer fresh material to those returning to help plan your trip, and use in your travels.

It is divided into Reykjavík and Iceland's regions. The Reykjanes Peninsula is where most travellers start their Icelandic journey—landing at Keflavík International Airport. The book has information on everything from the man-made wonder, The Blue Lagoon, to the Hidden People. The West is home to Snæfellsnes, immortalised by Jules Verne in 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth'. The region is also known as 'Iceland in Miniature' for its varied landscape in a relatively small slice of the island. The Westfjords are considered the most remote part of the island, but no-one who makes the effort to go there will regret the journey. The North, with its many natural wonders, features activities such as horse riding, skiing, whale and bird watching and fishing, to name a few. The East Fjords have jaw-dropping bird cliffs and serene isolation. It's small villages are home to a thriving artistic community and the ferry connecting to mainland Europe docks here. The South Coast has gems like the Golden Circle, massive glaciers, volcanoes and charming coastal villages like Vík. The Highlands offer some of the most rugged and hauntingly beautiful scenery in all of Iceland.

An invaluable tool during your visit, Best of Iceland is also a great souvenir of your trip.

