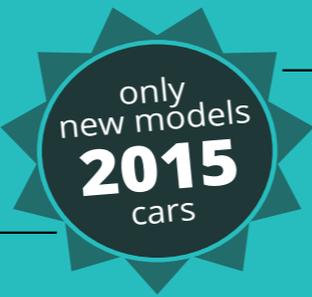




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KYNNISFERÐIR

If you are under the impression that the scenery in Iceland is less vibrant in colour in the fall than in the summer time, you are soon to find out otherwise. This time of the year the countryside is characterised by colours covering the whole of the warmer side of the colour spectrum, ranging from yellow, greenish to red and purple tones and the mountains are dressed in grizzled caps, making their appearance even more distinguished. This is also the favourite season of the northern lights lovers as this tireless phenomenon will rise from dormancy and delight locals and guests alike with its random, yet majestic performances. If you have come to experience the quiet nature that you've heard so much about, this is a prime time to do so. With fewer visitors travelling about the country, chances are that when you reach your favourite spot you may actually have it all to yourself. And yet you will find, regardless of where your heart is set on going, that there will be full service available with hotels,

guesthouses, restaurants and shops open all year round to meet your needs. Of course, there are plenty of tour guides and travel agencies in every region, where you will find expert knowledge of the area and the activities available, ensuring that you will have the most enjoyable holiday possible.

Another group worth mentioning, that appreciates this placid season, are the numerous craftspeople and artists who commonly have more time to attend to their creations. In this edition we will highlight the first-rate handiwork of designers and craftspeople, who put their heart and soul into their trade. Whether you plan on staying in the Reykjavik area or are headed to the countryside you will find a surprisingly wide variety of quality design, skilfully handmade with bundles of love. If you are still short on a Christmas present or two, you should find an abundance of ideas right here. We hope you enjoy this feature packed edition and that your holiday will be everything you dreamed it to be.

– Edda Snorradóttir

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Icelandic language

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

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

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ICELAND'S DYNAMIC DESIGN SCENE

Icelandic design is having a moment. From fashion to home products to handcrafts, the number of individuals producing innovative design projects in Iceland is staggering, making this tiny island a hotbed of creative energy. Many Icelandic designers have developed an aesthetic that incorporates the natural surroundings and picturesque landscape into their work. Iceland's boundless glaciers, wondrous waterfalls, towering volcanoes and vast lava fields never fail to inspire. Some designers favour working with local materials like Icelandic wool for fashion pieces, fish leather for handbags and accessories, and local birch wood for handcrafts.

Designers in Iceland come from various backgrounds. Some have studied abroad or attended the top-notch Iceland Academy

of the Arts (Listaháskóli Íslands) in Reykjavík, while others have honed their craft through self-study. Those with advanced degrees and those that have learned on their own share the same drive, with the desire to create coursing through their blood.

The close-knit design community in Iceland is often supportive and proud of one another, and thrilled to show off their original creations. To get a glimpse of some of Iceland's talented designers, check out the annual "Handverk og hönnun" exhibition, which will take place November 5-9 at Reykjavík City Hall. Scores of designers will be on hand displaying and selling their inventive goods. Locals love to support local designers and it's also a great place for tourists to pick up a unique handmade treasure from their unforgettable visit to Iceland. -JG

LEATHER DESIGNER

Ladies handbags, earrings and necklaces

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

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

Guðrún graduated from the Royal School of Architecture in Denmark in 1986. After

working at an architect's office, she started her own business.

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

The Ark Art collection is available at the National Art Gallery, Snorrastofa in Reykholt and directly from Guðrún.

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



Arkart

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COLOURFUL AND PLAYFUL PIECES

SES Design Mixes Adventure and Fun in Each Collection

Sigríður Elfa Sigurðardóttir bases SES Design in a charming workshop/store in Borgartún, where visitors can see, and purchase, her beautiful creations. Sigríður has been a lifelong maker and artist and studied as a painter. SES Design features fashion pieces for adults and children as well as accessories for the home, and jewellery and hats.

Design has been a passion for Sigríður for many years. SES Design was born in 2006, several years after she founded another design company. All of Sigríður's pieces are done by hand and each item is worked on one at a time. There is absolutely no mass production in SES Design. The concept started out as a children's line, but quickly expanded to include clothing for adults, including dresses.



The collection is colourful, playful and very pleasing to the eye. Some pieces feature fabrics that come from Africa. In addition to the SES Design workshop, which is recommended on TripAdvisor, Sigríður's designs can be purchased in Reykjavík at Álafoss, Epal (in Harpa), the Handknitting Association of Iceland, the National Gallery of Iceland,



Víkingur, Norska húsið in Stykkishólmur, the House of Hands in Egilsstaðir, and Gullfosskaffi off the Golden Circle. -JG



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DELICATE HAND-PAINTED SILK DESIGNS

Budda-Design Offers Whimsical Fashion Pieces Featuring Northern Lights Inspiration

Budda-Design is the creation of Aðalbjörg Erlendsdóttir, a fashion and textile designer based in the heart of Reykjavík. Budda's line is based around gorgeous designs she hand-paints on silk, including scarves, dresses, pillows and artwork. Aðalbjörg's designs are delicate and colourful, while being classic and playful at the same time.



Icelandic Nature

Iceland's stark nature and unrivaled beauty is a consistent influence on Aðalbjörg. She spends her summer travelling widely across Iceland and her deep love and appreciation for the natural surroundings is reflected in her designs. For her current collection, northern lights take centre stage with pieces inspired by the dancing green lights that adorn Iceland's skies every winter. Mountains, volcanoes and lava fields are also an inspiration.



Career Switch

Aðalbjörg has had an interesting professional path as she studied biology and geology at the University of Iceland and worked for many years as a biologist. About 23 years ago, she wanted to further explore her artistic side and graduated from the Columbine School of Fashion and Design in Denmark.

Locals and tourists can buy Budda-

Design pieces at a number of places around Reykjavík including her studio at Skipholt 9, National Gallery of Iceland, Ófeigur Gullsmiðja, Icelandair Hotels Reykjavík Natura, Hilton Reykjavík Nordica and Radisson Blu Saga Hotel, and Gullfosskaffi along the Golden Circle. -JG



Budda Design

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THE FINE ART OF KNIFEMAKING

Bringing an Ancient Viking Tradition Into the Present

In the town of Mosfellsbær, just a 15 minutes' 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.



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 special order online.

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 scattered 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 something of a sought after souvenir from Iceland.

Custom-made

Should you have your own design ideas or materials that you would like to use, Palli

Walk-ins Welcome

Palli and Soffía's workshop can be found at Álafossvegur 29, 270 Mosfellsbær. Opening hours are 9 - 6, Monday through Friday, from 9 - 4 on Saturdays 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.

-EMV

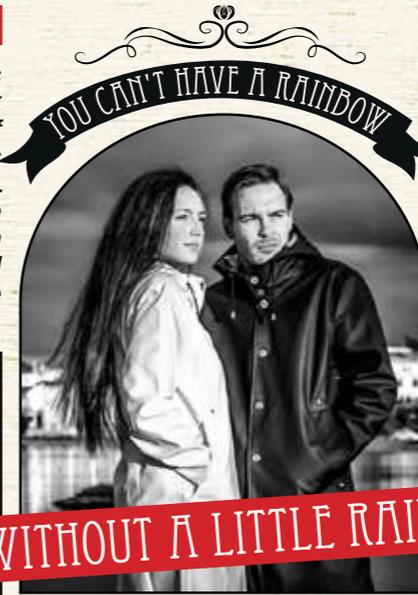


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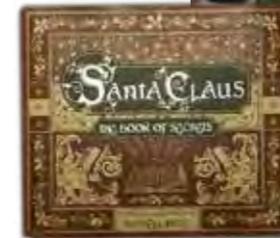
THE JOYFUL WONDERLAND

The Little Christmas Shop that is festive all year round

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

In the Land of Eternal Christmas

Anne Helen, a genuine aesthete, says she has always had somewhat of a Christmas obsession and an intense passion for things of beauty. She never goes for anything average but hunts for things of quality that truly stand out. Though she imports merchandise from all over Europe, her ambition is to specialise in Icelandic handiwork and ornaments. She already has



an extensive range, most made exclusively for her by a number of craftsmen, each having a distinctive approach and working in materials such as wool, glass and clay. In addition to



customary Christmas ornaments, she includes local folklore figures, like the thirteen Yule Lads and the Christmas Cat.

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

-HP



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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, Reykjavik'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 1,000 metres. It is also available to the general public, along with pilots' watches, likewise known for their dependability and absolute reliability.

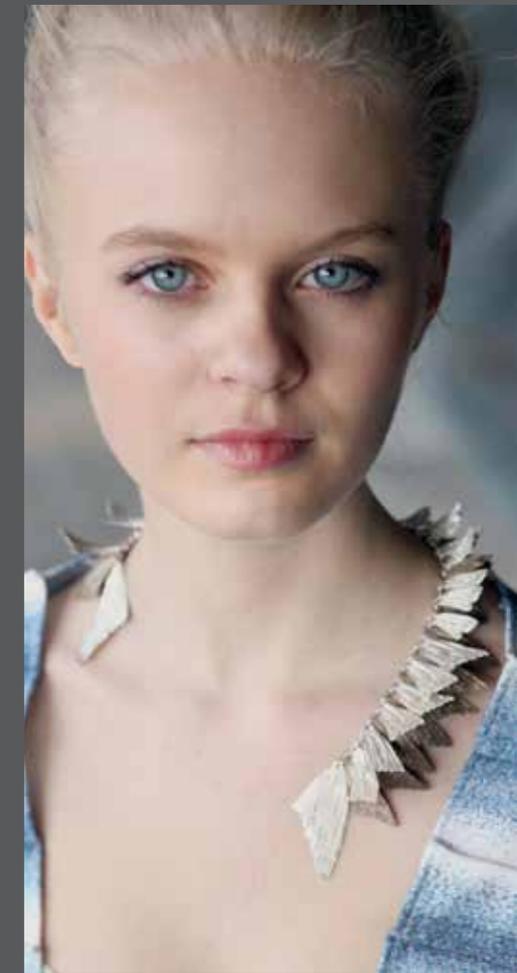
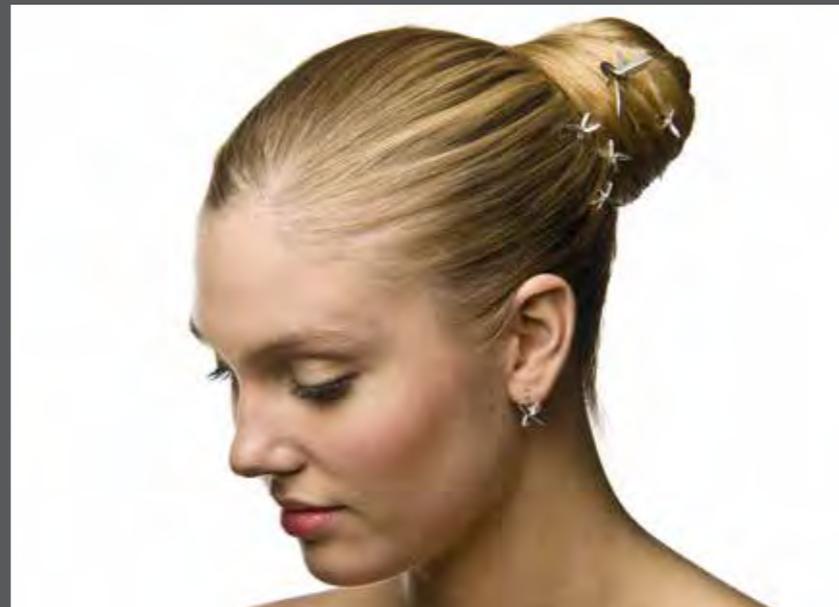
Wear the volcano

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. Orate 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



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DELICATE AND PRECIOUS

Aurum's award-winning Icelandic jewellery designs in downtown Reykjavik

Bankastræti 4 in central Reykjavik is one of the best spots in town. It houses a unique shop: Aurum. Its windows are filled with beautiful jewellery designed by award winning designer, Guðbjörg Kristín Ingvarsdóttir, along with colourful and interesting articles from all over the world.

Like a breath of fresh air

Aurum's jewellery pieces are notable for their fine details and delicate nuances, giving a feminine touch but, at the same time, a light and modern appearance. When Guðbjörg introduced her jewellery to the market, it was like a breath of fresh

air. These pieces were something new and different but yet very Icelandic, as the inspiration and motifs are taken from Icelandic nature.

The mountains, flowers and the glacier

Guðbjörg comes from Ísafjörður, a fishing town in northwest Iceland. The high mountains, the long and narrow fjord, glittering in the moonlight or sunshine, the dark winters and the tiny flowers next to a cold glacial shield, are reflected in her delicate but yet strong and powerful jewellery.

She trained as a goldsmith and jewellery designer at the Institute for Precious Metals

in Copenhagen. While she was studying, she visited her home town in summer and climbed the Drangajökull glacier. The tiny flowers there, fighting for their lives, had a great impact on her and became the inspiration for her first flower line. These designs have become like Aurum's logo.

After three years abroad running a cooperative design shop, she came home to Iceland in 1999. She founded Aurum with her husband, Karl Jóhann Jóhannsson.

Guðbjörg has taken part in many international design exhibitions both as a solo designer and as a part of a group. She was awarded first prize in the jewellery competition 'Spirit of the North' in St.

Petersburg in 2000, received the DV Cultural Award in Reykjavik for Art Design 2002 and the Visual Arts Award in 2008. In 2011, Aurum received the Njarðarskjöldur award for Best Tourist Shop of the year. Articles about Guðbjörg and Aurum have appeared in many different international magazines and very recently, in the Swedish magazine, Elle Interiör.

New nature motifs every year

Guðbjörg is very productive and launches 2-5 new lines every year, now adding up to over thirty altogether.

She is an enthusiastic angler and this year, she introduced her salmon jewellery and the ray, which used to be typical food in her home town. Recently three birds were presented: the swan, the raven and the falcon.

She is now working on a new and different line in cooperation with a reindeer farmer in Greenland. She is making a



necklace and bracelet range from silver and reindeer hooves. These pieces will first be shown in a special exhibition in Reykjavik and then launched in the Design March festival in Reykjavik in 2015.

Porcelain and international design

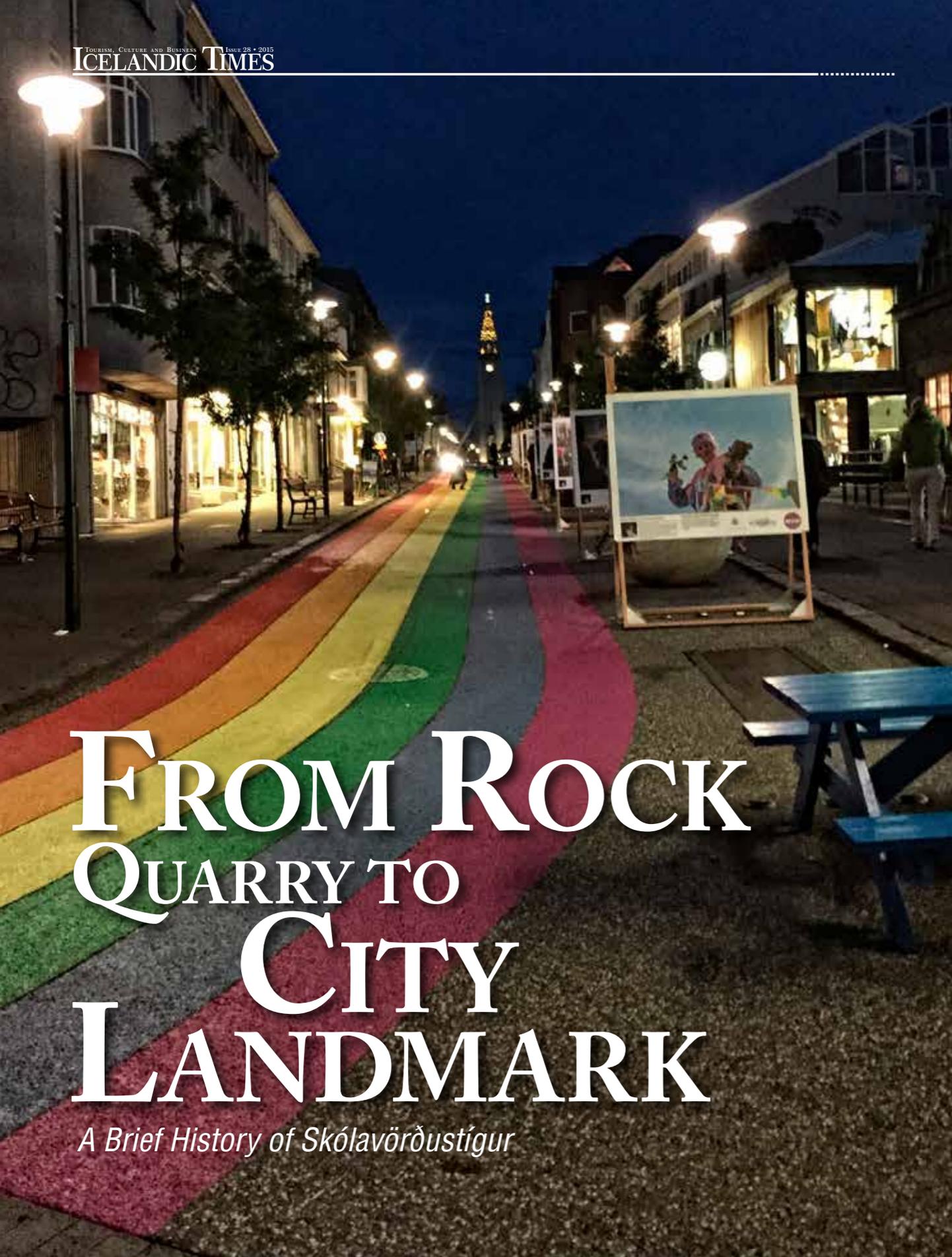
The Aurum jewellery shop is like fairytale world. Showcases full of fine, delicate and detailed silver objects are so inspiring and beautiful that it is hard to resist buying one. But, in the next room is a colourful, different and exciting design shop run by Guðbjörg and her husband. There one can buy interesting Icelandic design items as well as various things from countries all over the world. Special socks from Japan, perfume from France and porcelain decorated by Guðbjörg in cooperation with the Finnish design studio, Elinno. There are also candles designed by Guðbjörg in cooperation with Popup Paris. In three of the candles are hidden 0.15 carat diamonds. Only one of them has been found as yet.

- SJ



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FROM ROCK QUARRY TO CITY LANDMARK

A Brief History of Skólavörðustígur

One of Reykjavik's most notable landmarks is Hallgrímskirkja, which towers over the cityscape from a hill in the city's centre. The street leading up to the church is famous for its bustling street life, diverse restaurants, art galleries, innovative design shops and quality shopping.

The rock collectors

Given Reykjavik's relatively short history, it is hard to imagine that, only two centuries ago, a group of schoolboys collected rocks and stones from the area, scaled the hill and proudly raised a cairn to honour their newly built school nearby. The year was 1793, only seven years into Reykjavik's official trading town status, and the hill had not yet been built upon and, in fact, was registered as a falcon reservation at the time.

No horses allowed

The hill was thus named Skólavörðuholt, which literally translates School cairn's hill. The cairn didn't prove to be a durable construction and fell into disrepair, so city officials took action. A seven-metre high tower was raised in 1834 on the top of the hill, providing splendid views over the city. The city also committed to maintain the tower and the surrounding area and thus a road leading up the hill was built. The road was given the name Skólavörðustígur and was meant as a scenic pedestrian street and therefore all traffic by horse was forbidden (also to minimize the road's maintenance). The ban on horse traffic proved to be difficult as the hill was also used as a rock quarry for constructions in the city, especially the harbour area, which meant hauling rocks down the slope had to be done by manpower.

A man with a vision

The first buildings started rising around Skólavörðuholt in the mid-19th century, some of which are still standing and preserved by the city, including the still-used city prison. In the early 20th century, Guðjón Samúelsson,



Photo from the year 1902 of a seven-metre high tower was raised in 1834 on the top of the hill, providing splendid views over the city on "School cairn's hill"

the state architect of Iceland had big plans for Skólavörðuholt as a centre of culture, education and religion. Although those ambitious plans didn't work out as the university was given land further to the west, he did design the majestic church that stands there today.

Make room for Leif

The statue of Leif Eiríksson, the first European to discover North America, on Skólavörðuholt was a gift from the United States for Iceland's millennium celebration of Alþingi's founding in 1930, but to make room for the generous gift, the tower on Skólavörðuholt was demolished, leaving people without a favourable view over the city.

This was remedied as Samúelsson's plans for Hallgrímskirkja, the grand church on top of Skólavörðuholt named after Iceland's primary psalm composer, Hallgrímur Pétursson, were made into reality. He started designs in 1937 and construction started in 1945, though the church wasn't completed until 1986 - 36 years after Samúelsson's death.

A Lasting Monument

The church has proven to be a lasting monument, as the surrounding area has changed from a rock quarry with a cairn on top into a lively and colourful neighbourhood where Reykjavik's top chefs, designers, craft folk and artists congregate.

-VAG



The statue of Leif Eiríksson.



CELEBRATING ICELANDIC NATURE THROUGH TEXTILE DESIGN

GJÓSKA WOOL ART

Textile artist Birna Kristín Friðriksdóttir walks through the pasturelands that surround her farm Brúnagerði, in the Fnjóskadalur valley, North Iceland. In summer, the countryside is full of life and bursting with energy. In winter, the profound stillness of this valley is restful and refreshing. Now, in late September, the rapid transition from summer to winter begins and it is here in the midst of all this splendour, that Birna gets her inspiration, in hefty daily doses, while working out of her studio.



100% Icelandic Craftsmanship

Her medium is textiles. Reams of knitted Icelandic wool is her canvas upon which she skillfully incorporates strands of loose unspun merino wool, interspersed with flashes of neon green or bright red/orange silk, evoking a magnificent northern



lights display, or the lava falls from the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in 2010. Once the patterns are created, Birna cuts the material into shapes that will then be sewn into woollen outerwear - hats, gloves, jackets, capes & ponchos and of course sweaters, in her own inimitable style.

Inspired by Nature

After many years working as a textile teacher in her hometown of Grenivík, Birna felt the call to move into the realm of clothing design.



In 2013 Gjóska Clothing Company was set up, allowing Birna full reign to indulge her passion for clothing design. She's been going full steam ever since.

Plans for the Future

Birna hopes to export her creations to other nations where the northern lights are visible, such as Canada, Finland and northern Norway. Closer to home, plans are afoot to bring northern lights tours to her workshop in Fnjóskadalur, a 30-minute drive from Akureyri or to pop in to the retail shop at Skólavörðustígur 20, 101 Reykjavik to see her creations.

You are welcome to visit Birna at her workshop in Fnjóskadalur, a 30-minute drive from Akureyri or to pop in to the retail shop at Skólavörðustígur 20, 101 Reykjavik to see her creations.

They make wonderful mementos of your trip to Iceland! -EMV

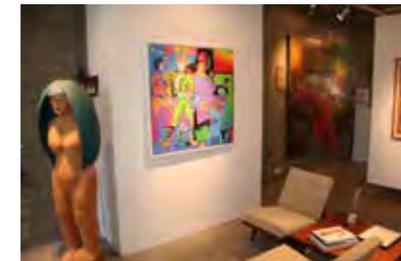


Gjóska Wool Art
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+354 863 6112
birnahe@gmail.com
Find them on Facebook: Gjóska

MASTERS ON DISPLAY

Get a Glimpse of Icelandic Masters and Contemporary Artists at Gallery Bakarí in Downtown Reykjavik

Skólavörðustígur is the hippest street in Reykjavik 101 and Gallery Bakarí is at the centre of it all. The cosy gallery is home to an impressive number of local artworks that are on display and for sale. The owner and staff members take great care in rotating the exhibitions, making sure the gallery experience stays fresh. Some of the artists that have been on display at Gallery Bakarí include Kjarval, Karólína Lárusdóttir, Ásrún Kristjánsdóttir, Eyborg Guðmundsdóttir, and Sæmundur Valdimarsson. "We have one of the biggest collections of the old masters and contemporary artists, as well as newcomers," says Árni Thor, a staff member at the gallery. "We change the artists often and while we are a small gallery, there is always something new to see."



The gallery is open Monday-Friday from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. and on Saturdays from 12 p.m.-4 p.m., and closed on Sundays. However, if the gallery is closed, people are always welcome to contact the staff at any hour to see if the

gallery can be opened. Contact Sveinn Thorhallsson at +354/690-0931. Keep Gallery Bakarí in mind to see traditional and modern art in Reykjavik.



Gallery Bakarí
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GRANDI

THE NEW HOME FOR INNOVATION AND CULTURE

A few years ago a visit to the Grandi harbour area in Reykjavik would most likely have been an unremarkable experience for non-industry workers, but in a relatively short time this former industrial area has been transformed into a lively neighbourhood where the past, present and future meet.

Now you'll find exciting restaurants, designer shops, cafés, IT companies and museums intertwined with the area's old fisheries-related operations. Once dreary buildings have been renovated and huge murals cover former barren walls.

The Best Ice Cream in Town?

A walk along Grandagarður street is thus full of sights and activities. Old baiting shacks have been transformed into designer studios and shops. Renowned fashion and jewellery designers have thus taken a liking



to the area and set up shops there. Those who are looking for a bite to eat or sit down for a drink have several options: two cosy cafés,

a fish and chips restaurant, a burger joint and an innovative café based on Icelandic traditions. Some say the best ice cream can

be found in Grandi; just be prepared to wait in line if the sun is out.

The Reykjavik Maritime Museum is the heart of Grandi; connecting the harbour to the streetlife and the past to the present. The Saga Museum goes further back, all the way to Viking times, offering vivid recreations of the period. Nature enthusiasts will not be disappointed by the gigantic Whales of Iceland museum or the Aurora Reykjavik – Northern Lights Center.

Shopping in the area is both easy and fun; as you have the option of big grocery shopping on one side and going to an artisanal butcher or fashion designer on the other side.

The Smell of Money

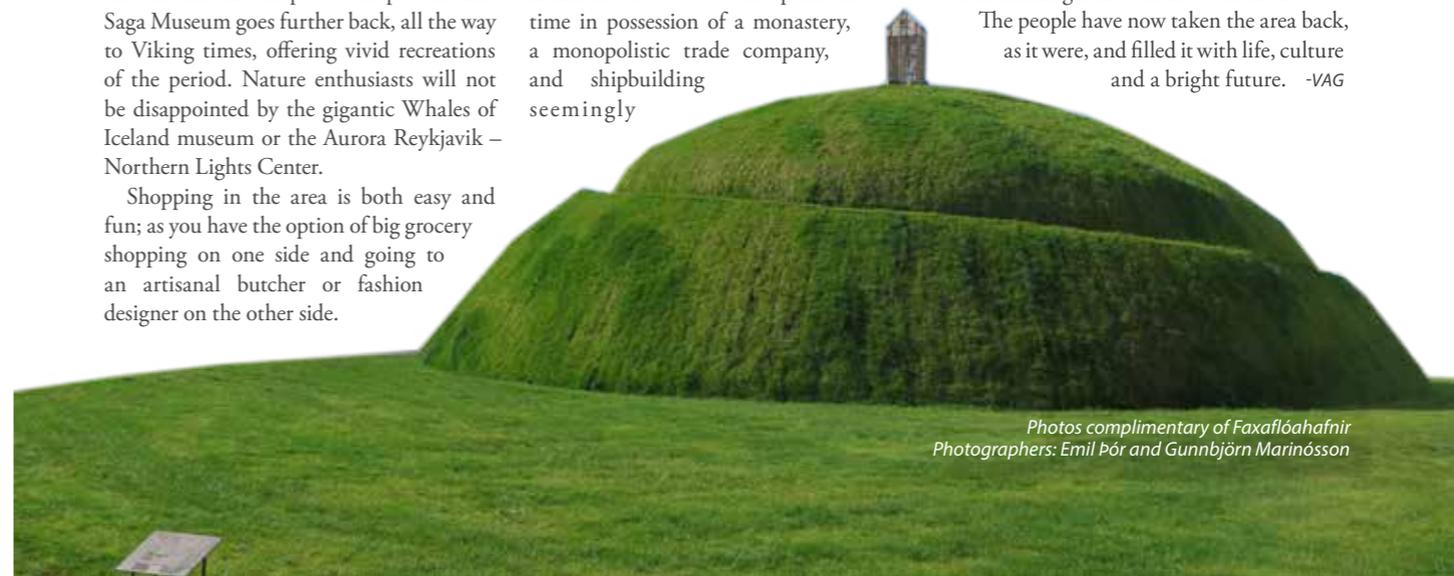
This overhaul of Grandi's appearance and purpose is however not its first. It is in fact a landfill connecting a small island to the mainland. It was at one point in time in possession of a monastery, a monopolistic trade company, and shipbuilding seemingly



took place there in the 18th century. After a ferocious storm swept away all settlements at the turn of the 19th century, the island was repopulated and was finally purchased by the city of Reykjavik in the early 20th century, as it was considered a convenient location for fish industries and shipping docks. A fish liver oil factory was set up on the island; a process which created unique pungent odours which travelled across the city, much to the annoyance of its inhabitants, to which the owner of the factory simply replied "it's the smell of money."

The island was originally only connected to the mainland by a rocky reef, which was covered during high tide. The reef was piled up with rocks in 1913 making it accessible to the public and quickly became a popular area for outdoor activities. During the Second World War British troops used the island as their base and constructed several large buildings there, and since the end of the war the island has been a site for large industries. In 1980 a landfill was made, roads paved and more houses built, fully transforming it into an industrial zone.

The people have now taken the area back, as it were, and filled it with life, culture and a bright future. -VAG



Photos complimentary of Faxaflóahafnir
 Photographers: Emil Þór and Gunnbjörn Marinósson



CATCH THE NORTHERN LIGHTS ALL YEAR AROUND

Aurora Reykjavik'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 Reykjavik'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 Reykjavik'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 Reykjavik'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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ONLY AT KAFFIVAGNINN

Taking Traditional Icelandic Food to the Next Level

So much has been written about Icelandic fish, the stars in the crown of many a new restaurant in Reykjavik. But when your restaurant is just a stone's throw from the docks where the fish were caught just hours before, and prepared by the likes of a chef named Guðmundur 'Gummi' Viðarsson, then you know you are in for something wonderful, dare I say, superb.

In Iceland you learn not to judge a book building by its cover. Kaffivagninn's humble wooden exterior belies the food experience that lies within. Gummi has been cooking for 30 years and it clearly shows. He turns out perfectly executed dishes day after day, never missing a beat, with a passion for his craft that no one should miss out on.

He's cooked for well-known British chefs Gordon Ramsey and Ainsley Harriot, appearing in a segment of the latter's 'Street Food' TV series. It goes without saying that both were suitably impressed.

It also goes without saying that this might just be the freshest fish you have ever tasted. The chef's choice, the 'Fish Pan' was served to me piping hot, right in the frying pan - a gratin of cod loin with shrimp, béarnaise sauce, buttery potatoes and some fresh greens on the side. Delicious!

Under glass-domed cake stands, a variety of enticing home-made goodies such as traditional Icelandic pancakes, waffles, 'marriage cake', Sarah Bernhardt cakes, as well as enormous kleinur and 'love balls' are



on display- any one of which would be the perfect finish to an already perfect meal.

Doors open at 7.30 a.m. weekdays and 9.30 a.m. on weekends, but also close early at 6.00 p.m., so you'll want to make sure you get in promptly to grab a table. Popular with locals, Kaffivagninn is ideal for an early breakfast or a lovely weekend brunch and a great place to sample traditional fare with an updated twist.

Kaffivagninn celebrates its 80th birthday this year, so do go if you get a chance...it's down by the water's edge in the Grandi area of Reykjavik. *-EMV*



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 www.kaffivagninn.is





NORDIC CHIC AT ITS BEST

Modern Icelandic Fashion Brand Farmers Market Makes Waves in Grandi

Farmers Market is an Icelandic design company and clothing brand that features designs that mix modernity with classic Icelandic heritage. Natural fibres, muted colours and unrivaled craftsmanship are at the centre of each piece of the collection.

Founded in 2005 by a young artist couple - a designer and a musician, Farmers Market has become a staple in Icelandic fashion, found in the closets of artists, musicians, everyday Icelanders and hip tourists. The clothes are impeccably styled with pieces suitable for city life while sustaining the outdoor elements. "We place ourselves at a junction," said Farmers Market designer Bergþóra Guðnadóttir. "A place where heritage meets modernity, the national meets the international, and the countryside meets the city. We find this an exciting place to explore."

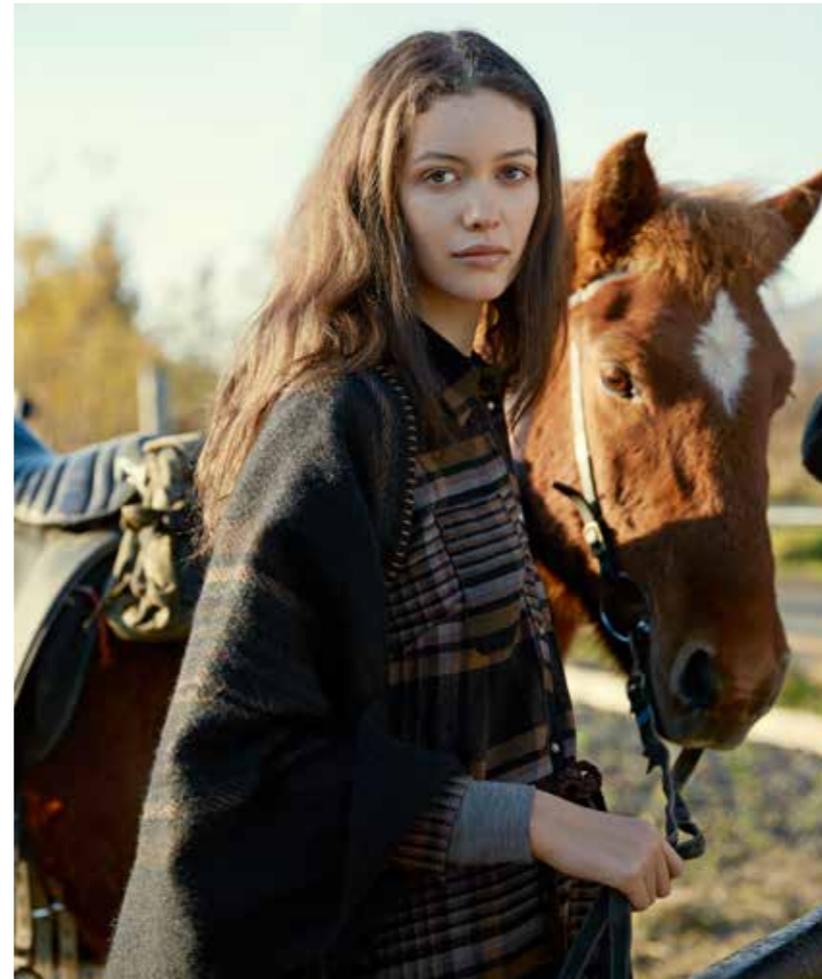
The brand focuses on sustainability,



respect for the environment and the use of natural fabrics. Farmers Market works with materials including local Icelandic wool to waxed cotton fabrics from British

Millerrain to raw Indian silk. The use of synthetic materials is kept to a minimum.

While knitwear is at the core of the brand with luxurious cardigans, sweaters



Farmers Market
— ICELAND —

and dresses; Farmers Market also creates quality pants, skirts, tops and underwear for women. For men, the brand offers knitwear along with shirts, pants, vests and underwear. Scarves and hats are also a must for men and women. Adorable sweaters and jumpsuits are on offer for children.

Farmers Market's flagship shop, Farmers & Friends, is situated in the up-and-coming Fishpacking District in Grandi. Just a 20-minute walk from the city centre, Grandi is home to a growing number of businesses including a microbrewery, ice cream shop, restaurants and gourmet butcher. Farmers & Friends is the perfect place to purchase clothing and accessories, while browsing a perfectly curated selection of CDs and LPs, books, and other goods. It's a fun shop to spend some time while exploring the charming old harbour district. The shop is open Monday-Friday 10 a.m.-6 p.m. and Saturdays 11 a.m.-4 p.m. —JG



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info@farmersmarket.is
www.farmersmarket.is





CELEBRATING ICELAND'S WHALES

A Close Encounter with Those Majestic Giants of the Deep



Personally, I have always loved whales. Blue whales, humpbacks, sperm whales, and of course those oh-so-friendly dolphins have always fascinated me. Who can forget the plaintive sounds of the humpback whales that accompanied Judy Collins in her rendition of the old Scottish whaling song 'Farewell to Tarwathie'?

A First for Iceland

The idea for the exhibition came about a few years ago in response to mounting interest in whales worldwide, coupled with the rise in tourism to Iceland. With the help of private investors, plans were laid to create a tribute to these impressive marine mammals and it was with great



excitement and fanfare that Whales of Iceland's 1,700 square metre exhibition hall opened its doors to the public in February 2015.

Soothing Surround-Sounds

Whales of Iceland is the largest whale exhibition in Europe (and quite possibly the planet), with 23 full-scale replicas of the whales that frequent Icelandic coastal waters. Here you can immerse yourself in another realm and forget your cares (for awhile at least) of the world 'up top'. Beautiful, soothing surround-sounds of whale songs, clicks, as well as the gentle sound of pulsating waves adds an extra dimension to this unique experience.

Close Encounters of a Cetacean Kind

Being in such close proximity to the life-size models gives many visitors a new appreciation of their grandeur and scale, while meticulously researched information panels give you the low-down on the details of each magnificent animal. Made of steel and foam, each model's 'skin' is hand stitched together and when finished the largest among them weighs up to two tonnes.

Free Coffee!

After you have had time to soak up the magic, take a moment to enjoy a hot coffee or tea in the main hall - it's on the house. Whale watching tours can be booked in the lobby and the gift shop is where you will find many lovely whale and marine life-related items, both decorative and practical.

If you love whales, you'll find the Whales of Iceland exhibition, located near Reykjavik Harbour in the Grandi District, to be not only an enchanting experience, but also an educational one that the whole family will enjoy.

The whales would certainly approve!

Whales of Iceland is open year round, except over Christmas and New Year's Day. Winter opening times are from 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

-EMV



Whales of Iceland
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 +354 571 0077
 info@whalesoficeland.is
 www.whalesoficeland.is





THE NORTHERN LIGHTS SEASON IS UPON US

Day Tours or Private Tours 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.

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 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 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.

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



Reykjavik Excursions
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Two Icelandic themed villages



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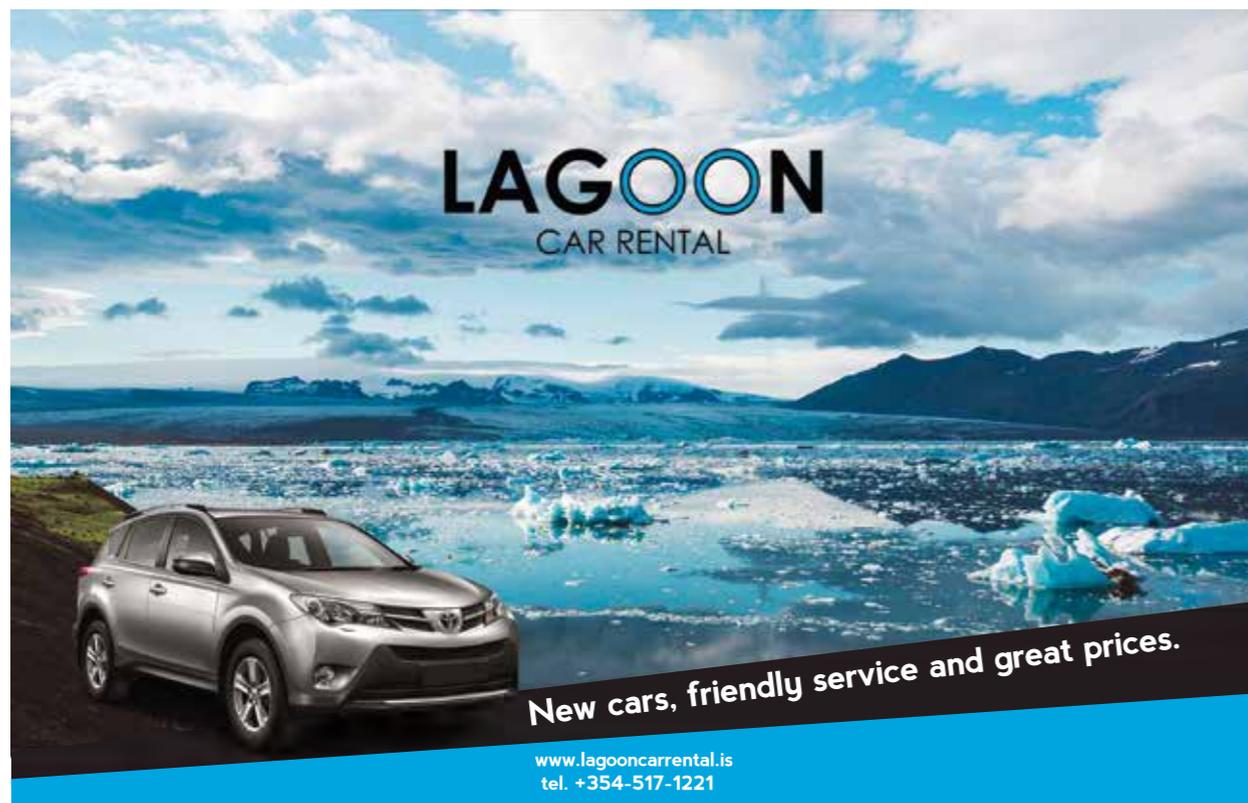
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Finally a car rental company with affordable prices! Knowing that the standard price for even a small 2-door, no frills passenger car can cost upwards of €100 a day in Iceland (in winter, and even more in summer), I was intrigued. Surely there was a catch - hidden fees or extra charges somewhere in the fine print? I decided to go straight to the top and find out for myself. (Ok it's a small family-run company so this was not difficult.)

I spoke to iRent's affable owner Björgvin Sævarsson who assured me that what you see is what you get. Unlimited miles, all taxes and fees included in the price, and a very nice selection of new and almost new cars to choose from, starting at €39.00 a day. You can even rent a bicycle or an all-terrain vehicle, or opt for their high-end luxury cars such as the Cadillac Escalade or the Hummer H2. The least expensive car? It's the 5-passenger

Hyundai i10, priced at €39.00 a day from September 1st 2015 to May 31st 2016. At these prices how can you NOT afford to visit Iceland this winter? *-EMV*



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JOE & THE JUICE GETTING JUICED IN ICELAND

Joe & the Juice is an on-trend coffee shop/ juice bar that opened in January 2015 at Keflavik International Airport. The concept answers today's traveller needs 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

Unmistakable 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 Keflavik Airport's check-in lounge. A new Joe & the Juice will open in KEF airport's departure lounge on March 15th. This is one place to check out! -EMV



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www.joeandthejuice.is



THE BRAVE GET THE BEST

The Sea Baron's Fish Meals Attract Visitors from All Over the World

Iceland has many 'different' foods which have their roots in seafaring history. The Vikings came up with many novel ways of preserving their foods and their traditions continue to this day. Some of these foods sound unappealing, to say the least, and it takes the adventurous soul to step out and try them. Iceland is for the adventurous and they reap the benefits of the brave. The timid stick to burgers!

The Sea Baron in True spirit

A former fisherman and Coast Guard chef, Kjartan Halldórsson, also known as the Sea Baron, is the master of unusual fish dishes. His lobster soup, for example, has gained fame around the world, earning it the title of 'the world's greatest lobster soup'. While he never revealed the secrets of his recipe, that has never stopped the restaurant from being filled every day with aficionados.

He entered the restaurant business by chance. One day, when standing by his boxes of fish, some foreign visitors asked if he could prepare some fish for them. Spotting an opportunity, he ran to the nearest hardware store to buy a grill—and was in business! His visitors were invited to dine in his shop in this improbable restaurant. Word quickly spread and soon he was shifting his boxes out to make room for tables and chairs. He took the unusual and created delicious meals that no one else had thought of. He took old recipes, some of which sounded revolting, and made meals that have established his reputation around the world.

The Passing of the Sea Baron

Kjartan, the true Sea Baron, has recently passed away. But his legacy will surely live on for many years to come. A few years ago, Kjartan passed his mantle on to Elísabet Jean Skúladóttir, an energetic and vibrant young woman who actually bought the restaurant at the Sea Baron's request. Kjartan wanted to make sure his place would be well taken care of in the future, but he used to joke that, not only



did Elísabet make a great investment by purchasing the restaurant, but he was included in the deal himself. Kjartan's spirit will surely remain palpable

as visitors will not only feel his energy but he will actually be there to greet them in the form of a wax sculpture!

Dining as a Seafaring Experience

Kjartan's restaurant is popular with the fishermen who sailed for many years from Reykjavik. It is filled with memorabilia donated by old sea captains and their families that fill it with a character all its own. Handmade model sailing boats, pictures of ships of the past and stuffed birds fill the second floor's walls, where groups of up to 35 can celebrate together. Eating at the polished tables, sitting on cushioned fish barrels, surrounded by paraphernalia of the sea, it is an experience that will leave you with both good memories, a satisfied appetite—and perhaps, a rather shocked mind that you would actually have eaten fermented fish and that it tasted so, so good. Moby Dick on a Stick (minke whale on a spear) for example, is a play on words

with great impact, delicious and stirring—as are the great variety of other fish spears with a mix of cod, blue ling, salmon, trout, lobster and giant shrimp, to name a few. Also worth mentioning is an Icelandic specialty dish, available at noon on Thursdays, a combination of fermented fish. On the first Saturday of the month they offer skate with heaps of hamsatólg (fried fat), potatoes and rye bread with butter. This delicacy is only available from 1st September – 30th April. For desert, as a true Icelander, one should enjoy grjónagautur—or rice pudding of sorts, often served with raisins and cinnamon flavoured sugar.

Bon Voyage Sea Baron!

The Sea Baron will be missed dearly by all who knew him. His heritage will live on and there is no doubt that his recipes will continue to warm the bellies of both Icelanders and travellers alike for generations to come. This man has surely put his mark on the restaurant landscape and changed the way we perceive a grand dining experience. -ASF



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www.saegreiffm.is





REFINEMENT IN REYKJAVIK

Einar Ben Brings Style and Class to Dining in the Capital

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

Home of a Hero

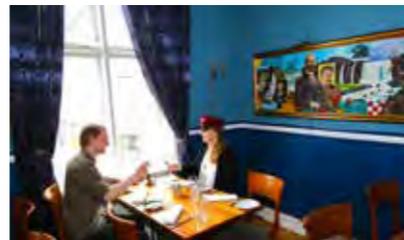
The restaurant is, in fact, the former home of one of Iceland's greatest heroes, after whom it is named. Einar Ben was a poet and pioneer who personified the dreams and ambitions of Icelanders in the early 20th century.

It is easy to see why the restaurant has become a part of Reykjavik's culture. It retains the romanticism and grace of the Golden Age period and yet it is free of pretense and excess. You'll find none of the modern, careless, fast food rush here. The staff enjoy taking time to provide a quality service in an open, friendly manner.



Dishes With a Difference

Of course, what matters most is the food, and here, Einar Ben's reputation is well known. Its dishes are built around the classics: fish and lamb. They are justifiably



proud of their menu, from the hors d' oeuvres, the main course to the desserts and coffee drinks, the master chef creates sublime tastes which blend together for an amazing dining experience.

Fortified for the night

Up on the third floor of the house is fun surprise: Rauði barinn, Einar Ben's lounge. It's the perfect place to relax with some after-dinner drinks. Reykjavik's nightlife is legendary, so the 'Red Bar' will prepare you to start a night on the town.

Einar Ben is found on the corner of Ingólfstorg, at the end of Austurstræti, right in the city centre.

-ASF




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 @einarben@einarben.is
 www.einarben.is



RÉTTR

THE YEARLY SHEEP ROUND-UP!

In September the majority of farmers across the country will be herding their sheep from the plateaus of Iceland, which have been roaming freely in the wilderness throughout the whole summer. The sheep round-up is an annual event that most farmers look forward to as it will reveal the results of the quality of their year's production. The occurrence also serves as a major social setting and is typically enveloped with good spirits (partially from flasks being passed around), gatherings of friends, rejoicing of neighbours and, of course, some singing and dancing. And the younglings love to take part in the gaiety.



Photography: Anna Maria Gunnþórsdóttir

So how does this whole process work? How on earth can farmers simply let their domesticated sheep go, and then expect to

reclaim them again by the end of summer? We did some research to unveil the secrets surrounding the roaming sheep, which most travellers have encountered on their journey in the countryside of Iceland.

Born to Be Wild....

Once a dam gives birth to a lamb, she is commonly kept inside the cowshed for the first two weeks, followed by a two week adjustment period on the farmland. After that the magic begins. Depending on the location of the farm, it is often enough for the farmers to simply open their gates to the wild and the sheep will know what is expected of them – to leave the farm. Some



farmers may need to transport their sheep in trucks to the heaths to set them free. The dam will guide her lamb to succulent grazing grounds where she and her young will feed of forbs, seaweed, heather and sometimes on the leaves of the short-statured birch spinney. Any type of sprout is their particular favourite. They will cover large areas on their journey without ever coming in touch with fertilised pastures. This all-natural superfood will result in remarkable growth of the lamb. It is common practice to free the sheep in early June, when the lamb weighs about 7 kg (approx. 15 lbs). Once the sheep is collected in September or early October, on average the lamb will have gained a staggering 35 kg (80 lbs). This amounts to almost 400 g of added weight per day - and hence the lamb will have sextupled its weight in only three months! Of course weather conditions play a major role as the weight gain of the lamb is directly correlated to the sprout of the vegetation.



Momma Knows Best!

Once it is time to herd the sheep from the summer feeding grounds a good organisation comes in handy. The sheep herders will comb the areas against the borders of their neighbouring parishes. Farmers are assigned a certain amount of workdays depending on the number

of winter-fed sheep they keep. The more sheep, the more manpower they possess and thus a larger search area, measured in workdays, is assigned to them. But here's where the farmers' experience is paramount. Most farmers know their sheep and their habits so they have a pretty good idea of their whereabouts

beforehand. Amazingly, the good knowledge of the dams gets passed on through generations, and the ewe lamb, once grown up, will eventually follow her mother's path and lead her own younglings to the same locations.

Home Sweet Home

Once all the sheep from the region have been gathered into the fold, the sorting begins. Thankfully, each sheep is carefully marked to ensure the rightful reclamation by the farmer. A fully grown brood ewe will have three types of markings; a mark on her horn to refer to her province, a plastic label in her ear to refer to her district and an earmark which pertains to the farmer. Not only do the thorough markings ensure the reunion of the sheep and owners but they also play a key role in preventing theft.

Once all the sheep have been accounted for, the farmer will eagerly tout the sheep to their homeland. Though they try to make an effort to keep their herding limited to



country roads, riding trails and beaten paths, they are sometimes forced to use the main roads. In which case you might come across a traffic disturbance that will look quite unconventional.

By All Means!

Do drive carefully when exploring the countryside of Iceland - not only during the round-up season, but throughout the summer, at the time when the sheep roam free. Most accidents occur when the lamb

attempts to follow its mother to the other side of the road, jumping without warning in front of passing traffic. If you are met with the unfortunate tragedy of driving over a sheep, please be kind enough to notify the appropriate authorities about the mishap. This will inform the farmer about the loss or allow for necessary measures to be taken, such as providing medical care for the sheep. Most farmers will not insist on any penalties to be paid as they are already insured for such casualties.

Making a Mark

Whilst travelling the beautiful countryside of Iceland you will without doubt come across free ranging sheep, either close-up by the side of the roads, or at the very least, as white clouds dressing up the landscape from afar. They certainly put their mark on their surroundings and have served as inspiration to Icelandic artists throughout time. -ES



ICELAND FROM ABOVE

One Man's Journey to Get to Know His Native Country

Getting to know a country is a lifelong journey and, while most of Iceland's visitors have to make do with first impressions, majestic as they might be, they can now expand their experience through the arduous work of pilot and photographer Björn Rúriksson. In his photography book, 'Iceland From Above', he has captured the essence of Iceland in a breathtaking manner, soaring countless times above its landscapes in a plane, camera in hand.



"You truly get the whole context when viewing from above, which is not easily available otherwise, and I try to present this experience in my book", says Björn.



A Work of Art

Volcanic activity in Iceland is a large part of its identity and is constantly changing and forming the island, which has not gone unnoticed by Björn, as he has flown over and photographed 16 different volcanic eruptions all over the country.

The book is clearly divided into chapters by regions and each chapter begins with concise information where the region's

Björn has been doing this for decades and proudly claims that the distances he's covered flying over Iceland during his photography missions equals flying 15 times around the globe. Getting the perfect shot requires repeated approaches and finding optimal conditions, which means that Björn has, on some occasions, visited locations up to forty times just to get the perfect shot. But according to Björn, it's worth every minute as he feels it is the best way to truly comprehend what Iceland is made of. Iceland is, of course, ever-changing with its contrasting dark winters and bright summers, melting ice and burning fires and by visiting these same locations again and again Björn says he feels like he's getting closer to really knowing Iceland.

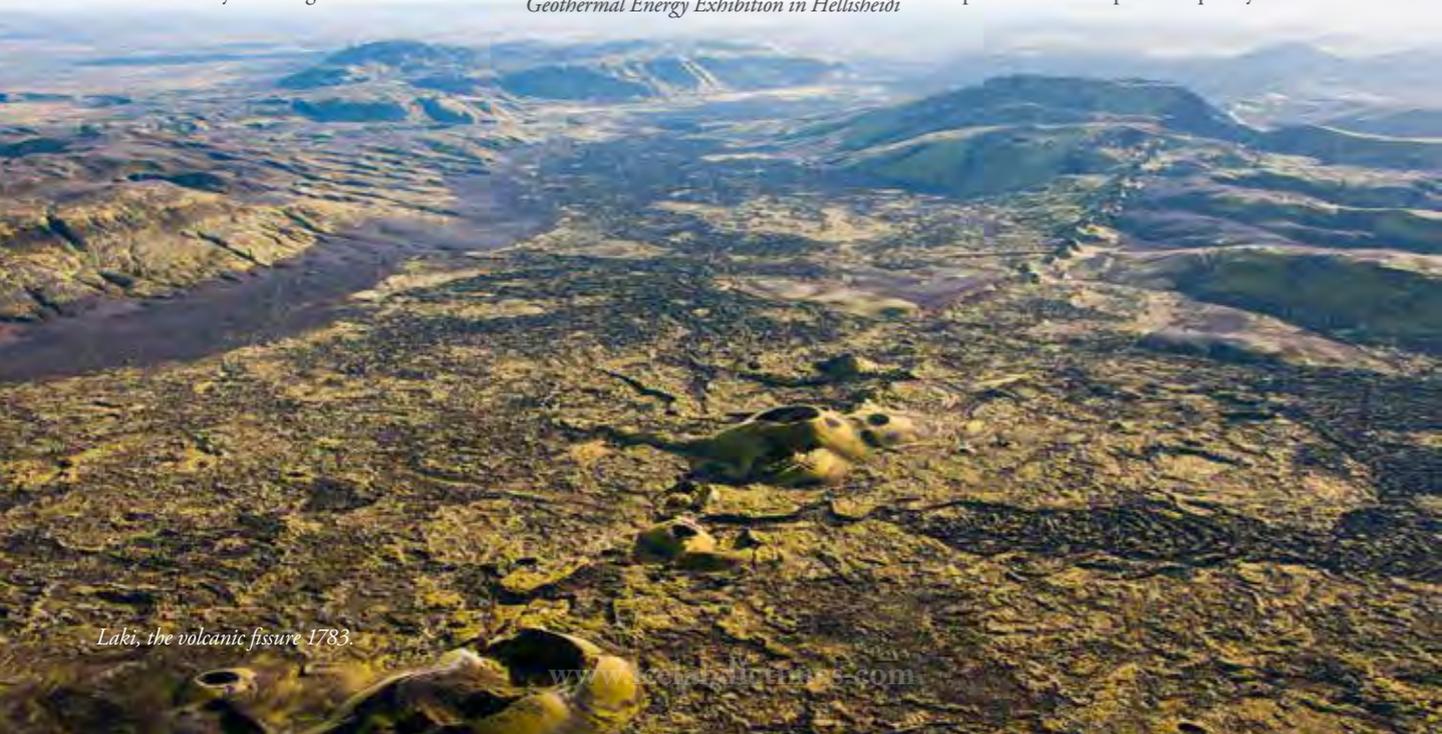


Björn's work is on display all year around in the Geothermal Energy Exhibition in Hellisheiði

distinctive features are accentuated and put into context with Iceland's ongoing geological history. 'Iceland From Above' thus has three different functions, as it were: as a reference book for tourists while touring Iceland, as a souvenir from a memorable trip to Iceland and simply as a work of art.

Available in Six Languages

'Iceland From Above' is available in six different languages: Icelandic, English, French, German and now Russian and Chinese. It comes in two formats; regular size and a pocket sized version, both printed on high quality paper to give the photos added depth and quality. -VAG



Laki, the volcanic fissure 1783.



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 Laxdæla, not to mention the rich folklore and tales of adventure. Tours bring history to life as museums and historical sites abound.

Pictures complimentary of Agúst Atlason, Marketing Office of the Westfjords marketing office, www.west.is.



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Stöðin and Kirkjufell by Grundarfjörður.



Löngufjörur on the southern beaches of Snæfellsnes peninsula.

Texts and photos ©
Björn Rúriksson



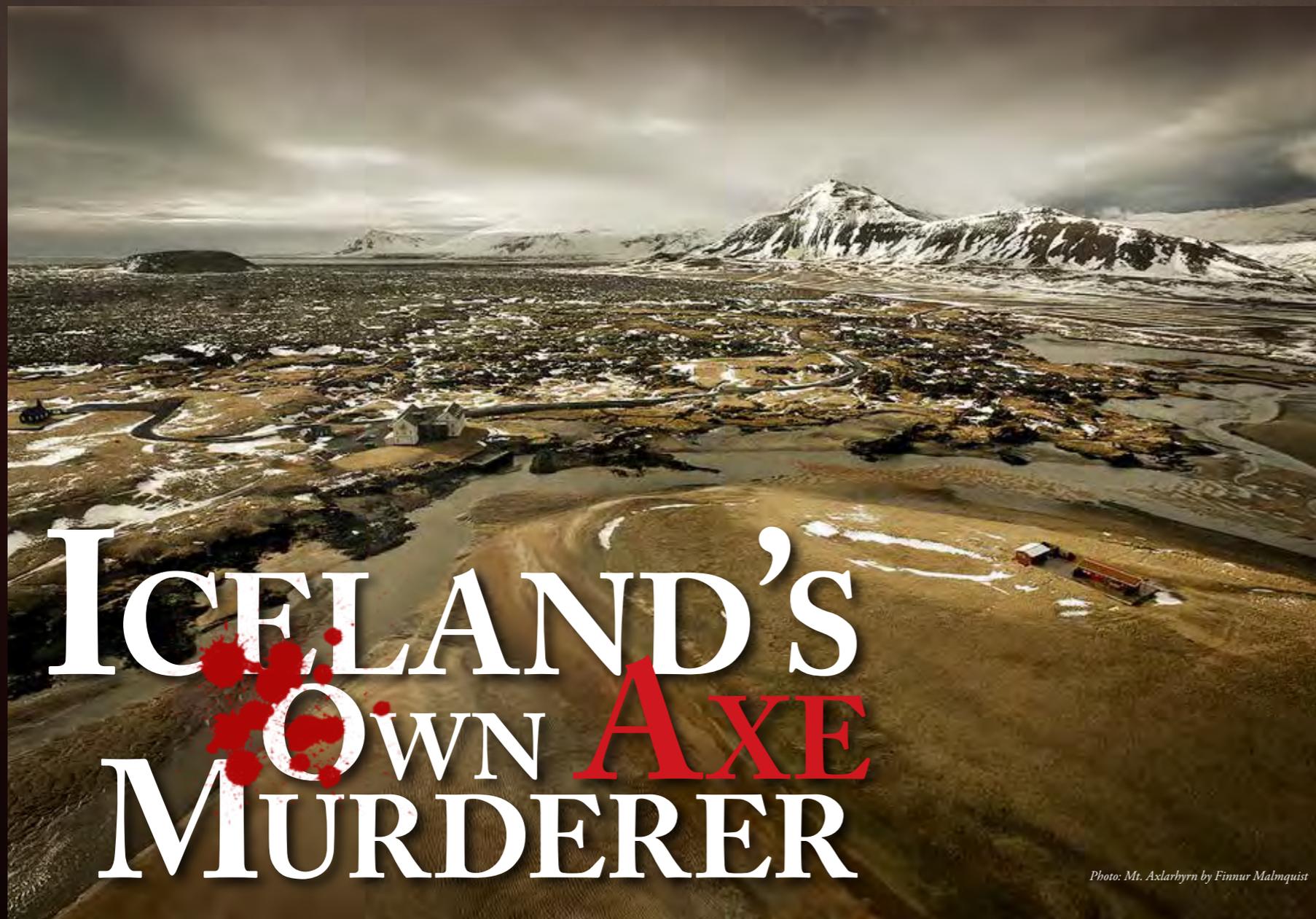
The magnificent glacier-topped
Mt. Snæfellsjökull (1446m).



The majestic Eiríksjökull glacier towers above the Western highlands (1675m).



Gatklettur rock at Arnarstapi with the Arnarstapi village.



ICELAND'S OWN AXE MURDERER

Photo: Mt. Axlarhryna by Finnur Malmquist

Although having a stunningly low crime rate and a first place ranking in the Global Peace Index as the most peaceful country of all, Iceland is not without a gory history. Anyone who has read a few pages of the bloodstained Sagas knows this, where newly introduced characters rarely survive to see the next page. But tales of shocking cruelty and torture are rare, making the reports of a 16th century serial killer named Axlar-Björn unique.

Though the existence of this man and his horrendous acts are undisputed, the details regarding the course of his life are somewhat conflicting between various sources, some of which date back more than 400 years. Admittedly, the chronicle has a tincture of folktale-feel about it, but the fact remains that Axlar-Björn is the most notorious serial killer Iceland has ever seen. His killing spree lasted for several decades before he was executed in 1596.

Cravings for Human Blood
 Born in 1555 in one of Iceland's most scenic areas on the beautiful Snæfellsnes Peninsula, Björn did not differ from his two older siblings the first years of his life. His mother, however, is said to have suspected early on that her child was not right, even as she carried him in her womb. She endured horrendous dreams during the pregnancy and suffered from the unconventional cravings for human blood. Her husband drew blood from his foot to quench her

thirst but she eventually confided in him, admitting that she feared that the child she carried might not be *righteous*.

Björn's father, Pétur, was a ploughman for a man named Ormur, from the farmstead Knörr. Ormur was rich and influential in the community. The two men were good friends and so it was decided that Ormur would foster Björn when he was four years old, as was common practice to support needful families during hard times. Björn was well cared for in his new home and became good friends with his stepbrother, Guðmundur.

The Ungodly Dream

Björn's character disorders began to appear in his teenage years when he became bad-tempered and closed-off. Folklore claims that he played truant at mass one Sunday, instead falling asleep and dreaming of a man offering him a plate with pieces of raw meat. He greedily gobbled the meat bites, one after another, but after the eighteenth bite he felt nauseated. The same man then instructed him to go to Mt. Axlarhryna to find an instrument that would serve him well in the years to come. Sure enough, this is where he is said to have found the axe that he later used to slay his victims. Shortly after, the cowman on the farm disappeared and was never seen or heard from again.

The Rising of a Serial Killer

After the passing of Ormur, Guðmundur's wealth and heft grew over and beyond his father's. He built his stepbrother the farmstead Öxl (genitive Axlar) which Björn drew his cognomen from after settling there with his wife, Þórdís. Visible from the main road, the farmstead's charming exterior attracted unwary travellers, many of which became Björn's prey. In addition to fulfilling his homicidal tendencies, he is believed to have stole valuables and horses of his victims, mainly due to the couple's flush lifestyle which contradicted their earnings.

Björn's compatriots had long suspected that something was off on the farmstead but his stepbrother's influence resulted in lack of further investigation. And so Björn was left undisturbed to practice his atrocious acts for years, brutally murdering men, women and children. He disposed of the dead by sinking their chopped up bodies in a deep mere on the premises, called Ígultjörn.

An old lady is said to have lulled an infant to sleep with the following verse in the sitting room at Öxl, as advice for a couple of wayfarers that were considering staying the night:

*None should lodge with Gunnbjörn
 who has the fancy clothes.
 He takes them to Ígultjörn mere.
 Blood flows
 down the road
 and I rock you child, until you doze.*

Sources vary as to what led to the discovery of the horror in 1596, but it appears that one of his intended victims got away to alert the authorities. Some sources claim that the survivor was a mother of two, who barely escaped with her life after losing both of her children to Björn's rampage. Others tell of travelling siblings that stayed the night at Öxl, and before escaping, the brother hid in the sewage as Björn butchered his sister.

To this day, the number of Björn's victims remains uncertain, although many sources agree on the number 18. Björn himself only admitted to 9 murders but investigators' findings, mainly the human remains in the mere, suggest there were far more. Björn's claim that he had found the additional bodies and disposed of them to relieve himself of inconveniences, was deemed unbelievable.

A Bloodline of a Butcher

Björn named his wife as his accessory and so they were both sentenced to death. Björn's execution was gruesome and slow. First his limbs were shattered with a sledgehammer and then cut off, along with his head, and strung to poles. His private parts were cut off and tossed to his wife's lap, but her execution was postponed as she was with child at the time. There are no records to conclusively warrant that her sentence was ever enforced.

Later that year, Þórdís gave birth to their son who was called Sveinn skotti Björnsson. He inherited his father's evil nature and was hung in 1648 when found guilty of a rape attempt. He had spent his life wandering the country committing numerous heinous crimes. The same fate was dispensed to his son, called Gísli hrókur Sveinsson, who was also hung for his crimes in Dyrhólaey.

Morbid Memories

Amazingly, there is an inhabited farm called Öxl standing right where these horrific events took place. If you are intrigued, a visit to this historical site would be well worth your time. Another interesting site close by is Laugarbrekkubúing, the place of Björn's execution.

Of course, a visit to these sites would make for an opportune moment to explore the outstanding landscape of the stunning Snæfellsnes Peninsula – and give you a unique chance to absorb the local hospitality while at it.



BORGARNES IN BORGARFJÖRÐUR

The Heart & Soul of Iceland's Cherished Sagas

Whether you're off to visit Akureyri, the Westfjords, or Snæfellsnes Peninsula, the journey to Iceland's north always includes a stop in the village of Borgarnes. It's time to stretch one's legs, have a bite to eat and soak up nature's magnificence in this most picturesque spot, where mountains, sea and sky

converge.... and to take time out for some in-depth exploring of this important historical region that is oft overlooked.

The town offers wealth of activities and services that you would normally not expect to find in urban area of this size. There are museums, restaurants, art galleries, guesthouses and of course one of Iceland's

finest bakery. So, when you are travelling through Iceland, be sure to take your time and explore this historical district where the Icelandic sagas come to life and the nature consumes you with its quiet grandeur. -EMV

GEIRI'S BAKERY OR GEIRABAKARÍ

Considered by some to be one of the best bakeries in Iceland, Geirabakarí 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 shown in the bakery throughout the day.

- EMV



Open daily Monday - Thursday, 7.00 a.m. - 7.00 p.m., Friday 7.00 a.m. - 6.30 p.m., weekends 8.30 a.m. - 5.00 p.m.

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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 sea, 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 15 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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SHAPED BY THE BAY

A Base 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 proximity to Breiðafjörður bay contributes largely to the town's character, surrounding it with exclusive natural beauty. As does 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 the town's

countenance and maintaining old traditions from the bay area.

Visitors will get a 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, including 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 offer 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



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 gotten a quality certification from Institut Fresenius, two hot pots with water straight from the earth and an excellent waterslide.

The Snæfellsnes peninsula is a must to visit when coming to Iceland. It is strewn with natural, historical and mystical phenomena and Stykkishólmur is the ideal base to explore it. -VAG

about everything connected with volcanoes, eruptions and other geological matters, but also see how these strong forces of nature have been expressed in artwork throughout the centuries, in Iceland and around the world.

The Perfect Base

Accommodation and services in Stykkishólmur are plentiful, with options



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SOAK UP SNÆFELLSNES PENINSULA

*Kast Guesthouse
provides accommodation,
camping and nature*



The silver and white lines of Kast Guesthouse stand out in stark contrast to the earthy tones of the surrounding nature here on the south shore of Snæfellsnes Peninsula. To the south, the waters of Faxaflói Bay lap gently upon the shore and to the north, craggy rhyolite mountains rise up directly behind the guesthouse. In the distance, the glacier-topped Snæfellsnes Volcano sits serenely in all its splendour, just waiting to be explored.

Sleep in Heavenly Peace

Family-run Kast Guesthouse opened for business in 2011 but recently added an additional house to their accommodation. Known for great atmosphere and hospitality, this hidden gem offers both double, triple and family rooms, all spacious yet cosy. All 27 rooms (21 with ensuite bath and 6 with shared facilities) are equipped with soft white bed linens, modern bathrooms and comfortable double beds, ensuring you have a restful night's sleep in the absolute peace and quiet of the Icelandic countryside.

Swim in the Sparkling Waters of Lýsuhólslaug

Just a few minutes walk from the guesthouse is the Lýsuhólslaug swimming pool; one of the few pools in the world where you can



bathe in naturally carbonated geothermal water with not a drop of chlorine. The water is rich in minerals and its healing properties are especially effective for eczema and psoriasis. At winter time the opening hours are irregular but they try to keep it open when weather allows, so look them up on Facebook to keep tabs on the opening hours.

Horse riding and fishing

The guesthouse offers guided horse riding tours from one to three hours long in the surrounding area, and relatively inexpensive fishing licenses can be arranged for fishing in nearby lakes.

Wake up to freshly baked bread

A light and typical Icelandic breakfast is served in the main dining room every

morning from 7.00 to 10.00 and a variety of breads are baked daily on the premises. During the day, the café is open for snacks and sandwiches and, in the evening, a basic, fixed menu is served from 19.00 to 22.00.

The centrally located guesthouse is approximately 2 hours drive from Reykjavik and a 40-minute drive from Stykkishólmur. Open year round, Kast Guesthouse welcomes you. *-EMV*



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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*



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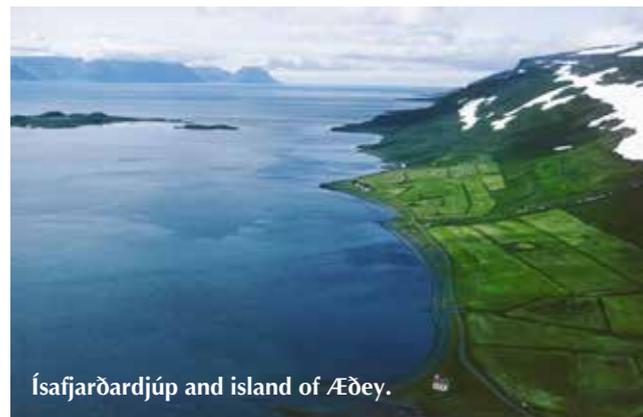


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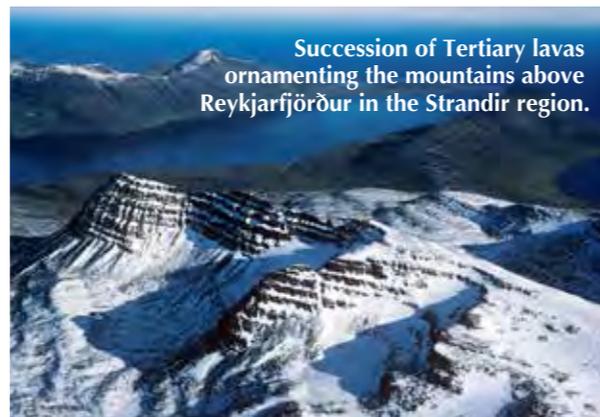




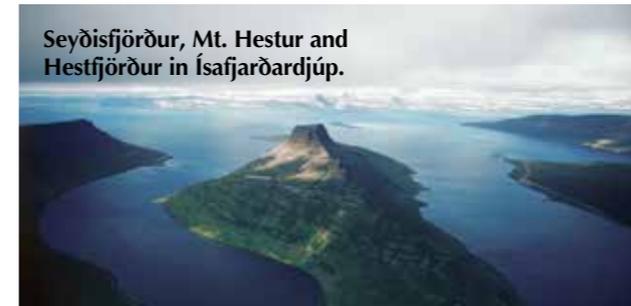
The big fjord of Arnarfjörður.



Ísafjarðardjúp and island of Aðey.



Succession of Tertiary lavas ornamenting the mountains above Reykjarfjörður in the Strandir region.



Seyðisfjörður, Mt. Hestur and Hestfjörður in Ísafjarðardjúp.



Hornvík and Hornbjarg.



The beige coloured shell-sand spit of Sandoddi in Patreksfjörður.

Texts and photos © Björn Rúriksson



The magnificent promontory of eroded Drangaskörð at Strandir.



KAUPMAÐURINN: EYE ON DESIGN

Ísafjörður is the unofficial capital of the Westfjords, but don't let that "title" fool you; it's a small, charming town of about 4,000 people. A short drive outside town, you'll find towering mountains, interesting rock formations, and more sheep than people. Ísafjörður is a good base for exploring the Westfjords and an increasingly popular stop on cruise ship itineraries. The town itself is quaint with an adorable downtown area with shops, guesthouses and restaurants and the surroundings are picturesque with mountains in the background and a bustling harbour.

During your shopping outing in town, one shop not to miss in Ísafjörður is Kaupmaðurinn, a colourful and design-focused shop that has been open since the spring of 2013. Tourists and locals love to peruse the shop, from luxury items such as fur scarves to traditional Icelandic sweaters, jewellery, accessories for the home, children's clothing, hand carved knives, wool blankets, pillows and fashion accessories.

Kaupmaðurinn is a one-stop shop for Icelandic design and the owner carries an astonishing number of Icelandic brands.

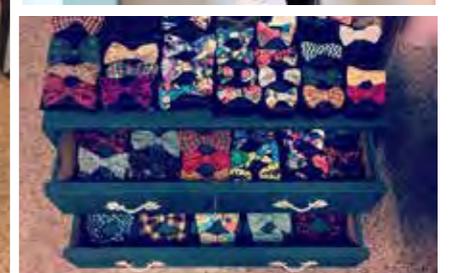


Among the carefully stocked shelves, visitors will find fine woolen clothing from Farmers Market, minimalist jewellery from Aurum and other designers, fine fur accessories from Feldur Verkstæði, and cute bow ties from Deathflower, among many other brands.

In addition to the diverse design items on offer, customers are thrilled to learn

that Ísafjörður prices can be lower than Reykjavík's and locals love to stock up on unique Icelandic-made gifts. Some of the most popular gifts are scarves, hats and gloves by designers like Vík Þrjónsdóttir and soft fur collars and hats from Feldur.

For those that can't get that item out of their mind after stopping by the shop,



don't worry, because Kaupmaðurinn ships worldwide. You can check out their Facebook page, which staff monitor daily, here:

www.facebook.com/Kaupmadurinnahorninu

Ísafjörður is simply beautiful with endless coastlines, jaw-dropping bird cliffs, and gorgeous mountainous landscapes, but don't forget about the downtown area with

its eclectic shops. Kaupmaðurinn is the perfect place to get a keepsake from your unforgettable trip to the Westfjords. *JG*

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ÍSAFJÖRÐUR'S PRISTINE WINTER PLAYGROUND

THE CALL OF THE WILD

In just a few weeks' time, the last vestiges of autumn will give way to winter; Ísafjörður's fall colours will disappear under the inevitable snow that blankets the area, thus heralding the start of skiing season here in the capital of the Westfjords. Despite the all-encompassing winter darkness that creeps across the land, the town's folk look forward to this time of year, taking advantage of the well-lit ski areas and enjoying the pristine wilderness that is their backyard. Ísafjörður is, after all, a ski town where every year, 90% of its 3,000 strong population take to the slopes in some way or another, whether it's snowboarding, downhill, cross-country/nordic, backcountry skiing and even participating in a good old-fashioned snowball fight.

Where Elite and Recreational Skiers Rub Elbows

The highly accessible ski area comprises the twin valleys of Tungudalur and Seljalandsdalur with their many facilities that cater to all types of snow sports. Seljalandsdalur provides groomed cross-country/nordic ski trails as well as wide-open terrain for those looking for an off-piste experience. Tungudalur has three lifts and groomed runs for all levels of difficulty, from beginner slopes to the sheer vertical chutes that are highly coveted by the most advanced extreme-sport enthusiasts. Both

areas are within easy reach of comfortable ski lodges where one can warm up with a hot cup of coffee, buy snacks or rent ski equipment.

Breathtaking Backcountry Skiing

In recent years, the area around Ísafjörður has been showing up on the radar as a

fantastic place for backcountry skiing. The terrain is varied with everything from gently rolling hills to steep, gnarly couloirs and there is no need to travel long distances from town to enjoy an unforgettable day in the mountains. There's also the option of taking a boat to the Hornstrandir Nature Reserve to ski this dramatic backcountry area. Here you can spend your days in the mountains, and in the evening, return to your lodgings onboard a sailboat or in an old renovated farmhouse where you can enjoy a fine dinner and a good night's sleep.

Annual Events in Ísafjörður

Every year Ísafjörður hosts many local events based on its rich cultural and skiing heritage. One such event is the popular Easter Ski Week with a varied programme of outdoor activities and local culture, culminating in

the Aldrei fór ég suður rock festival. In early May, Ísafjörður hosts the annual Fossavatn Ski Marathon, attracting locals as well as visitors from around the world. Suitable for participants of all ages and abilities,

the marathon offers a variety of distances including a 50 km course. This year, the Fossavatn Ski Marathon celebrates its 80th anniversary and is the oldest skiing marathon in Iceland, dating back to 1935.

QUARTINETS
Tungudalur 66.056547, -23.224723
Seljalandsdalur 66.066113, -23.214956



Ísafjörður - A Rare Opportunity for Beauty

It's that unvarnished rugged aspect of Ísafjörður that makes it such a compelling destination - a compact little town where everything is practically within arm's reach, with a surreal beauty that defies description, coupled with an unearthly quiet that is not found, let's face it, in just about any other place on earth.

-EMV

Isafjordur Ski Area - Dalirnir tveir

+354 450-8000
+354 878-1011
ski@isafjordur.is
www.dalirnir.is

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 Skagaströnd, 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.



Pictures complimentary of www.northiceland.is



MÝVATN NATURE BATHS EXPERIENCE - RELAX - ENJOY

The Mývatn Nature Baths

Enjoy a relaxing visit to the Nature Baths. Begin with a relaxing dip in clouds of steam rising up from fissures deep in the earth's surface and end with a luxurious bath in a pool of geothermal water, drawn from depths of up to 2,500 metres. Mývatn Nature Baths are perfect for those who enjoy close contact with nature and want to relax their body and soul in the warm natural waters, overlooking the scenery of Lake Mývatn and the volcanic crater of Hverfjall.

The Kaffi Kvika Restaurant

Welcome to Kaffi Kvika or "Magma Café" located at the Mývatn Nature Baths. Here our guests can enjoy light meals, drinks and sweets in a beautiful setting with a great view of the area.

Opening Hours

High season (June, July, August) 09:00 a.m. - 11:30 p.m.
Low season (September - May) 12:00 noon - 9:30 p.m.

Lake Mývatn Area

The region is one of Europe's greatest natural treasures. Shaped by repeated volcanic eruptions and seismic activity down through the ages, the landscape around the 37 square kilometre lake is a spectacular panorama of surreal lava, crater and cave formations. The wetlands around the lake are teeming with plant and birdlife and are also home in summer to the swarms of midges from which the region takes its name.

Our staff is happy to help you out with information about things to do or see in the area.

Mývatn Nature Baths / Jarðböðin við Mývatn
Jarðbaðshólar, 660 Mývatn, Iceland
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A view out to the mouth of Eyjafjörður, the longest fjord in N-Iceland. Hrísey island to the far right.



The haven of seals; Sigríðastaðaós estuary and runoff from the Lake Hópið in the Húnavatns-district.

Texts and photos ©
Björn Rúriksson



The landscape of Skagafjörður is characterized by large mountain ranges and the broadest valley in N-Iceland.



The two lower photos are taken across river Blanda just above town of Blönduós.



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

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

But no longer! In 2003, after much back and forth discussion and negotiation, plans for a tunnel connecting the two villages were finalised, making it the most ambitious project ever undertaken by the Icelandic Road Administration. Then, in 2006 the residents of the two communities voted to merge into one municipality, under the name of Fjallabyggð. The tunnel, or shall we say, tunnels, as there are two of them, are 11 km in combined length and already have had an huge impact on residents of the now-unified villages. The official opening of the tunnels took place in October 2010.

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

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

The Rise and Fall of Iceland's Herring Boom

Possibly one of the best, if not the best museum of its kind in Iceland, Siglufjörður's Herring Era Museum has a

creative and entertaining way of bringing the subject of herring to life. The museum was awarded the Micheletti Award for the best new industrial museum in Europe in 2004. Spread out over several buildings, the exhibits revisit Iceland's golden age of herring that lasted from 1867 to 1968 and had an enormous impact on Icelandic society and economy. Lively theatrical performances depicting life and times from the Herring Era of the 1950's are scheduled every Saturday in July. It is open from 10.00 to 22.00 between 12th June–18th August, and 13.00 to 17.00 in Spring and Autumn.

Music in their Bones

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

The Red, the Yellow and the Blue

The unmistakable bright red, yellow and blue buildings on the Rauðka Marina serve as the main gathering place and landmarks in Siglufjörður. Named after a well-known local sailor, the Hannes Boy Café, with its cosy rustic ambiance is reminiscent of the glory days of the herring era. Opened in 2010, Hannes Boy Café is actually a brand new restaurant, serving quality food at reasonable prices and using the best local ingredients, as much as possible. Right next door, the Red House Café & Bar has just opened and is the place to enjoy light lunches, a glass of wine, and live music. Finally, the Blue House, also on the marina, will serve as a gallery hosting the works of local artists. (www.raudka.is)

Poetry Centre

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

Whale Watching in Ólafsfjörður

Exciting new developments in whale watching are now on the horizon for North Sailing, one of the leading whale watching companies in North Iceland. In early June 2011, the well-known company began offering its tours from Ólafsfjörður,

as well. Its traditional oak boats just add to the authenticity of your journey out on the open waters of the Arctic Sea, where the chance to spot various whale species is optimal.

Natural History Museum in Ólafsfjörður

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

The Photogenic Fjallabyggð

With winter right of the heels of autumn, the drive to Fjallabyggð has scenic wonders all its own. If you happen to be in the north of the country this fall, a detour to this very northerly tip of Iceland is a worthy one that should not be missed. Now, with the new tunnels in place, the drive to Fjallabyggð is a piece of cake. Make sure you don't miss this gem in North Iceland.

-EMV



Torgið Restaurant

A cosy restaurant situated by Siglufjörður's main square renowned for making the best pizzas in Siglufjörður while offering a range of fast foods as well as coffee and cakes.

Torgið Restaurant & Café • Aðalgata 32 • 580 Siglufjörður ☎ +354 467 2323



Fjallabyggð
Gránaagata 24 • 580 Siglufirði
+354 464 9100
fjallabyggd@fjallabyggd.is
www.fjallabyggd.is





THE OLD POST OFFICE

Jóa Guesthouse connects people and places

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

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

floor, that harks back to the old times and which have garnered much attention. You will find brand new comfortable beds, basins, closets, and, of course, free WiFi. Dark curtains in front of every window guarantee a good sleep, even through bright Icelandic summer nights. The two bathrooms are fully equipped.

A Breakfast for Exploring

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

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

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

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

Jóa Guesthouse
 Ströndgata 2 • 625 Ólafsfjörður
 +354 868 5287
 gistihusjoe@gmail.com
 www.joesguesthouse.is

THE HISTORIC SIGLO HARBOUR HOSTEL AND APARTMENTS

A testament to the great Herring Era in Siglufjörður can be found at Siglo Harbour Hostel. In its heyday, the upper floor housed the many workers who came from all over Iceland to help process the fish. The ground floor served as a warehouse, where hundreds of barrels of herring were kept before being shipped off to Europe. Now the completely renovated building is a full-fledged hostel with an array of sleeping options, including 3 fully furnished apartments right across the street from the hostel.

Nearby, the Harbour House

Café serves up a much-loved seafood soup that some claim is the best in the world.

The café's friendly owner, Valgeir Tómas Sigurðsson, is on hand every day, overseeing operations himself, making sure everything is tiptop and his guests are happy.

Black Death Craft Beer on Tap



Craft beers have been taking the world by storm in recent years, and it was only a matter of time before Iceland entered the fray with its own unique brands. Despite its ominous

name, 'Black Death', don't be put off. This English-style stout beer is making a name for itself and has been very well received since its debut in 2011.

If you haven't yet had the opportunity to try this beer, described as 'spicy sweet, with hints of chocolate and coffee, with a smoky aftertaste' by those in the know, now is the time to make it over to Harbour House Café for a taste of the real deal. *-EMV*

Harbour House Café
 Gránagata 5b • 580 Siglufjörður
 +354 659 4809
 info@harbourhouse.is
 www.harbourhouse.is



SIGLUFJÖRÐUR'S NEW MARINA VILLAGE

Sigló Hótel Complements the Town's Vibrant Cultural Life

Staying at the top of the world has just taken on a new meaning. Driving up the coast to Siglufjörður in North Iceland is filled with beautiful vistas but nothing can prepare you for the spectacular view as you come out of the tunnel into the fjord, surrounded by snow capped mountains. The town itself is set picturesquely on one side of the fjord, overlooking the Herring Museum and the marina area.

Completing the Marina

Carefully designed to blend into the surroundings and taking full advantage of the spectacular views in every direction, the new 68-room Sigló Hotel has just opened to provide full 4-star accommodation, dining and activities for visitors to this northern fishing town.

Speaking of fishing, watching the fishing fleet sail down the fjord while you're eating a delicious breakfast in the restaurant or outside on the patio as the sun climbs over the mountains and burns off the mist, is an experience you will always remember.

The hotel's Sunna restaurant overlooks the marina where the fresh catch is landed every day and the best are selected and cooked by the skilled chefs for dinner that evening. It's a beautiful dining spot with plenty of space for individuals, couples or groups.

The high quality service is matched by the rooms. There is a good choice of rooms, with 3 suites – two full deluxe suites and a junior suite, large deluxe rooms 29 sq metres in size, classic rooms averaging 23 sq metres, and all equipped with a range of amenities including complimentary WiFi, HDTV, alarm clock, work desk, window blinds, walk-in shower and more.



Restaurants with Character

Part of the charm of visiting this northern town is meeting the people and the Marina Village is complemented by the Hannes Boy restaurant and Kaffi Rauðka – the bright yellow and red buildings on the other side of the marina. Hannes Boy is a cosy, romantic environment, favouring salted cod and lamb dishes that are favourites for lunch or dinner.

Kaffi Rauðka, the bright red house is the hot spot in town. With a casual, relaxed family atmosphere, the restaurant's menu has everything from sandwiches, cakes and coffee to BBQ ribs and traditional Icelandic hashed fish and is open all year round.

Romance, Relaxation, Business and Sport

Siglufjörður is a vibrant, all-year town, with festivals, sports and activities taking place throughout the year. It is a popular ski resort and the new hotel provides the ideal après ski centre. With an outdoor hot tub to soothe sore muscles, an infrared sauna and a fireplace room and bar, you have everything you need to relax. It is a truly unique location for honeymoon couples while meetings of up to 150 people can be held here, making it an innovative location for incentive tours. *-ASF*

Sigló Hótel
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 siglohotel@siglohotel.is
 www.siglohotel.is

EAST ICELAND

Tiny, tight-knit communities extend a warm welcome here. A well-developed infrastructure, with regular flights from Reykjavik 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.



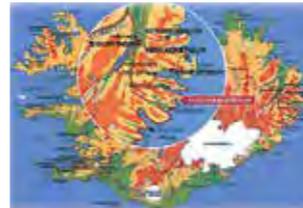
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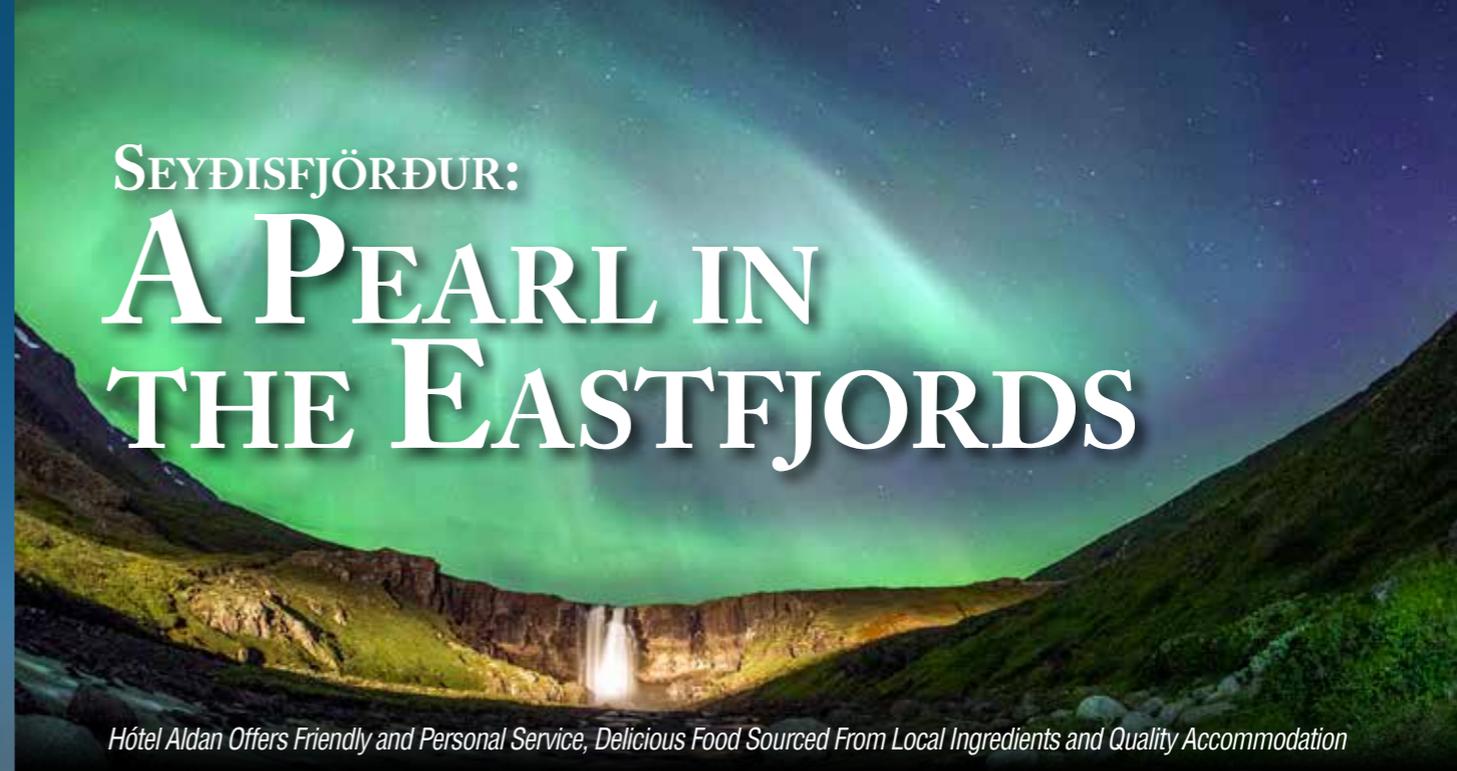
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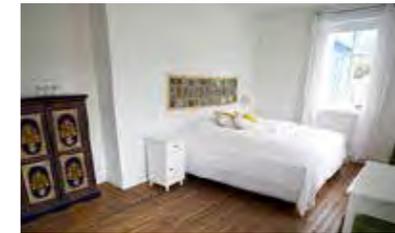


SEYÐISFJÖRÐUR: A PEARL IN THE EASTFJORDS



Hótel Aldan Offers Friendly and Personal Service, Delicious Food Sourced From Local Ingredients and Quality Accommodation

Seyðisfjörður is a small fishing town on the East coast of Iceland, with a population of just 700, but it is so much more. It has been a cultural hotspot from the late 1800s, and a modern day haven for artists and an all-around hipster mecca complete with an art school and summer festivals. The town is situated among high mountain peaks, gorgeous waterfalls and historic old houses. During calm winter nights you could experience the magnificent mountains covered with snow bathed in moonlight and if you're lucky, you could see the northern lights dancing in the sky. Hótel Aldan, a darling 23-room hotel situated in three historical buildings that used to house the town's bank, the post office and store for close to a century, is at the centre of it all. The hotel also offers two family apartments in the town's oldest school buildings.



Upscale Stay

Hótel Aldan features tasteful rooms that are decorated perfectly with vintage furniture, antique lamps and soft furnishings imported from India. The beds are outfitted with comfortable mattresses, quality linens and luxurious down duvets. The hotel is open year-round and is a favourite for locals and tourists alike. Furthermore, movie buffs are thrilled to learn that the hotel was featured prominently in Ben Stiller's 2013 film, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*.



Various Dinner Options

After a day exploring the region, be sure to visit one of Hótel Aldan's three restaurants. Skaftfell Bistro, which is open year round and situated in the basement of the Skaftfell Visual Arts Center, features a delectably diverse menu ranging from local, fresh lamb and fish dishes to langoustine-topped pizzas. Nordic Restaurant, which is open for breakfast and lunch all year and dinner from May to September, features the best fine dining experience in town with tasteful décor, a friendly staff, fresh fish, local ingredients and unique choices such as a goat cheese salad. Norð Austur, a sushi bar open from May to September, is not to be missed in the summer for its super fresh catch, trained sushi chefs and exciting Japanese menu of starters, sushi dishes and drinks.

When planning your next trip to the region, keep Hótel Aldan in mind for comfort, class and top-notch dining. -JG



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www.hotelaldan.is



The conspicuous Mt. Búlandstindur (1069m) seen from Álftafjörður.



Mountain ranges in East Iceland were build up of igneous rock some 15-20 million years ago.



The weight of the volcanic pile which thickens towards the center of the country and the huge additional weight of the big icefields during the ice age, caused down-sagging of the land. Lava layers in the mountains clearly incline towards west, into the center of Iceland.



River beauty in a calm morning at Berufjörður.

Texts and photos ©
Björn Rúriksson



The Kambanes headland and view across the fjord Stöðvarfjörður with the settlement of the same name.

ÁLFHEIMAR COUNTRY HOTEL OF BORGARFJÖRÐUR EYSTRI

A Seaside Hotel with a Mission

Álfheimar Country Hotel, set in a prime seaside location, overlooks the wide expanses of Borgarfjörður fjord on the edge of the colourful fishing village of Bakkagerði.

The country hotel's affable owner, Arngrímur Viðar Ásgeirsson, born and raised in the area, is fairly brimming over with local knowledge. Proud of his background and heritage, Arngrímur, and his local staff, often take on the role of chief tour guide, much to the delight of the hotel's international clientele.

Álfheimar Country Hotel offers 32 rooms from single rooms to family size, all with private bath. Each evening, the hotel restaurant emphasises a main course using quality fresh fish or lamb supplied by the area's fishermen and farmers.

Puffins Galore

If puffin spotting is on your to-do list this summer, Borgarfjörður eystri could well be called the best place on earth to do just that. Each year, 10 to 15 thousand of these charming little birds arrive in mid-April and stay until mid-August. Quite tame, these little guys allow you to get within a few metres of them for that highly sought-after puffin close-up and can often be seen circling the harbour, which provides an ideal lookout point for avid bird-watchers.

The area of Borgarfjörður Eystri has a well-maintained hiking infrastructure with over 300km of marked trails criss-crossing the fjord's wild, deserted inlets.



According to Arngrímur, "We are a hidden treasure in the trekking world and therefore our guests can enjoy the peaceful area with day tours ranging from a few hours long to multi-days treks, led by experienced local guides. I like to call it 'comfort hiking' because we carry only our daypack, and afterwards you will sleep in a comfortable hotel room – and of course enjoy our 3-course dinner with wine in our restaurant, surrounded by good company. For even more comfort, our neighbour, Blábjörg Guesthouse, offers a wonderful

spa and wellness centre with a hot tub and sauna that is relaxing after a good day's hike in the mountains. For those who

are new to hiking or those who are not keen on the 'mountain hut' lifestyle, our service would be an excellent option."

Eco-tourism

The community has its roots in eco-tourism, placing a special emphasis on respect for nature through environmental stewardship. This has earned it recognition from the EU's Blue Flag programme for Hafnarhólmi, its environmentally friendly harbour, and for their sound, sustainable practices.

Iceland's Elf/Hidden People Debate

To believe or not believe. You decide. Here in the Elf Capital of Iceland you can visit Álfaborg, a rocky mound that is purportedly home to the Queen of the Elves. There are some 172 folk stories about hidden people, elves and trolls that attest to the vast number of these beings that are thought to have populated the area for centuries.

Slow Travel Tips from Arngrímur

"Rushing around the Ring Road, attempting to see the whole country in a week, is one

way to see Iceland, but not the only way", says Arngrímur, who suggests picking one to three 'slices' of Iceland as a base and exploring from there.

"If you need a place to relax and get out of ordinary city life, you will find a quiet zone of Iceland at Álfheimar Country Hotel... It's only a one hour flight via Air Iceland from Reykjavik to the East.

"We are more than happy to help you plan your stay, suggest itineraries, fetch you from the airport and basically do everything we can do to make your holiday memorable and enjoyable. That's our mission!" –EMV



Elf Tours
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 +354 861 3677
 info@elftours.is
 www.elftours.is
 www.borgarfjordureystris.is
 www.puffins.is



SOUTH ICELAND

South Iceland has a long list of sights and activities



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 Gullfoss, Háifoss, Skógafoss, Systra and Seljalandsfoss waterfalls; 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 Þórsmyrk 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.



DINE IN THE LANGOUSTINE CAPITAL

Humarhöfnin satisfies the hunger for whole langoustine in Höfn

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

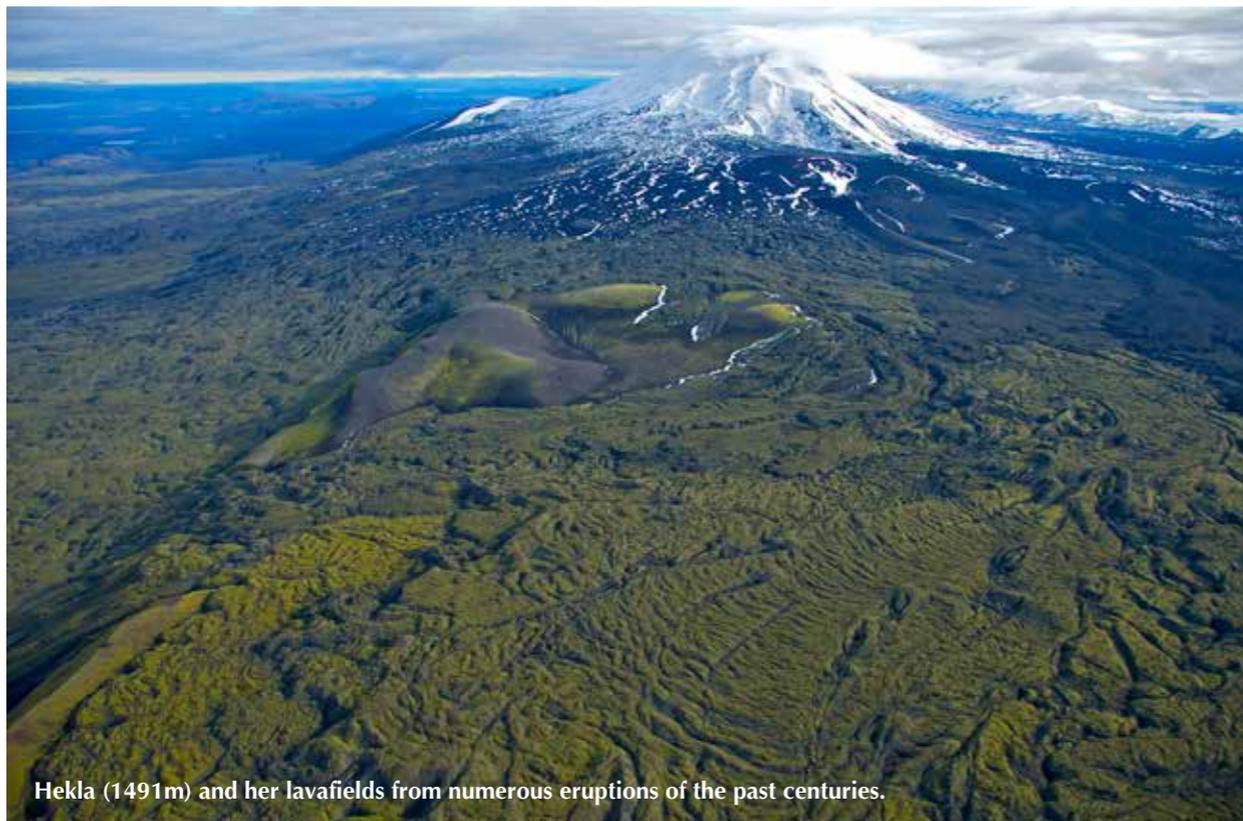
If you are a langoustine aficionado, you can fly, drive or take a bus to Höfn where you will find your seafood haven awaiting you.

-EMV





The countryside of Hreppar south of the Gullfoss waterfall.



Hekla (1491m) and her lavafields from numerous eruptions of the past centuries.



The colourful River-beauty and Mt. Stóri Dímon on the alluvium plain of Markarfljót.



Fljótshlíð is one of the fertile agricultural areas of the South.



Mt. Vestrahorn east of town of Höfn, makes the border between South and East-Iceland. This mountain massif is a body of magma intrusion and remains of a former buried magma chamber.

Texts and photos ©
Björn Rúriksson



THE MYSTERIOUS HOTEL LAKI

Light, Elves and Volcanoes

Hotel Laki, located in the countryside in the South of Iceland, offers many possibilities for an unforgettable stay. The hotel 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

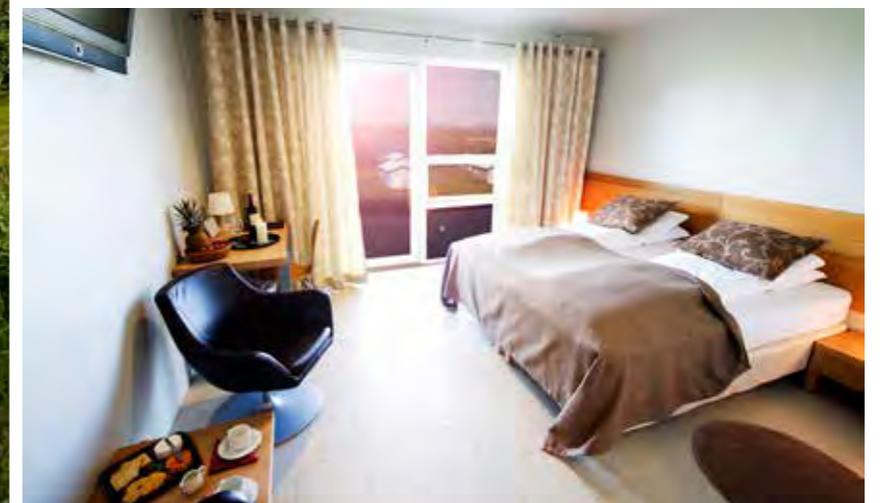
The hotel's remote location blissfully eliminates all light pollution from urban areas. This is a fortunate quality as it allows the natural light in the spectacular surroundings to shine undisturbed; the light nights in the summertime as well as the stunning northern lights in the wintertime. Hotel 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 hotel'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 hotel staff to wake you up once the northern lights make their grand



appearance. Hotel 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 Hotel Laki in 2005, right beside their old home, and are continuously making improvements to add to the guests' comfort. Today, the hotel has



64 rooms in different categories as well as 15 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 hotel 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 hotel, so if you are planning to do some hiking during your stay in Iceland, the hotel 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.

Hotel Laki is open all year round. -KB



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STRACTA HOTEL HELLA

A New Hotel on Iceland's South Coast



Located in the peaceful village of Hella in South Iceland, Stracta Hotel is one of Iceland's newest hotels that caters for every budget. Built in 2014, the hotel gets high marks for its ability to incorporate a pleasant modern look seamlessly throughout its well thought out concept and design.

A Room for Every Budget

The hotel encompasses a wide variety of room options - from high-end deluxe suites, each with its own private hot tub and well-stocked mini-bar, right down to budget rooms with shared facilities. There are also studio apartments and spacious cottages, with simple self-catering facilities that are perfect for families with children. Whichever you choose, you can always count on comfortable beds, free access to the hotel's hot tubs, saunas and wi-fi throughout the hotel.

Northern Lights Prime Time

Stracta Hotel's prime location, situated far from the light pollution of the bigger towns, allows guests a fabulous opportunity to view the northern lights from October through April. Imagine yourself lounging in a cosy hot tub, glass of wine in hand, as the northern lights



swirl through the skies above. Should the auroras happen to make their appearance while you are sleeping, a wake-up call can be arranged so you don't miss this once-in-a-lifetime event!

Healthy Food Choices Abound

Food options and choices are varied at Stracta Hotel. The bar and bistro located on the ground floor is where you can order healthy sandwiches, salads, cakes and deserts, coffee, teas and a variety of wines and spirits. They even offer asian food. Guests will enjoy the panoramic views of the surrounding countryside from the second floor dining room where a buffet style dinner is served every evening. When the weather is fine you can take your dinner out onto the balcony, or sit outside on the patio below, where you can enjoy the long summer nights. Planning a day out? Why not purchase a freshly made packed lunch



from the bistro to take with you on your journey.

Health, Wellness and Activities

Experience Iceland via a wide range of activities that can be arranged at the front desk. Horse riding tours, local farm visits, super jeep tours of nearby Eyjafjallajökull volcano or even an exciting helicopter tour over the most famous South Iceland sites are all possibilities. Fancy a massage or healing treatment? Stracta Hotel is well connected! Local therapists make themselves available to hotel guests and offer massages, meditation, Reiki and cranial-sacral massages.

Hotel Stracta welcomes you! -EMV



Stracta Hotels
Rangárflootum 4 • 850 Hella
+354 531 8000
info@stractahotels.is
www.stractahotels.is



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 family atmosphere.

The house itself is positioned on a hill with a panoramic view, in one of Vík's oldest houses, built in 1902. The interiors capture the building's history with romantic furniture and decoration, which makes for a very peaceful and warm place to be.

The family owned restaurant 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. All ingredients are local



– everything from 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. Other staples include the always popular steak sandwich, which Ben says has been developed to perfection by the kitchen staff, and of course varied quality Thai dishes to add welcome variety to a small Icelandic town.

Suður-Vík is open from 12:00 noon to 10:00 p.m., offering lunch and lighter dishes as well as an elegant evening dining experience. -VAG



Suður-Vík Restaurant
Suðurvíkurvegur 1 • 870 Vík
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none




REFRESHING VÍK

Halldór's Café satisfies locals and travellers alike

Guests 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 emphasises the use of only quality ingredients from the locality in their cooking. Whether be it a freshly caught salmon you crave, steaks from grass-fed cattle or free range lamb served with the accompaniment of locally grown greens – you can be sure that Halldór's Café will deliver. They also offer a variety of lighter meals such as soup of the

day and light salads, and those with a bit of a sweet-tooth will not be disappointed, as the menu includes home-baked cakes and home-made ice cream from a local farm.

Originally, Halldór's Café was the 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, using 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, ideal for meeting and



greeting old friends or new acquaintances. The café is open all year round. Summer opening hours are from 11:00am to 10:00 or 11:00pm, but winter openings are from 11:00am to 9:00pm. When travelling in the area around the beautiful Vík, be sure to stop at this charming café and get greeted with a welcoming smile and a seductive menu. -JB



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THE SECRET LAGOON IN FLÚÐIR

Dipping Into the Secrets of Iceland's Newest/Oldest Swimming Pool

The history of The Secret Lagoon is straightforward: originally built in 1891, the 'Gamla Laugin' as it eventually came to be known, was Iceland's first swimming pool.

In 1909, swimming lessons were offered and for many years it was one of the only places to learn to swim in the area, right up until 1947. Around this time modern concrete swimming pools began to appear in towns around the country, and little by little Gamla Laugin fell into disuse.

The Top-Secret Pool

For decades thereafter, Gamla Laugin was virtually abandoned until its present day owner decided to give it new life in 2005. By this time, the pool had long been forgotten and for a few years he used it as his own private heated swimming pool just for himself and a few friends, remaining



a secret for several years. That is how The Secret Lagoon got its enigmatic name.

Technical Details

A natural hot spring feeds the lagoon with 38-39°C water that bubbles up from deep within

the earth at a rate of 10 litres per second, constantly replenishing itself so that there is a steady supply of fresh clean water in the pool at any given time.

The Secret Is Out

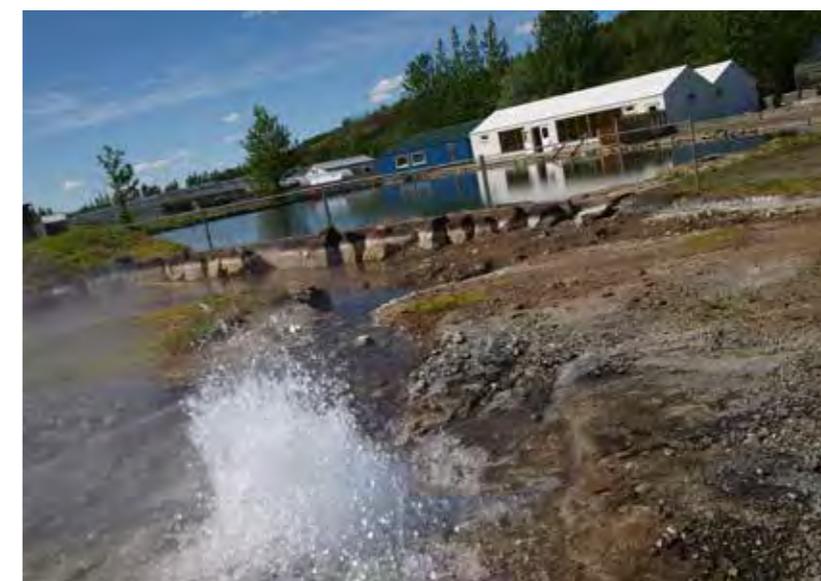
With the completion of changing rooms, showering facilities, outside deck, walkways and a small café, The Secret Lagoon quietly opened in the summer of 2014 and was an immediate hit with tourists.

Even though the secret is now out, its owner, who shuns the spotlight, wants to keep the lagoon low profile and does a minimum of advertising. The pool, after all, was built for the tiny community that inhabited the area at the turn of the 19th century and can only take so many bathers at one time. (tip of the day: it's good to avoid the peak hours between 4.00 p.m. and 6.00 p.m. on Saturdays in summer).



It's the Real Deal

Information boards recount the history of the lagoon, and wooden platforms are useful for viewing the geothermal elements such as the tiny geyser called 'Litli Geysir' that vigorously erupts regularly, as well as several



bubbling, boiling natural pools - Básahver and Vaðmálahver, where women came to wash clothes in the days of yore.

If you've forgotten your swim suit/bathing costume or towel, never fear - those items are for hire at the front desk.

Beer, wine, soft drinks, juice, as well as coffee and tea are available for purchase in the café and inflatable armbands and 'noodle' floats are free to use in the pool.

Discover the secrets of the Secret Lagoon for yourself. It's an easy drive from the Geysir Geothermal Area to Flúðir on the Golden Circle route. But it's a secret, so shhhhhh.....

-EMV



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www.secretlagoon.is



GPS: 64° 8,238'N, 20° 18,557'W (ISN93: 436.251, 404.485)



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 Úlfjótsvatn. 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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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 Reykjavik, 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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THE HOUSE AT EYRARBAKKI

The House at Eyrarbakki

Árnessýsla folk museum is located in Húsið, the House, historical home of the Danish merchants built in 1765. Today one can enjoy exhibitions about the story and culture of the region, famous piano, shawl made out of human hair and the kings pot, are among items. Húsið prides itself with warm and homelike atmosphere.

Opening hours: May 1st - September 30th daily 11.00-18.00 or by an agreement
 Tel: +354 483 1504 & +354 483 1082 | husid@husid.com | www.husid.com

HÚSIÐ Á EYRARBAKKA
 The Southcoast Museum



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 15 tons of lobster are used annually to make its famous soup, aka langoustine soup. Hmmmm....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



Fjöruborðið
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