

NORTHERN HIGHLIGHTS

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NORTHERN HIGHLIGHTS

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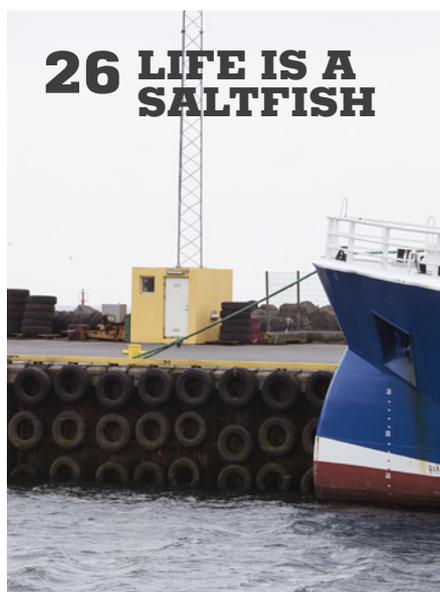
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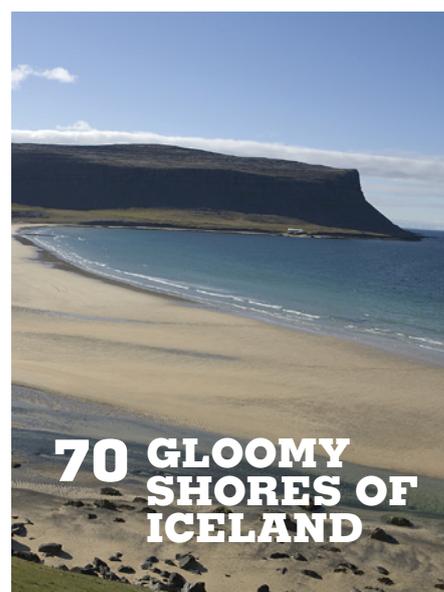
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REYKJAVÍK CITY HALL

Reykjavík City Hall is an impressive building on the northern shore of Lake Tjörnin.

Bold and modern, this impressive building in the centre of Reykjavík, connects nature, water and is designed deliberately to attract bird-life to the centre of town. Opening in 1992, it houses the Mayor and other executive officials of Reykjavík. On the ground floor you'll find a helpful information desk, internet access and a lovely view of the lake at café Öndin. The building is also put to use as a gallery hosting a steady stream of new and exciting exhibitions. A perennial favourite in the exhibition hall is the huge relief map of Iceland. It is equally interesting to examine before and after your explorations of Iceland



VIÐEY

Enjoy a short trip with the Elding ferry service to the lovely island of Viðey, situated in Kollfjörður just off the coast of Reykjavík.

Apart from its ancient ruins and rich historical background, other attractions include impressive works of art by Yoko Ono (the Imagine Peace Tower) and Richard Serra (the Milestones project). Fans of architecture will also be interested to learn that the church in Viðey is one of the oldest in the country and that Viðey House is the first

building in the country to be constructed with stone.

With an extensive network of trails and a population of lovely resident horses the island can be explored both on foot and by horseback. No matter which path you take, you'll be rewarded with spectacular views of the surrounding mainland, and to the west you'll be able to see the impressive outline of the Snæfellsnes peninsula.

In summertime there are daily ferry departures both from Skarfabakki pier and Ægisgardur harbour. The winter service runs on Saturdays and Sundays from Skarfabakki to Viðey. Note that trips to Viðey are free with the Reykjavík Welcome Card.

THE GEOTHERMAL ENERGY EXHIBITION

At Hellisheiði Power Plant is a state-of-the-art look into the harnessing of geothermal energy in Iceland.

The plant is owned by Reykjavík Energy and is a striking example of how geothermal energy is harnessed in a sustainable manner and a showcase for the rest of the world. Experienced guides are on-hand to provide informative presentations backed by multimedia shows about sustainable green energy as a global energy resource, since geothermal resources can be found worldwide. The feature on the origin of geothermal energy is available in Icelandic, English, French, German, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese! There is a coffee shop on-site with an interesting local handicraft centre. The Hellisheiði Power Plant is a 20 minute drive from Reykjavík on Route 1, towards Hveragerði.



AURORA REYKJAVÍK

THE NORTHERN LIGHTS CENTER

Explore

Learn

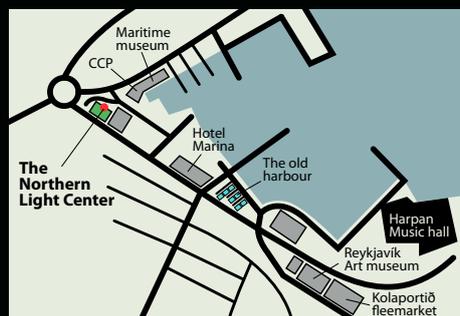
Discover



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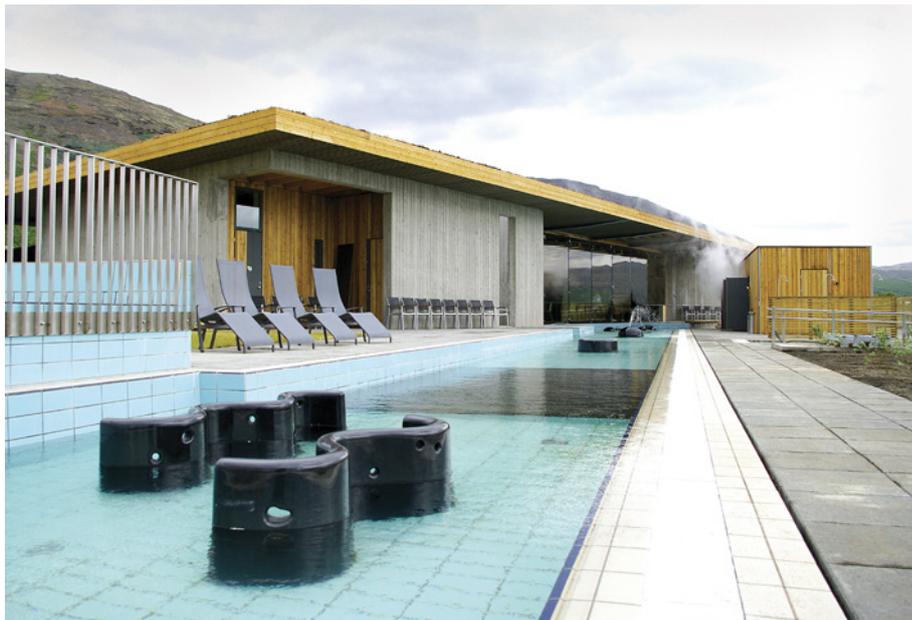
www.aurorareykjavik.is



**NIGHTLIFE
IN REYKJAVÍK**

You could blame it on those long winter nights or perhaps the endless summer days, maybe it has something to do with the exceptional quality of the locally produced beer and Icelandic schnapps; but whatever the reason behind Reykjavik’s legendary nightlife or “jammy” as the locals refer to it, it’s certainly gaining a reputation for being one of the hottest places to party in the world today!

If you’ve spent the day absorbing all that green energy in the great outdoors and you need to spend it somewhere, then it’s time to trade those waterproofs and walking boots for your glad-rags and party shoes and see if you have enough stamina to stay up as long as a local! We’ve got pubs, clubs and lots of live venues to suit a multitude of different party moods! On weekdays most bars are open until 1am, with extended party hours from Thursday evening through the weekend, when the bars can stay open until 3am or longer. Most bars and clubs do not charge an entrance fee; however, expect to pay a small charge for entrance to live music venues. If you look younger than the minimum drinking age which is TWENTY, then make sure you bring your ID out with you.



LAUGARVATN FONTANA:

-Where Historic Hot Springs Meet Modern Amenities

SPA UNIQUE

In Laugarvatn, at the centre of the famed Golden Circle, steam rises from the bubbling earth, grand mountains surge in the distance, and the peaceful Laugarvatn Fontana geothermal spa beckons. Today, this charming town and lake are home to modern mineral baths, but the history of the region with the powerful hot springs runs deep.

The springs at Laugarvatn have been used by Icelanders since the year 1000 when the coolest spring, Víðdalaug, was the site of a mass baptism for the entire parliament. The parliament, called Alþingi, used to gather at Þingvellir, 25 kilometres away. Under much pressure from the Norwegian king, the pagan parliament adopted Christianity and, rather than use the cold waters of Þingvellir, they were all baptized in this warm spring at Laugarvatn.

One of the springs has now been used since 2011 by Laugarvatn Fontana for gorgeous contemporary mineral baths. In an elegant, well-appointed spa, visitors can soak in the hot water, but there are four interconnected mineral baths vary in depth, size and temperature. In three wet-steam rooms, built directly over the bubbling earth, guests smell and hear the bubbling water underneath and inhale steam as it rises straight from the core of the earth just as Icelanders have through the ages.

And too, for centuries Icelanders used the geothermal energy from the springs to cook, baking bread in the steaming sands. Today, the locals still harness this same power from the hottest of the three springs at Laugarvatn for geothermal district heating. This primary

energy source provides heat and energy to all the buildings and business in the region. Just like in the olden times, today Fontana Baths offer traditional Icelandic rye bread baked in the hot sandy shore and trout caught and smoked at a nearby farm. Guests can also take part in the making of the bread if they wish (they can book that experience beforehand, small fee).

Through tasteful, cutting-edge architecture, the Fontana Baths are able to preserve the sanctity of the natural landscape and pay homage to the historical importance of the site. The turf roof, clean stark lines, and floor-to-ceiling windows highlight the spectacular views, bringing nature inside and luxury out-of-doors. Of course too, the plush towels, organic, sweet-smelling Sóley skin products, and heated floors make spending time at this ancient lake feel like a modern-day indulgence.

Note: Laugarvatn Fontana is in the heart of the Golden Circle: a fifteen-minute drive from Geysir and a twenty-minute drive from Þingvellir. Make sure that your Golden Circle Day Tour includes a visit to Laugarvatn Fontana.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
FONTANA.IS**

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www.jswatch.com



REYKJADALUR ADVENTURES.IS

Hike from the outskirts of Hveragerði, the town of hot springs and flowers, into the beautiful valley of Reykjadalur. Up there hot water rushes down the slopes of Hellsheiði mountain range and creates the ideal place to relax in an untouched natural hot stream. The valley also has an amazing abundance of geothermal springs and you will witness everything from small gurgling melting pots to vibrant super heated pools of water. After strolling along these wonder of nature we hike back down into the town of Hveragerði. This is a great half-day trek that everyone can participate in. Get in touch with the pure Icelandic nature on your own two feet!

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
ADVENTURES.IS**



AKUREYRI WWW.VISITAKUREYRI.IS

There is contiguous open area around Akureyri where the biosphere and landscape are extremely diverse, and vegetation in many places is especially lush. In the urban area there are also interesting natural features, and on the hills of Akureyri there are many intriguing plants.

Within the Akureyri town limits there are many interesting recreation areas and hiking paths. The Akureyri Botanical Garden is known far and wide for its beautiful walking paths and luxuriant flora. One of Akureyri's gems, it was founded in 1912, and it contains nearly every

plant found in Iceland ca. 450 and nearly 7,000 foreign plants. The town has many museums, galleries and exhibitions who offers insight in the diversity of the culture and the nation as a whole.

Selection of activities and tours are offered with everything from tours to local villages and national parks, northern light tours, visit to the small island in the fjord and to tours with emphasis on local food.

Akureyri and the surrounding area offers a number of annual events as well as many occasional concerts, exhibitions, theatre ect.





The disappearing café

TÍU DROPAR

Le Chateaux Des Dix Chuttes

Tíu dropar (Ten Drops) is a café located in the cellar of Laugavegur 27. This is one of the oldest cafés in Iceland and for the last 30 years to this very day they serve freshly baked pancakes and waffles á la the grandmothers of Iceland, with lots of whipped cream and Icelandic jam.

Ten Drops is also known for its homemade cakes, baked from scratch according to old recipes, and of course, their hot cocoa, known by many of their guests as 'The Only Real Hot Cocoa on Earth'. If you're not in the mood for old fashioned Icelandic goodies you can choose from an assortment of light dishes, tea, wines and beer. We recommend the French meat soup, a popular dish and another old favorite

WHERE DID THE CAFÉ GO?

Don't be surprised if you can't find the café after 18:00. Something happens around that time that transforms this little cellar into a French wine room known as Le Chateaux Des Dix Chuttes or the Castle of the Ten Drops. This is a lovely place to sit and enjoy good wines along with cheese, ham or other light dishes for as little as 500 ISK a plate, and don't worry, the coffee, cocoa and pancakes are still there! Lovely French music sets the mood and the ambiance is perfect for a deep conversation. Guests wanting to break out in song can have their turn after 22:00 on the weekends, as long as they can find someone to play the antique piano given to the café's owner, David Bensow, by a regular.

CHOOSE YOUR WINE

Guests can have their say on the wine list of Le Chateaux Des Dix Chuttes and David will make special orders to fulfill their wishes. In fact, he welcomes any suggestions making the wine list one of the more, well-endowed in Reykjavik. He's especially interested in serving good Port to his clientele.

INTIMATE CLIMATE

The little wine room and café seat only 40 guests and the mood is set in the early evening. It's safe to say this is just the kind of place that was missing from the brimming Icelandic bar and café scene a perfect setting for a small group of friends to reminisce over the good old days or for a first date. Be sure to taste David's "wine of the week" or let his fair beer prices amaze you.

Check out the ten drops twitter feed and find both café and wine room on Facebook.

TÍU DROPAR / LE CHATEAUX DES DIX CHUTTES

Laugavegur 27, 101 Reykjavík
Tel: 00 354 551 9380

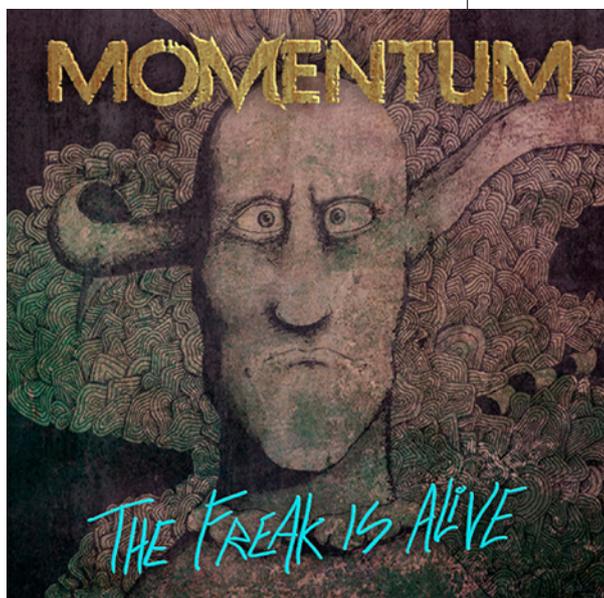


WHAT'S GOING ON?

APRIL 5 MOMENTUM

Saturday night April 5th Momentum, Angist, Malignant Mist and Future Figment will play at Gamli Gaukurinn. Doors 21:00 Happy Hour between 21 & 22 Show starts at 22:30 Entry 1000 IKR The show marks the first of a short European trip for Momentum who will be appearing at the famous Roadburn Festival in Tilburg, The Netherlands as well as playing a couple of shows in France with the legendary band Napalm Death.

WWW.MOMENTUMICELAND.COM



APRIL 24 THE FIRST DAY OF SUMMER

The First Day of Summer (sumardagurinn fyrsti) is an annual public holiday in Iceland held on the first Thursday after 18 April. In former times, the Icelanders used the Old Norse calendar which divided the year into only two seasons, winter and summer. Although the climate in late April cannot be considered to be summer-like, after the long winter, Icelanders still celebrate this first day of "summer" with parades, sporting events and organized entertainment, held in various places around Iceland.

DRESS CODE: WARM

APRIL AND MAY THEATRE WORKSHOP IN THE WOMEN'S STORY CIRCLE

Now it's time to laugh a lot and take part in a new and creative project of The Women's Story Circle: Theatre workshop in The Women's Story Circle, spring 2014. Teachers: Helga Arnalds and Aude Busson. Place: Gerðuberg Cultural Center and Reykjavik City

Library, Gerðuberg 3-5. We will meet twice a month. Registration: Please send an email to amelia@womeniniceland.is. The aims are first of all to have great moments together in a creative atmosphere. During the workshop we will go through a variety of theatre methods to

enable speech and work in a group as well as reinforcing trust and listening skills. In addition the participants will be introduced to exercises that give them tools to express themselves in other ways than in everyday life. We will be working with visual theatre, object theatre and improvisation. The theme will be "Listening to the material". ALL WOMEN ARE WELCOME - we are looking forward to seeing you! The workshop is free of charge and on behalf of The Women's Story Circle - a cooperation between Reykjavik City Library and W.O.M.E.N in Iceland.



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Worth the experience

WHAT'S GOING ON?



MAY 10 INTERCULTURAL DAY

Saturday 10th of May we will be celebrating our 6th Intercultural day in Reykjavik. The programme starts at 13.00 with a parade from Hallgrímskirkja to City Hall. At City Hall there will be a market where you can taste food from different parts of the world, arts and crafts market. At Tjarnarbió there will be live entertainment from 13.30 - 17.00.

FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO:

WWW.RVK.IS/MANNRETTINDI



MAY – 31 THE FESTIVAL OF THE SEA

The festival is an annual event featuring lots of fun for the whole family, and serves as a reminder of how important the sea and its sailors are to Iceland's history, economy and people. A diverse programme of events takes place from 11am on Saturday morning until Sunday afternoon, at Reykjavik's West Harbour; Grandagarður. Here are some of the festival highlights:

- Funny Fish on display
- Arts and crafts
- The Maritime Museum
- Ferry trips to Videy Island
- Delicious Herring
- Special discounts on puffin watching and sea angling tours, and fun family sailing trips
- Speed rowing, race rowing and sailing competitions
- Fun activities for the kids
- Aerobatic airplane stunts
- Ocean Rescue demonstration
- Music, entertainment and much more...

FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO:

WWW.HATIDHAFSINS.IS

Reykjavik Arts Festival



MAY 22 – JUNE 5 REYKJAVIK ARTS FESTIVAL

Save the dates for the 28th edition of RAF, the Reykjavik Arts Festival from 22 May through 5 June 2014. RAF is an annual multidisciplinary festival with a special focus on new commissions and the creative intersection of the arts. For two weeks every year it brings together major cultural venues and unconventional spaces throughout the city in exhibitions and performances of contemporary and classical works, presented to the widest possible audience. Artistic Director: Hanna Styrnisdóttir Since its inception in 1970,

the Reykjavik Arts Festival has invited hundreds of artists from all parts of the globe to perform or exhibit at the festival. Through this activity, the RAF has helped to create a vast network of connections between national and non-national artists, been a catalyst for the creation of new works and a major force in the development of cultural diversity in Iceland.

FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO:

WWW.LISTAHAATID.IS



The steak house by the harbor

A WARMHEARTED RESTAURANT

if you like steak this is it! steikhúsið, which simply means “The steak house”, is a trendy new restaurant in the middle of reykjavik. The vibrant, beating heart of the premises is the spanish Mibrasa coal oven where guests can watch the deft hands of the cook, artfully preparing the sizzling steaks.

The beautiful coal oven, visible to guests above a bar table is used for grilling and baking. The distinct flavor from the coals gives the food a richer taste and enhances the tenderness of the meat, and speaking of tenderness, if the texture of supple, butter soft meat is to your liking, be sure to taste the “28 days” tendered meat specially cured by the chef. The excellent selections and innovative side dishes are all tantalizing and be sure not to miss the grilled Icelandic fish, a tasty delicacy worthy of your indulgence. Although the focus is primarily on steaks the vegetarian choice is excellent. A myriad of flavorful starters served with freshly baked bread will set the mood for your meal. The exciting list of side dishes gives every one the opportunity to design their favorite meal or why not be daring and try something new?

How about deep fried tempura vegetables or sweet potato French fries?

If selecting becomes too much of a dilemma there is always the set menus. These vary with the seasons and offer the freshest and most popular dishes available at any given time. The owners take pride in catering to the whole family so as you would expect the children’s menu is excellent.

ROUGH AND READY STYLE INTERIOR

The raw decoration and furniture made partly out of recycled materials create an ambiance of old fashioned charm and history. The restaurant is situated just above the old harbor by the whale watching center of Reykjavik and therefore the interior, reminiscent of old harbor pubs, is fitting and adapt. Also it reflects on the

history of the house which was built to house a blacksmith’s smithy and metal works. But the main focus here is really on steaks so back to basics, this restaurant is situated firmly in the modern world. The drinks menu arrives on the table in the form of an iPad making it easy to browse, create a wide selection and change it when something new and exciting catches the sommelier’s attention. After a good meal in the warm atmosphere of The Steak House, a stroll along the harbor or through the lively neighborhood, of restaurants, cafés, artisan stores and workshops will give a fitting ending to a fun and enjoyable evening.

STEIKHÚSIÐ
Tryggvagata 4-6, 101 Reykjavík
Tel: 561 11 11
steik.is

... and tasting the sea

If you find yourself in the west of Iceland, particularly in the picturesque town of Stykkishólmur on the Snæfellsnes peninsula we recommend that you venture a little offshore and check out the awesome islands and scenery of the Breiðafjörður bay. Last June we got the chance to see this all for ourselves and of course we took a small army of photographers with us to capture the beauty and deliver it to the pages of Northern Highlights magazine.

by Guðrún Vaka Helgadóttir Photos: Rakeł Ósk Sigurðardóttir, Emir Eyjólfsson and Hákon Davíð Björnsson



Breiðafjörður is a large shallow bay, the second largest in Iceland, separating the region of the Westfjords from the rest of the country. Encircled by mountains, the majestic Snæfellsjökull glacier and the Snæfellsnes peninsula on the south side and the West Fjord peninsula to the north, Breiðafjörður has a spectacular land and seascape consisting of shallow seas, small fjords and bays and an inner part of intertidal areas dotted with about 3,000 islands, islets and skerries. In olden days people used to say that three things in Iceland could not be counted, the hills in Vatnsdalur valley, the lakes on Arnarvatnsheiði moor and the islands in Breiðafjörður.

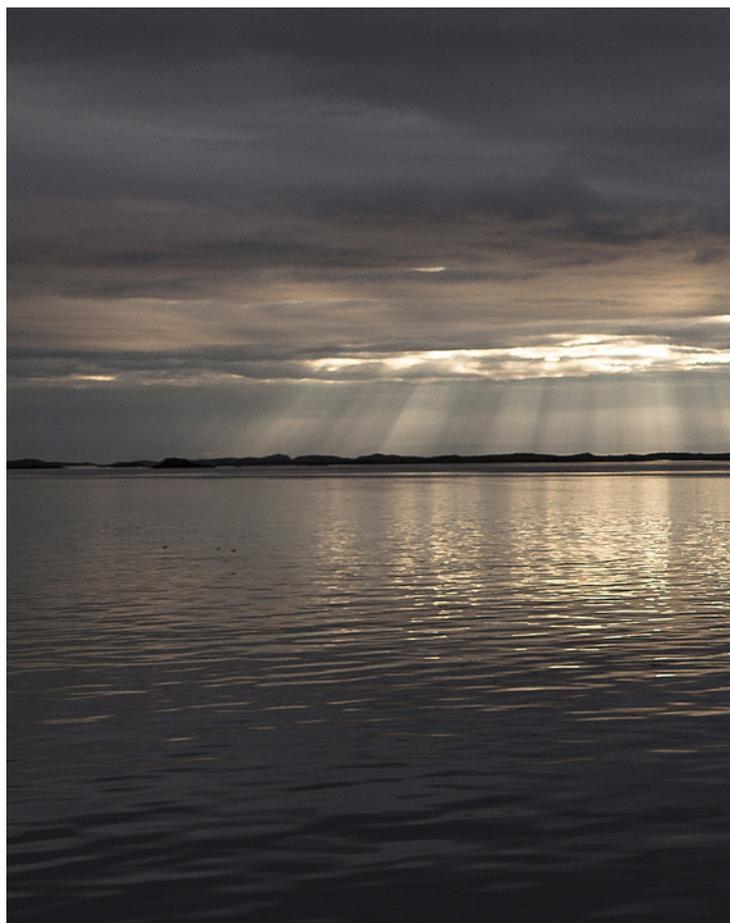
LET'S GET GEOPHYSICAL

If you are a geophysiphile (a word we just invented for those

who love to dabble into the wondrous world of geophysics) you will probably be interested in the Breiðafjörður bedrock, formed during rift volcanism in the Late Tertiary. The area consists mainly of a pile of basaltic lava and on many of the islands you can see great formations of columnar basalt, formed from rapidly cooling lava that once flowed there. In some places the columnar basalt even sways and bends, creating a very picturesque landscape.

ISLANDS IN THE STREAMS

The islands in Breiðafjörður have an unbroken history of human use but now only few islands are inhabited year-round, the most famous of which is Flatey, the setting for Baltasar Kormakur's film *Brúðguminn* (White Night Wedding). Many of the islands are used for summer residences





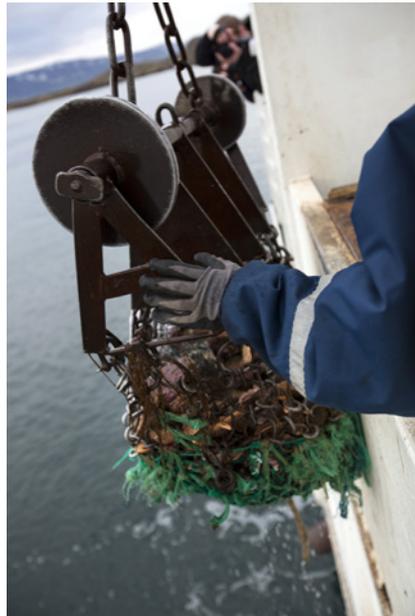
"In some places the columnar basalt even sways and bends, creating a very picturesque landscape."



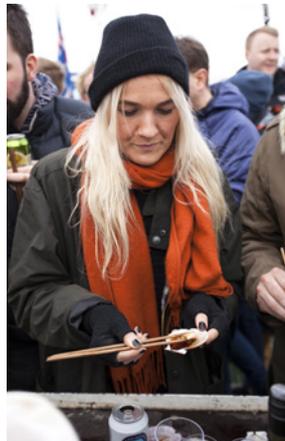
TESTING THE TIDES

and are a source of income for the families and farmers that own them who harvest eiderdown. Not so many years ago the islands were not particularly sought after but in recent years owning an island on Breiðafjörður has become somewhat of a status symbol for the rich and aptly so as through the years it was said that the people living around Breiðafjörður or on its islands never wanted for food as the islands, with their vast birdlife, and the sea provided well.

THE FRESHEST SUSHI YOU'LL EVER GET



FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT WWW.SEATOURS.IS
OR KNOCK ON THEIR DOOR ON SMÍÐJUSTÍGUR 3
BY THE HARBOR IN STYKKISHÓLMUR.



The sea still provides well as we learned during our tour. While we were feasting our eyes on the beautiful scenery the staff aboard our vessel, Særún, dropped out a plough (for bottom trawling) and scraped up some delicious morsels, such as sea urchins, mussels and scallops. Served with pickled ginger, wasabi and soy sauce, along with some chilled white wine, the delicious seafood, called Viking Sushi on board Særún, tasted like nothing we'd ever had before. The guests aboard, some reluctant at first, soon dove in a feeding frenzy (no just kidding) tasting everything the sea had put on the menu that day.

If you want to test your sea legs, fill your lungs with clean air, taste the ocean and sail on Breiðafjörður bay, we can definitely recommend Seatours in Stykkishólmur.



BE IN YOUR ELEMENT

Visit the Laugarvatn Fontana geothermal baths. Nowhere else can you enjoy a steam bath on top of a hot spring and afterwards relax in the open air thermal baths. Our café serves locally grown delicacies.



Book your tour online or with your tour desk.
Reykjavík Excursions offers two daily tours to
Laugarvatn Fontana:
The Golden Circle and Fontana Wellness SRE74
Warm Baths and Cool Lights SRE64

Open daily from 11:00 to 21:00
Geothermal Rye Bread Tour available
every day at 14:30
Country style dinner buffet available
from 18:00 to 21:00

LAUGARVATN
fontana
Geothermal Baths

Points of Interest

- a. Harpa - Concert Hall and Conference Centre
- b. Borgarbókasafnið - The City Library
- c. Hafnarhúsið - The Reykjavík Art Museum
- d. Kolaportið - Flea market
- e. City sight seeing bus
- f. Reykjavík 871 +/- 2 - The Settlement Exhibition
- g. Austurvöllur - Public square
- h. Alþingi - The Parliament Building
- i. Dómkirkjan - The Old Cathedral
- j. Ráðhúsið - City hall
- k. Fríkirkjan - Church
- l. Listasafn Íslands - National Gallery of Iceland
- m. Stjórnarráðið - The Government House
- n. Hæstiréttur - The Supreme Court
- o. Þjóðmenningarhúsið - The Culture House
- p. Þjóðleikhúsið - The National Theatre
- q. Kling og Bang - Artist Run Gallery
- r. Sólfarið - The Sun Voyager (Sculpture)
- s. Nýló - The Living Art Museum
- t. Listasafn Einars Jónssonar - Sculpture Museum
- u. Hallgrímskirkja - Church
- v. Sundhöll Reykjavíkur - Indoor Swimming Pool





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Hverfisgata

Laugavegur

Grettisgata

Snorrabraut

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Frakkastígur

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Grettisgata

Grettisgata

Njálsgata

Óðinsgata

Baldursgata

Skólavörðustígur

Bragagata

Njálsgata

Þingholtsstræti

Spítalastígur

Spítalastígur

Skólavörðustígur

Óðinsgata

Bergstaðastræti

Baldursgata

Bragagata

Njálsgata

Boðhöfustígur

Skólavörðustígur

Skólavörðustígur

Laufásvegur

Laufásvegur

Skóthúsvegur

Sóleyjargata

Laufásvegur

Njálsgata

Tjarnargata

Frikkirkjuvegur

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HOROSCOPE

GO FOR IT ... OR NOT



ARIES

March 21 – April 19

Changes are impending and you need all the help you can get. Even though you read about it in the paper that the police are doing house searches on a regular basis, they are not prepared to help you find an apartment.



LEO

July 21 – August 22

You receive news that make you change your plans slightly. It appears that the woman you love used to be a man.



SAGITTARIUS

November 22 – December 21

The Progressive Party recently presented a parliamentary resolution to enforce a ban on organized crime. You think you can easily get around the new law with a little organization.



VIRGO

August 23 – September 22

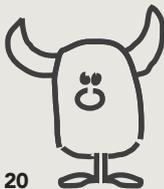
Philosophy and religion will be on your mind this month. Primarily because you're stupid and gullible.



CAPRICORN

December 22 – January 19

The video game developer CCP continues the promotional campaign of its new multiplayer game. It is called World of Darkness and it's based on your life, and your marriage especially.



TAURUS

April 20 – May 20

Your love life will be a mess. Whatever you decide to do, do not use the pickup line: Want to be more than just cousins?



LIBRA

September 23 – October 22

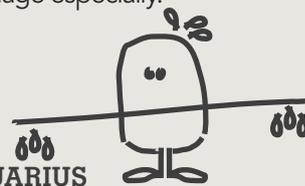
The police suspect you of committing an armed robbery at a gas station in Breiðholt. You try to explain to them that you were in a hurry and just forgot to pay, but they don't believe you. Apparently a high school diploma is classified as a weapon in that area.



GEMINI

May 21 – June 20

You lose your job suddenly and receive a so called „letter of dismissal“. That's fun. You hardly ever receive letters nowadays.



AQUARIUS

January 20 – February 18

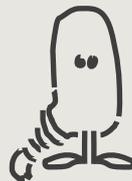
You can't neglect the family issues anymore. You still have siblings alive that you will need to get rid of if you're going to enjoy the inheritance alone.



CANCER

June 21 – July 22

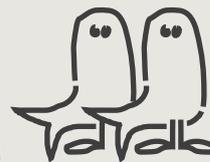
Your domestic life is running smoothly. Everybody is in sync when it comes to making things work and agrees that things have been working better now that you're in custody.



SCORPIO

October 23 – November 21

You enjoy dining out and invite the family to a new and exciting restaurant. Being the adventurer you are you order course 43 randomly, before really looking at it, and, wouldn't you know it, it turns out to be a placenta.



PISCES

February 19 – March 20

There is no reason why you should always share your things with others. On the other hand, your spouse keeps insisting that the kids are not just "yours".



The English Pub

SAVE WATER, DRINK BEER!

For years, Iceland has enjoyed a diverse selection of restaurants and often sophisticated bars. However, one tiny grumble occasionally surfaced from the country's Anglophiles – simply that there was no proper “pub”.

And so the English Pub was born. From modest beginnings it has built a hearty reputation, seeking out, with the advice and guidance of its dedicated customers, the finest ale available to mankind. Today it offers its enthusiastic clientele the chance to sample 50 beers from around the world, as well as a staggering 15 Icelandic brands.

WHISKY GALORE

Not content to rest on its laurels, the English Pub has ventured north of its virtual border and also offers the finest selection of whiskies anywhere in the country. The choice of some 60 malts include many of Scotland's finest, ensuring that numerous Icelanders and worldly travelers make the pilgrimage to the pub's humble door.

Located at the very heart of downtown Reykjavik, the walls of the English Pub are adorned with hundreds of photographs – like an album of the city's history just waiting to be explored over a quiet beer.

A SPORTING CHANCE

Live sporting coverage is amply catered for, with a choice of three big screens and TVs. In side the pub there is room for up to 150 people, and an outdoor terrace can accommodate plenty more on those balmy Icelandic evenings! Whether it is football (Premier and Champions League), rugby or golf, there are always special offers when live events are being broadcast.

Live music every night adds to the atmosphere and for anyone feeling lucky, there is the Wheel of Fortune. Regulars like nothing more than to spin the wheel and chance a “Sorry” or preferably win what used to be called a Yard of Ale. These days, it's inevitably known as a meter of beer, but the winners don't seem to mind!

**The English Pub Austurstræti 12
101 Reykjavik
Tel: +354 578 0400 Mobile: +354 697 9003
enskibarinn.is**





BARBECUE POINTERS

Barbecue disasters are often caused by the fact that the cooking time for each ingredient is different. It looks good to place meats, peppers, onions and mushrooms together on a skewer but these raw materials require different cooking times on the grill and even different temperatures. The simplest way is to keep the meats and the vegetables on separate skewers, you could even place mushrooms on one skewer, peppers on another, etc.

RUB

When dry seasoning meats it is useful to cut shallow stripes into the meat before rubbing the seasoning on, that way the flavour seeps deeper into the meat. When seasoning chicken in this way it is good to put the seasoning under the skin as well as on top of it.

It is often necessary to work fast when barbecuing and that's why it is best to keep everything you need within reach from the beginning, f.ex. tongs, spatula, marinade for brushing, salt, pepper, etc.

DON'T MOVE

Don't be tempted to move food on the grill or tamper with it in the first few minutes of cooking. Most food items will stick to the grate during the first minutes but after the crust has formed turning them is easy.

Don't stack too much on the grate. If too many food items are put on the grill at once the food may turn out wet rather than crisp.

It is preferable to turn the food only once on the grill. Don't stick the meat with a fork to turn it, that way you open the meat up and let out the delicious juices. Use tongs instead.

When using a charcoal grill it is best to fire it up 30-40 min before starting to grill, that gives the charcoal time to reach the right temperature.

CHECK REGULARLY IF THE FOOD IS READY AND START CHECKING A FEW MINUTES BEFORE THE FOOD IS SUPPOSED TO BE READY. THERE IS NO TURNING BACK IF THE STEAK BECOMES OVERCOOKED.

It is very important to preheat the grill properly before the food is put on it. The key to successful grilling is cooking the food's outer layer quickly and so forming a flavourful crust around a succulent center. If the grill isn't sufficiently hot the meat may turn out tough, dry and bland.

Do not leave the area. Food is quickly cooked over the hot flames and there is always the possibility of accidents around a singeing hot grill.

CLEANING

Clean the grill after each use. A clean grate prevents the food from sticking. If the cooking surface is covered with burnt leftovers it poses the risk of the fresh food tasting of the old as well as turning out sootier. Brush the grate with a hard wirebrush while it is still hot.

If you forgot to clean the grill after its last use it is best to fire it up and let the grate warm up well enough for the leftovers to burn. Then brush the burnt leftovers off with a long wirebrush.

WARNING

Never mix raw food items with cooked items. Never put the food back onto the same tray after grilling.

Salt and pepper are very important when it comes to grilled food. Salt absorbs the juice from the raw materials which is why you should never put salt on food before grilling, but after.

BRUSH THE HOT GRATE WITH OIL BEFORE STARTING TO GRILL.

To prevent the meat from burning on the outside while remaining raw on the inside it is best to cook it on the outside at a very high temperature, close to the charcoal if grilling on a charcoal grill, and then lowering the temperature or moving the meat up to a cooler place on the grill. Close the grill if the cuts are thick.

Gas grills need 10-15 min to heat up the lava rocks, if rocks are used.

A FEW POINTERS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN CHOOSING A GAS GRILL

- Listen to what others are saying about the grills. If you have a certain type of gas grill in mind it might be worth the trouble to find someone who owns the same grill and ask them what their experience has been like, how well the grill has lasted, how well it keeps heat, etc. Word of mouth should be considered when choosing your grill.

- Stainless steel burners. Experienced men say that pot iron is too fragile for Icelandic conditions because it is more prone to rust. Choose a grill with burners from good, stainless steel.

- A massive grill grate. The more massive the grill grate, the more it heats up and keeps the heat in the grill. This is why it is better to choose a grill with a large and bulky grate. The grill grate is actually considered better than rocks in keeping the heat in the grill, because fat will drip from the meat on to the rocks where it will burn instead of running directly into a drip tray under the grill.



WELCOME TO GEYSIR



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OF GEYSIR AND STROKKUR

STAY AT THE HOTEL, ENJOY THE
BUFFET AT THE RESTAURANT,
TASTE THE LOCAL FOOD AT THE
BISTRO OR TRY THE MEAT SOUP
AT THE SNACK SHOP

This landmark of Iceland is a spectacular natural phenomenon beyond description. The geothermal field surrounding the Great Geyser is the definitive geyser, having given its name to the geological phenomena. Walking about this natural wonder, one experiences the intensity of the forces of nature.



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LIFE IS A SALT FISH

Around 1930, our Nobel prize winner and national treasure, author Hall-dor Laxness, penned his sociological novel *Salka Valka*, a book that deeply touched, as it still does, a special nerve within the Icelandic nation. The novel's heroine is Salka Valka, a feisty young woman coming of age, who bravely goes against the traditional gender roles that typically flourished in the fishing villages of Iceland's past, where brave men headed out for the often cruel seas while the women's lot was to take care of the brood at home and prepare, preserve or pack the catch brought back to shore.

by Gerður Harðardóttir Photographs: Emir Eyjólfsson

Salka Valka paints a vivid picture of daily life in many of the village communities found all along the Icelandic coastline, where life was, as it still is, all about fishing and the sea. Just how important the sea has been to the Icelandic nation is beautifully captured in one particular sentence in *Salka Valka*, from which a well-known Icelandic phrase has been coined. "Lífið er saltfiskur" literally translates into "Life is a salt fish", meaning that everything in life is about the fish, our hopes and dreams pale in comparison.

THE REYKJANES PENINSULA

When arriving in Iceland by air, you are most likely touching down at Keflavik International Airport, an airport constructed by and for the US military during World War II. Situated on the Reykjanes peninsula, on the southwest part of Iceland, the airport served as a NATO base up until 2006 when it was fully handed over to the Icelandic government.

Weather permitting, as the plane circles down to land what you see is mostly flat and barren landscape, almost totally covered with stretches of black lava and black sandy

beaches. But the occasional column of steam stretching up towards the sky might intrigue you. Reykjanes is an area rich with geothermal activity. And contrary to that first impression of a rather bleak landscape, Reykjanes boasts some of the most fascinating natural treasures Iceland has to offer, except perhaps dramatic waterfalls. While Icelanders are used to it, this begins with the aforementioned lunar landscape which according to my friends in the tourist business is always a hit with tourists. What Reykjanes lacks in thundering waterfalls the peninsula makes up for in lively wildlife. If you are in luck you will catch sight of whales and seals swimming in the mighty North Atlantic Ocean surrounding Reykjanes or you'll enjoy watching the surf when it dramatically crashes against the coastline. It's a dream location for photographers and frequently used when shooting films, commercials and music videos for there are few backgrounds more dramatic. And you are certainly in for a treat if you are an avid bird watcher, for Reykjanes coastline is perfect for bird watching, such as at Krísuvíkurborg, a cliff rich with bird life and the nesting location for thousands of birds every year.



At Seltún, tourists can experience a cluster of hot springs, bubbling pools of mud, steaming with the familiar smell of sulfur, that inevitably comes with it. There are caves and craters, cliffs and mountains and Heimsálfubruin, a wooden bridge that spans a rift valley linking the Eurasian and North American continental tectonic plates. At a certain spot on the bridge you can place yourself in both continents at the same time. And then there is the Blue Lagoon, a pale blue mineral rich lagoon, probably the number one tourist attraction in Iceland.

The Blue Lagoon was originally created by accident when run-off seawater, used to cool down a nearby power station, didn't get absorbed by the surrounding lava as was expected, but instead formed a lake close to the plant. The healing powers of the lagoon were discovered by a worker at the plant, back in the eighties. The worker decided to test if it would help with his psoriasis and started to take baths in the warm water. It did help and since then the Blue Lagoon has become one of Iceland's busiest tourist spots, its changing rooms evolving from a small wooden shack with a broken window as it was when I

first visited years ago, to the modern award-winning architecture facility it is today.

GRINDAVÍK AND THE BRAVE SAILORS

Not far from the Blue Lagoon is the small fishing village of Grindavík, a town typical for the village Laxness invites his readers to visit through his novel *Salka Valka*. *Salka Valka* started off in the late 1920s as a manuscript for a motion picture while Laxness lived in LA and dreamt about making it in Hollywood as a famous scriptwriter. Those dreams never materialized the way Laxness had hoped, (with Greta Garbo in the role of *Salka Valka* in a major motion picture on the silver screen, to be titled either as *A Woman in Pants* or *The Icelandic Whip!*).

Salka Valka, the novel, was partly written in Grindavík in 1931, after Laxness returned from LA. The novel was indeed, later filmed in and around Grindavík in 1953 by a Swedish Film Production company.

For centuries Grindavík served as one of the country's most important ports of trade and in the 15th and 16th centuries, German and English traders had their bases there. In

the summer of 1627, the village of Grindavík, along with several other villages in and around Iceland, suffered a great disaster when barbaric pirates from Muslim countries around the Mediterranean Sea, raided the village. A large number of people were killed with around 400 people in total taken back to Africa and sold into slavery. At the time the total population of Iceland was estimated to be around 60,000. This dramatic event in Iceland's history is always referred to as *Tyrkjaránið* (The Turkish Abductions), when in fact the leader of the raid in Grindavík was one Jan Janszoon, also known as Murat Reis who happened to be a Dutch pirate, operating from the town of Salé in Morocco. Around 180 people are thought to have lived in and around Grindavík at the time and twelve of them were abducted; men, women and children. Of all the people only a small number managed to find their way back to Iceland. What became of the rest of them will never be fully known.

For centuries brave sailors have set out from the harbor in Grindavík, never certain they would arrive back on shore. The weather in Iceland is notoriously fickle and around

Grindavík you can still see wreckages of ships that tell their tragic story. The life of a fisherman was not for the faint of heart. It's no wonder that Icelandic music heritage is rich with songs of these brave and virile heroes of the sea, the lyrics all about the hardship on board and how these men fought horrible weather conditions to bring fish to shore. When not fighting the appalling weather, rugged seamen were, according to the songs, busy getting a wee bit drunk and fighting each other. That is to say, when they were not preoccupied with one of their many girlfriends, which we are told, were waiting patiently, one in each harbor, for their sweetheart sailor to return.

MAKING SALT

Today, around 2,900 people live in Grindavík and fishing or fish processing provides the main source of income. Grindavík has one of

ruled over Iceland from 1380 until 1944, established saltwork in Reykjanes peninsula in the Western fjords of Iceland (not to be confused with Reykjanes in the Southwest of Iceland, where Grindavík is located). The location was chosen for its active geysers that provide the necessary heat for salt production and their close proximity to the sea. The Reykjanes on the Southwest coast of Iceland, is, like its namesake in the Western Fjords, also ideally located for salt production, for its rich abundance of geothermal hot springs and activity and its closeness to the sea.

In most countries known for salt production, the sun is used as the main energy source when the salt is separated from the seawater and dried. For Iceland that was not really an option, because of the limited amount of sunshine during the long winter and the relatively cool temperatures all year round. Another thing that limited the possibilities

mastered the salt fish properly when it comes to creating mouthwatering dishes. Not until perhaps recently when chefs have started to experiment with it and today you will find delicious salt fish dishes on the menu of many of the best restaurants in Iceland. Our usual way of serving it, however, has always been to simply boil it in water and then serve it with potatoes and butter.

THE SALTFISH MUSEUM

Iceland's main salt fish production has for decades been in and around Grindavík and by the harbor in there, you will find the only museum dedicated to the history of salt fish production in Iceland. The museum brilliantly leads the visitor through the story of salt fish production in Iceland from its very first days and how it was like in the fishing villages in the past when life truly revolved around salt fish production. Visitors travel through historical



the most active harbors in Iceland producing more than 40% of Iceland's total salt fish. In the late 19th century, salt fish production was immensely important to Iceland's economy. So important in fact that up until our independence in the first half of the 20th century, salt fish, (a cod that has been gutted, split, beheaded, flattened, heavily salted AND dried), found its way into our coat of arms, acting as a symbol of our increasing prosperity and independence from the Danish Crown. Incidentally salting as a mean of preserving food, is a relatively new addition to the Icelandic cuisine. Before, our main means of preserving food was either to pickle it in fermented whey, dry it or smoke it.

The first experiments with saltmaking in Iceland, using geothermal energy, dates back to 1752 when Skúli Magnússon, the first Icelandic Treasurer and founder of the first industrial enterprises in Iceland, had samples of sea taken around Iceland, sent off to Copenhagen to have it analyzed. As a result attempts were made to start producing salt in Iceland but it wasn't until 1773, when salt production in Iceland got successfully off the ground. The Danish Crown, which

was the fact that Iceland is a country lacking in forests and consequently lumber, which traditionally was vital as an energy source in Europe in production of salt. For salt making to get off the ground, different means had to be invented to separate the salt from the seawater. And here's where Iceland has the upper hand due to its abundance of geothermal energy that was cleverly put to use in the salt-making process. The Danish crown had all the necessary equipment such as pans, wood and calcium shipped over, along with professional salt makers whose task was to set up the saltworks. Since then, salt has played a key role in Iceland's commerce and for years, salt fish was Iceland's main product exported overseas. Most of it was exported to Spain and Portugal, the two countries with the highest consumption of salt fish in the world.

Salt fish, or bacalao, has for centuries been a stable ingredient in the cuisine of the countries around the Mediterranean but also in countries in West Africa, the Caribbean and in Brazilian cuisine. The cuisine of Spain and Portugal offers a plethora of fantastic salt fish recipes. Here in Iceland however, as strange as it sounds, we have never really

objects, photographs and a sample of texts which provide a glimpse of how things were done in the first days of salt fish processing in Iceland, when things were much more primitive than today with our modern day high tech equipment and vessels; a far cry from the basic sailboats and rowing boats of centuries past.

Through old photographs we see how things were done and it shows how people dressed, in layers and layers of woolly clothing to keep them warm in the often bitter cold. It's interesting to note that when asked about the biggest revolution in fish processing, people who lived through these times are quick to mention the introduction of the rubber boots around 1950 as the biggest breakthrough. I'm sure Salka Valka would agree.

*Grindavik.is/kvikan
Hafnargötu 12a
240 Grindavík*

**FOR MORE INFO VISIT:
WWW.REYKJANES.IS
WWW.GLJUFRASTEINN.IS**

VATNAJÖKULSPJÓÐGARÐUR NATIONAL PARK

WELCOME!

Vatnajökulsþjóðgarður is one of Europe's largest national parks. You are invited to see Iceland's highest mountain along with volcanoes, waterfalls, lava fields, sand deserts, and glaciers. Green oases, rich flora and birdlife.



© Ragnar Th Sigurðsson

◀ Climbers on Hvannadalshnúkur, Iceland's highest summit
Hafragilsfoss, 2 km downstream from Dettifoss ▼



© Sigurður Sigurðsson



© Skarphéðinn G. Þórisson

▲ Reindeer in the northeastern highlands

Laki craters ▶



© Helge Davids

Visit our website www.vjp.is to find more information
on Vatnajökull National Park.



THE ELEMENTS – Iceland's version

We all know our elements, but in Iceland, earth, wind, fire and water may not be exactly the same as in other places. Here's a small introduction to the Icelandic version of the elements.

by Guðrún Baldvina Sævarsdóttir Photos: Birtingur Photo Collection and Photos.com

WATER

It is probably our biggest pride and joy, and our most valued resource, the water. Icelanders reading this will nod their heads and think of the wonderful, ice cold and super clean water that runs carelessly from their taps in their kitchen or possibly think of their favorite stream in the countryside and although they have a point, we often forget about the amazing natural resource that our geothermal hot springs provide. We are so used to having the natural hot water pour out of the other tap in our kitchen that we need a moment to realize that the displeased look on our foreign friends' face is because they're picking up the sulfur scent we've long stopped noticing. It is also the main material of our most beautiful natural wonders, the waterfalls and geysers, the lakes, even the steam rising up in many places and of course, the glaciers. You'll find water in its many different forms all over the country and in such beautiful and unusual displays like Vellankatla,

the place where fresh water presses into Lake Þingvallavatn from underneath the lava fields and standing on the banks of the lake, you can see the fresh underwater stream enter the lake from an underwater cave and at Hraunfossar where the water presses out from underneath the grassy lava, forming a long row of miniature waterfalls falling into River Hvítá. If this is your first visit to Iceland, we can pretty much guarantee that during your stay you'll experience water like you've never experienced it before.

FIRE

And by fire we mean volcanoes, of course. It is Iceland's most prominent feature and probably the second thing foreigners think of (after Björk, of course) when Iceland comes up in a conversation. Until the Eyjafjallajökull eruption in 2010 they were seen as a national treasure, considered more awe-inspiring than dangerous and one of the biggest stars on the stage of Iceland's natural wonders.

It's hard to explain, but what seems like natural disasters (volcanic eruptions and earthquakes) stirs something in Icelanders that is almost welcome, being a nostalgic reminder of the powers in nature that can be destructive and yet are awe inspiring, awakening a quiet reverence and humility. After the Eyjafjallajökull eruption and the 6 day air travel disruption that ensued we were a little mortified actually, as if it were somehow our responsibility to contain our ash and our lava. We're working on it but hey, we do boast a pretty impressive line-up of volcanologists. For an impressive encounter with beautiful volcanoes, visit the craters of Grábrók near Borgarnes in the west, the very active Hekla in the south (dubbed the Gateway to Hell in the middle ages) or even Askja, along a road less travelled in the highland.

EARTH

Iceland is actually just seabed that rose from the ocean due to all the seismic activity along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Really, it is. And ever since it has been beautifully carved out by glaciers and rivers and the Icelandic road system. With a vast unbuilt interior which is mostly bare sand, lava and rock, we are a nation more earthbound than most. Or at least we should be and yet an impressive majority of Icelanders still believe in elves and trolls,



symbolic creatures of our mother earth. With 320,000 people living in very close proximity to the powerhouse that is nature, we know not to fool around with a know-it-all attitude, which is exactly why we build our roads around rocks that rumor has it are inhabited by elves. You simply never know. Iceland is quite young in geological terms and is still in formation with our newest piece of land being Surtsey, an island south of Vestmannaeyjar island that formed during an underwater volcanic eruption in 1963 and has been the subject of intense geological research ever since.

AIR

Ah yes, the wonderful clean air of Iceland. Since most of Iceland's denser populated areas are by the coastline, Icelanders are used to the fresh and cool sea air. We are however, as previously stated, also used to the strong odor of sulfur from our natural hot water. It is a strange combination and one that goes rather well together. The air is normally cool and on those very rare days that we feel a warm breeze, we look up and say "Wow, it feels like a foreign country!" The winds can get very strong and storms are an unavoidable part of winter. This is because of the frequent weather

depressions and the fact that the lack of vegetation doesn't provide much of a barrier, but our houses are strong and we've gotten quite used to walking almost horizontally during the strongest blasts, so you wouldn't be surprised seeing a person almost crawling to their car across a parking lot. And if you're looking to experience clean air in all its glory, we recommend a trip to Snæfellsjökull glacier and the surrounding national park. There is something different in the air on this peninsula that produces an otherworldly feeling for many of its visitors.

Book your tour online or with your tour desk.

- GEOTHERMAL STEAM ROOMS
- THERMAL BATHS
- SAUNA

Reykjavík Excursions offers two daily tours to Laugarvatn Fontana:
The Golden Circle and Fontana Wellness SRE74
Warm Baths and Cool Lights SRE64

Open daily from 11:00 to 21:00
Geothermal Rye Bread Tour available every day at 14:30
Country style dinner buffet available from 18:00 to 21:00

LAUGARVATN
fontana
Geothermal Baths



Molten lava falls at Fimmvörðuháls eruption.



A farmer in the south of Iceland during the ash fall of 2011. Photo: Rakeł Ósk Sigurðardóttir.

A LAND OF CONSTANT CHANGES

Iceland is the most active volcanic spot in the whole world. Smack under the middle of Vatnajökull Glacier there is a hot spot or a direct link to a mantle plume of molten lava. The active volcanic belt runs diagonally through the country from the tip of the Reykjanes Peninsula to the north shore and beyond. It is here that the greatest flow of lava in historical times has occurred.

by Steingerður Steinarsdóttir

Typically for Iceland are long palagonite ridges where the earth breaks open and molten lava spouts up through a series of craters. This means that lava flows in greater quantities on this small island than in other volcanic areas. Indeed Iceland holds a world record of volume of lava spewed out in a single eruption in historic times. 8700 years ago a 20-30 km long rift opened up in the highlands sending continuous streams of lava over the lowlands and into the sea some 140 km away from the actual craters. The amount of lava that came up during the eruptions was about 30 km³. We're kind of glad we weren't here at the time.

Icelanders weren't so lucky in the year 1362 when Öræfajökull

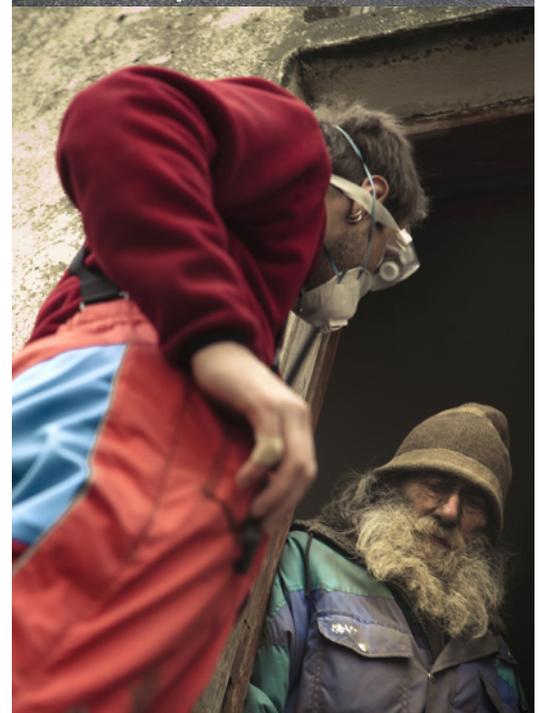
Volcano erupted causing devastation due to huge amounts of tephra being ejected and floods of water from the glacier above drowning a cluster of farms in an area called Litla-Hérað. For centuries the farms that remained in this area were isolated by large white rivers flowing from underneath the glacier. The people living there displayed courage and resourcefulness when crossing the rivers and the glaciers in order to keep contact with their neighbors and maintain their survival.

THE BLUE HAZE HARDSHIP

The most famous of Icelandic eruption is undoubtedly the Blue Haze Hardship. This eruption started in 1783 when great rivers



The bridge over the Markarfljót River was washed away by floods due to the fast melting of ice and snow during the volcanic eruption of Eyjafjallajökull Glacier. Photo: Róbert Reynisson.



A member of the Icelandic rescue team checks in on a lone farmer in the south of Iceland during the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull Glacier. Photo: Kristinn Magnússon



Photo: Rakei Ósk Sigurðardóttir

of molten lava flowed from the highlands down into the plains below. Although hazardous this did not prove to be the worst consequence of the eruption. Poisonous gasses, called the Blue Haze, filled the air killing livestock and ruining grazing fields. 75% of all livestock in Iceland died and over 10,000 people which formed the fifth of the nation at that time.

Like in the recent Eyjafjallajökull eruption Europe did not remain unaffected. The Blue Haze was carried by winds over the ocean ruining crops in many countries. The famine in France brought on by the Blue Haze is also believed to have been a contributing factor in the French Revolution of 1793.

THE ERUPTION ON HEIMAÆY

Most recent of these volcanic eruptions is the Heimaey eruption in 1973. A rift opened just above the town completely without warning. The eruption caused a major crisis for the islanders

and nearly led to a permanent desertion of the island. Volcanic ash filled the town and lava flowed over and destroyed around 400 homes. For a time the lava flow threatened to close off the harbor. Then the ingeniousness of man served well as an operation was mounted to cool the advancing lava flow by pumping sea water onto it. This saved the harbor and thus allowed the inhabitants to return when the eruption was over.

In recent years most eruptions in Iceland have been small and of little consequence for the people of this island. Although the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull Glacier and the great ash fall proved to be a great nuisance, it didn't cause any permanent damage or casualties. These latest eruptions serve to remind us that we live in a precarious situation and that anything can happen since the country is continually being shaped and molded by the forces of nature..



❶ The eruption of Westman Islands nearly led to a permanent desertion of the island. ❷ An old lava formation at Ódáðahraun. Photo: Sigtryggur Ari Jóhannsson. ❸ During Easter of 2010 there was a spectacular eruption at Fimmvörðuháls, a popular hiking route near Þórsmörk. It was often referred to as a tourist eruption due to the relatively easy access people had to go and see this extravagant expression of nature. Photo: Sigtryggur Ari Jóhannsson.



"8700 years ago a 20-30 km long rift opened up in the highlands sending continuous streams of lava over the lowlands and into the sea some 140 km away from the actual craters."

A well equipped vehicle drives through Frambruni lava field at Ódáðahraun. Photo: Sigtryggur Ari Jóhannsson




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In a beautiful old house just a few steps from the mainstreet Laugavegur, you will find a boutique and workshop owned by the Icelandic fashion brand GuSt. Among evening dresses and classic suits there are beautiful sweaters and coats made from Icelandic wool. Most likely the designer herself will be working and welcoming you, so don't miss out on this original Icelandic design experience.

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ADVENTURES IN THE ABYSS

Tourists travelling to Iceland now have the opportunity to be one of the very first in the world to enter the magma chamber of an extinguished volcano, a mere half an hour from Reykjavík. Þríhnúkagígur volcano has a crater so extraordinary that it may become a UNESCO World Heritage site. The crater is the deepest lava vault in the world, and the only volcano on this grand scale that can be seen from within. It's no surprise that the tourism industry sees it as one of Iceland's major attractions. However, concerns have been raised over potential damage to the environment in and around the crater due the expected influx of tourists, and the fact that the crater is situated in the capital city's water protection area.

by Hrund Þórsdóttir Photos: Rake! Ósk Sigurðardóttir Translation: Júlíana Björnsdóttir



Þórunn Bjarney Garðarsdóttir educated us about the crater and the history of the area. The crater Þríhnúkagígur is situated to the far left in the row of craters seen in the distance.

The crater Þríhnúkagígur, with its hard-to-pronounce name, is situated approximately four kilometers west of Blue Mountains (Bláfjöll) on the North American- and Eurasian Teutonic Plate. The mouth of the crater about four meters in size, and leads to a vast and massive cage, a cave considered to be one of the largest and greatest natural wonders of its kind on the earth.

The magma chamber is the heart of a volcano, and normally when an eruption stops it fills up with rocks and stones that seal the crater. Then a dent is formed and the crater look is perfected. What makes Þríhnúkagígur so unique is that in the 4000 years since it last erupted, the crater remains unsealed. In light of its unique positioning, drilling a tunnel onto a platform in its center is one of the proposed ideas to improve access. An environmental impact assessment is in process and it remains to be seen whether the plans will in fact be executed. The representatives for Þríhnúki, who operated tours to the crater last summer, are certain that should the plan be realized, it would be ready for use in 2015, at the earliest.

A LITTLE FALL IS THE BEGINNING OF A BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY.

We met up with our tour guide, Þórunn Bjarney Garðarsdóttir, at the parking area in the Blue Mountain ski resort. The journey on foot to the crater was approximately 45 minutes and took us across a somewhat impassable lava field to the base of the mountain. We walked with relative ease through the extraordinary landscape. Still somehow this journalist managed to fall flat on her bum, and on a paved road at that, just as we started our walk. The timeless Icelandic proverb, "fall er fararheill," meaning, "a little fall is the beginning of a beautiful journey" were a source of encouragement.

From afar Þríhnúkar seems almost insignificant but beneath the surface is a grand and majestic crater. Our destination was the magma chamber deep below the surface. By the crater is the base camp that



In 1973, Árni B. Stefánsson was the first person to abseil into the chamber and he named it Þríhnúkar. The crater was explored extensively and mapped in 1991.



The beaten path in the lava field due to visits from travellers to the crater has raised some concerns.



“Without spotlights, it would be impossible to see all the colors and formations that create an unforgettable atmosphere in an environment where you can lose normal perception of time and space.”

The gray area in the wall is the fissure vent. It's easy to spot.

consists of two sheds and a few latrines. Travellers receive safety instructions and the necessary equipment, a safety belt and helmet. Headlights are an optional addition to the spotlights already inside the crater. Without spotlights, it would be impossible to see all the colors and formations that create an unforgettable atmosphere in an environment where you can lose normal perception of time and space. The walk up to the relatively small crater is short. At the summit is a German lift – originally designed for window washing– that took us into the abyss of this extraordinary crater. To descend in the slow moving lift with the earth opening up beneath us was an inexplicable sensation, and we trembled as we felt moving deeper into the abyss. The crater is bottle- shaped and from a narrow opening widens extensively into 150,000 square meter size cave. The distance from top to bottom is spacious enough to fit Hallgrímskirkja, Iceland’s largest church with its imposing tower, twice, one on top of the other. 120 meters below, at the bottom of this massive cavity is a floor the size of a football field. Signs of life are few but around the summit by the crater’s opening was budding green moss and a little further down white spots appear to have been the beginning of a bacterial growth along the walls. No sunlight penetrates the far reaches of the crater, and all indications suggest the temperature has remained a stable four to five degrees Celsius since the volcano became fully extinct some 2000 years ago. Big water drops that have sunk through the sedimentary strata fall into the chamber and then continue their journey through the rocky surface.

One day, we may find ourselves drinking the water - even bathing in it – as the crater is located in Reykjavík’s water protection area.

PERCEPTION OF DISTANCE LOST!

Once we finally climbed out of the lift, we were immediately asked to stay on the safe side of the so-called “drop zone.” A line is laid across the cave floor and the large rocks spread across it to cut off the area to where rocks might fall. Spokespersons for the organized tours last summer state with certainty that not once have they seen rocks and stones loosen



Nature was in a mood for grandiose displays on the day of our adventure, and on the way home, we came close to walking right under the rainbow.



❶ The range of colors inside the cave is unbelievable - courtesy of the PH value in the rock. Shadowy images ignite the imagination and on this picture. We thought we saw the reflection of a dog on the wall. ❷ The lift is equipped with an undercarriage on the side as the crater hole is so narrow in places the lift could easily bump into the solid rock wall if those on-board did not push it away from it. Powerful spotlights are placed in the crater. ❸ Ólafur Þór Júlíusson prepares the lift as safety precautions are carefully met. ❹ The hole is narrow on top but widens the closer you get to the floor. ❺ The meat soup that awaited us when we came out of the crater was simply exquisite after the day's adventure.

from the precipice. However, this journalist wouldn't want to be on the cave floor during an earthquake, as apparently happened the day after our visit to this enchanting underground world. Away from the cut-off line, visitors can roam around the area as they please. Climbing awkwardly across a floor of large and heavy rocks is a unusual experience. How easy it is to surrender to the wonderment of this hidden underworld, rich with splendid colors. Thirty meters on the one side - in the innermost parts of the cave - is a pitch-black tunnel extending another 80 meters into the subterranean depths. The area is off-limit to tourists, and most certainly not a journey for the claustrophobic travellers as crawling through narrow space is required. All members of our group agreed that the strangest experience of all was the complete loss of our perceptions of distance. We simply

couldn't grasp the vastness all around us, let alone the incredible distance to the crater opening. The lift indeed took forever to travel down to the magma chamber with the next group of visitors.

INSIDE THE VOLCANO... IN HEELS

Time flew; we'd already spent an hour in the crater. The thought of being inside a volcano was truly overwhelming and during the whole time my senses were at high pitch. For a trip like this, warm clothing and good shoes are a must, and we made sure to dress appropriately. Nonetheless, we were shivering towards the end as the initial warmth from the walk to the crater had worn off. Back in base camp, we were served a boiling hot but absolutely delicious Icelandic meat soup that renewed our energies for the

walk back to the car park.

It's perfectly normal to have difference of opinion on how to utilize natural wonders such as this crater, and it's important to analyze all sides of the issue. After visiting this extraordinary natural wonder, we realized travellers from all over the world would swarm like bees to it if access to the area was improved. In our opinion, the real charm of the visit would be lost without taking the journey in the lift down to the floor of the cave, but on the other hand, the price for a visit to the crater would be much cheaper. Like our tour guide Þórunn Bjarney pointed out, a platform inside the crater would make it possible to explore the insides of a volcano in light clothing and heels. However, the question remains just how desirable that would be...

YOU'LL FALL IN LOVE

In the Vatnajökull Region you'll find the real reason why Iceland got its name. The area is dominated by Vatnajökull glacier which is the largest glacier in the world outside the Arctic region. There you will also find some of Iceland's most popular tourist attractions such as the spectacular Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon, Skaftafell, a preservation area and a jewel in Vatnajökull National Park and Hvannadalshnjúkur, the highest peak in Iceland and popular hiking destination.



snowmobile tours and jeep tours at Vatnajökull, ATV tours and geothermal baths at Hoffell, Northern Lights tours, reindeer excursions, a visit to the Thorbergssetur Cultural Museum, the local handicraft store or the Farm Zoo at Hólmur; the list goes on.

There are various possibilities in accommodations to suit your needs. Whether you want to sleep in your tent, in a hotel or anything in between, you'll find a warm welcome by knowledgeable hosts. There are several restaurants in the area and most of them offer local food made in the Vatnajökull Region by local people. Be sure to ask for the local beer Vatnajökull, which is made from icebergs found in the Jökulsárlón glacier

lagoon and arctic thyme. A lobster meal will also be a good choice since Höfn is the lobster capital of Iceland.

ACCESSIBLE THE WHOLE YEAR

The Vatnajökull Region is well accessible the whole year due to good weather conditions and frequent transportation. Daily flights are available from Reykjavík to the Höfn during the summer and five days a week in other seasons. Buses between Reykjavík and Höfn are scheduled daily in the summer and three days a week during the other seasons. There are also three car rental companies in Höfn.

The Vatnajökull Region is filled with contrasts with its black beaches and white glaciers. Serenity, energy and forces of nature combine to make a visit to the Vatnajökull region a never-to-be-forgotten experience and a photographer's dream. There is rich wildlife in the Vatnajökull Region with thousands of migrating birds passing through and herds of reindeer a common sight. If you're lucky you might spot a seal at Jökulsárlón or an arctic fox running across the terrain. You will also find dozens of companies that offer all sorts of activities year round, diverse accommodation and great restaurants with local food. The Vatnajökull Region in the Southeast of Iceland covers over 200km of the Ring Road from Lómagnúpur in the west to Hvalnes in the east. It also covers the southern and most accessible side to Vatnajökull. There is one town in the area, Höfn with a population of 1600.

ACTIVITY, ACCOMMODATION AND RESTAURANTS

Much of the activity in the Vatnajökull Region revolves around the glacier and the surrounding nature. You can choose between adventures such as boat rides at Jökulsárlón, glacier walks, ice cave tours and ice climbing at Vatnajökull,



CHEERS

Be sure to ask for the unique local beer Vatnajökull, which is brewed in limited edition from icebergs found in the Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon and arctic thyme.



FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
WWW.VISITVATNAJOKULL.IS

PINGVELLIR

– A UNIQUE NATIONAL PARK!

By Agnes Amalía Photos: Photos.com



Þingvellir is considered by many as the most beautiful place in Iceland and how can you deny it, given its stunning and diverse landscape. Now on UNESCO's world heritage list, Þingvellir shares its place with 800 cultural and natural heritage sites around the world. For centuries the national park has had a special place in Icelanders' hearts. It was at Þingvellir that the Icelandic Parliament was established in 930, gathering there until 1798. It is also the place where Iceland declared its independence on the 17th of June, 1944.

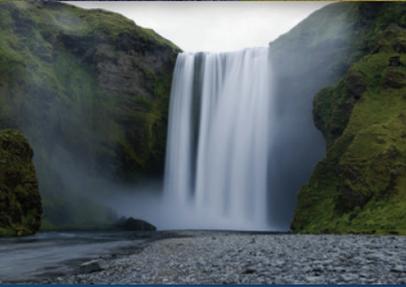
Þingvellir is a protected national shrine for all Icelanders.

Occupying a large portion of the park is Lake Þingvallavatn and beside the lake rests a luxuriant summerhouse area. People often go to Þingvellir for a day trip, savoring the beauty, catching fish or simply relaxing - perhaps finishing the day with a nice picnic. This romantic natural wonder is enjoyable all year round, for each season brings its own colors and charm. Þingvellir is only a short trip away from the capital and all visitors are guaranteed a happy and mesmerizing day.



Rangárþing eystra

a vivid place to visit



Hvolsvöllur



NATURE ~ ACTIVITY ~ CULTURE



HOTEL
VESTMANNAEYJAR

A HOME FROM HOME



A VARIETY OF FRESH PRODUCE DIRECT FROM FARMS

Produce is available directly from farms around the country where it's possible to stop by or order produce for home delivery. Detailed information about all service providers, products and delivery are found on the website beintfrabyli.is.

MÖÐRUDALUR Á FJÖLLUM SHEEP MEAT, GOAT PRODUCE AND MORE

At the Möðrudalur á Fjöllum farm goats and sheep live on nutritious highland grass and fresh spring water. Care is taken so that products are as natural as possible and no additives are used during production. Methods for smoking are traditional, performed in a turf house where both manure and Icelandic nature add flavor

to the process. Available products include smoked meat, sheep meat, double smoked goat meat, lightly smoked loin, smoked sausage, sheep pâté, goat pâté and smoked rolled sausage, as well as a variety of ethnic handiwork such as goatskin, wool felt and more. Delivered anywhere. Detailed information is available online at modrudalur.is.





HVERINN (THE HOT SPRING) IN REYKHOLTSDALUR

VEGETABLES, SPICES AND MORE

The travel company Hverinn is run at the farm Björk at Kleppjárnsreykir in Reykholtsdalur and offers a camp site, restaurant, wine bar and tourist shop. Björk operates a diverse horticulture and their products – vegetables, fruit and spices – are used as ingredients for the restaurant menu and sold directly to customers at the tourist shop. There you can also buy most necessities, Icelandic handiwork and design merchandise from the surrounding area and beyond, as well as certified organic herbal creams by Villimey.

At the camp site electric hook ups with 3,3 kw voltage are accessible on 60 lots. With access to WC, hot and cold water as well as showers, washing machine and drier, outdoor grill, RV dump station and car washing lot. A playground for children, swimming pool with a hot tub a 150 m away. More information on hverinn.is

BJARTEYJARSANDUR IN HVALFJÖRÐUR

LAMB, ORGANIC PORK, PRESERVES, DANDELION HONEY AND MORE

At Gallery Álfrótt at Bjarneyjarsandur you can find a range of goods produced by locals and craftsmen from the surrounding area. Glass art, baleen jewelry, caps, mittens and other wool products, skin products, preserves, bread and dandelion honey to name a few. You can also buy lamb and organic pork all year round, although there is a seasonal difference in products and services. A restaurant will be run there in the summer, where the main menu ingredients are direct from farms.

At Bjarneyjarsandur an Open agriculture

is practiced, guests can go on guided tours around the farm, outhouses and the neighboring area, learn about the operation, engage in personal dialogue with farmers and producers and familiarize themselves with the way farm animals are cared for. Walks around the neighboring area and to the shore are always popular and guided tours to other areas of Hvalfjörður are available. Guests can lodge at Bjarneyjarsandur, whether on the campsite, in a summer cabin or at home at the farm. For further information go to bjarneyjarsandur.is.

THE COWSHED CORNER AT EGILSSTAÐIR

SKYR, YOGHURT, CHEESE AND MORE

At Egilsstaðir in Fljótdalshérað region there is a free range dairy farm equipped with a robot cow milker. Recently they have opened a shop and café named The Egilsstaðir Cowshed Corner, which offers produce and a dining experience based on the farm's production.

Dining guests are welcome to take a look at the cowshed and a guided tour around the farm is available for groups on order. Among available produce at The Cowshed Corner are skyr (milk curd), yoghurt, cheese, milk and beef. For further information go to beintfrabyli.is/egilsstadir.





MRS LAUGA FARMERS MARKET IN THE CITY

Mrs Lauga is a neighborhood shop in Laugarnes that offers fresh food from Icelandic farmers from around the country. Quality and traceability are her passion. She also imports delicacies from farmers on the mainland, primarily from Italy.

A great opportunity for farmers and small producers to sell their goods directly to the customer. Now Mrs Lauga can also be found downtown, since she branched out in December and opened for business at Óðingsgata 1 in the Þingholt district. For more information go to frulauga.is



SÓLHEIMAR AT GRÍMSNES ORGANIC CULTIVATION AND BEAUTIFUL ORNAMENTS

Sólheimar at Grímsnes run organic cultivation stations. There you also find a number of workshops, including a candle workshop, art workshop, ceramics workshop, weaving workshop, herbal workshop and a wood workshop. At the premises are an organic café, guesthouse and bakery. All of their products are available at the Vala shop. In the residential area you

will find a church, a sculpture garden, an arboretum, art gallery, the sustainability center Sesseljuhús and a sports hall.

Sólheimar's culture festival runs throughout the summer with art shows, concerts, nature walks and lectures. For more information about the programme and the Sólheimar community go to solheimar.is.

LJÓMALIND AT BORGARNES REGIONAL FOODS AND HANDIWORK

During the weekend of Whitsun the food and handiwork market Ljómaliind was opened at Borgarnes. A group of thirteen individuals from all over West Iceland established the market. Part of the group ran an open market in Borgarnes before Christmas, which was a great success and as a result it was decided to put more effort into selling produce from the region.

Available is a variety of produce from Direct from Farms farmers, such as vegetables, meat, cheese, preserves and more. For sale is also handiwork, like wool products, gift shop items and greeting cards. Summer flowers are sold there as well as various arts and crafts. Supply is diverse and it is possible to apply for products to be sold on consignment. An independent committee assesses submitted products as emphasis is put on good quality. The market is located at Sólbacki 2 in Borgarnes, just north of the roundabout at the intersection toward Snæfellsnes.

For further information call 437 1400 or look up Ljómaliind on Facebook.



VELKOMIN Á TAPASHÚSIÐ



VOGAFJÓS COWSHED BY MÝVATN LAVA TEA, SMOKED TROUT, MÝVATN MOZZARELLA AND SALAD CHEESE AND MORE

The restaurant at Vogafjós Cowshed by Mývatn is joined to the cowshed and offers a diverse menu, with emphasis on products direct from farmers. At the gourmet corner a range of handiwork by numerous artists are for sale as well as produce direct from farmers, such as homemade preserves, lava tea, smoked trout and smoked lamb. There is also a guesthouse at the premises, consisting of spacious rooms with private bathrooms. For more information see vogafjos.net



Tapashúsið - Ægisgarður 2 Sólfellshúsið
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ICELAND IS HOME TO A HIDDEN UNIVERSAL ENERGY

by Jón Kristinn Snæhólm Photos: Ernir Eyjólfsson

There is more to Iceland than geothermal energy, waterfalls, lava fields, volcanoes and earthquakes. There are people who believe that Iceland is one of the main power sources in the world and that through this northern island lays a tremendous healing power, which special kinds of people use to heal others.

In the small village of Eyrarbakki, in the southern part of Iceland, lives Unnur (Uni) Arndísardóttir. Her work is of a very special kind. She is a yoga teacher, a musician, and a singer (her first solo CD came out in 2009). She also tells the future (Tarot cards and runes), and offers Sound Healing og Flower Remedy therapy. We visited Uni to get to know more about her interesting work and share it with our readers.

Does universal energy, which is both of a good nature and that of a bad one, exist?

"Yes, such universal energy does exist and I believe it to be both of a good nature and a bad one. There is no such thing existing which is entirely good or entirely bad. This is mere energy and to me God is energy just like the sun. My mother always told me that God was like the sun and we were the sunshine and that it was up to us to choose how we experienced God. Everyone experiences God

in a different way – that is my firm belief."

Is God the good element in mankind and also the bad one?

"God is definitely the good element in man but I have never thought about whether God could also be a bad one; I think God is neutral. We can for example always choose whether we want our day to be a good day or a bad one. I think it is all about how one is determined to experience it. We are allowed to experience both. God allows us to do so."

If we say that universal energy does exist, is it in our power to access it as we can the power of sea and water?

"Yes, it is possible to access God within oneself. The more we acknowledge the moment and allow ourselves to stay there the more we can feel the presence of God. We can enlarge God in our lives by activating our consciousness."

How does one do that?

"I think meditation is an important key to being able to find the moment and feel it and I also think that mankind is always trying to enhance it. We have been placed in a certain form of thinking about the past and also about the future and our minds are always roaming around. If we halt and stay in the moment and allow ourselves to be, here and now; like right now – It's raining –

then God is most certainly here. Exactly now! And then we can feel life. Meditation is a very good tool, which enables us to enhance the here and now because then the moment gets enlarged and a huge area appears which furthermore enables us to notice God. I believe that God is within everyone and in every single moment of our lives. It is just the question of breathing it in."

What exactly is meditation? Is it to motivate the mind more or better than we do on every day basis?

"Meditation means in so many words – not to think – send the mind on vacation! The mind rules our lives to a huge extent and when we accomplish dwelling in the moment without thinking about what we are going to eat tonight, what we were doing yesterday or what we are going to say to someone tomorrow, we allow ourselves to dwell in silence because meditation means simply to switch off the mind. We are using our minds all our lives; at work, in relationships, simply 24/7 all year round – meditation means to take this moment and push pause on the remote control of the mind. Be here and now without thinking."

How can one learn this? Were you sent here to teach people to switch off the mind?

"I don't know, probably. We can always look at it that way. We always learn from other people. I



"I am the channel for something, which is magic or energy."



studied this, I am a yoga teacher, and my mother practiced yoga when I was little. There are so many kinds of meditation; for example meditation which involves the switching off the mind, and now consciousness that involves being solely in the here and now. Thoughts appear, which one is perfectly ok with; we let the thoughts dwell for a while but try to maintain the now consciousness in everything we do. I believe that practicing yoga

has helped me a great deal."

What purpose does this serve? Does this make the universe a better place?

"Yes, I believe so. We are so busy being busy and too scared to stop and breathe for awhile because then we may need to start to feel. We may bear old sorrows in our hearts and maybe if we set everything on hold and breathe in we may experience this feeling again, which could be a

bit difficult for us. Actually magic occurs in the moment. Life is now, at this moment, it does not matter what you were doing yesterday or what you are going to do tomorrow – what matters is what you are doing right now ... and that you enjoy it right now!"

You call this "now consciousness". Are you saying that the past is something that does not make any difference at all? There are many who live



in the past; wars are fought because of the past. Is this a solution to the problems, which we have bestowed upon ourselves?

"This is a kind of a making peace with yourself. You know, I am not for everything that I have done, but I am a better person today than I was yesterday. If we have experienced bad things in the past it may have had a huge effect on the person we are today. I have met many good people and also many not so good ones. This has among other factors made me the person I am today so I am not rejecting the past but I am not going to get stuck in it."

What does this meditation, this particular insight, have to do with this earthly life with all its grief, agony, and worries? Do these aches and pains etc. produce energy in certain parts of the body and by what means is healing possible?

"When we suffer from aches and pains etc., the body is telling us to pay attention to something we are NOT paying attention to. Aches and pains is the body's way to get us to listen to it and pay attention to it. Bodily pains usually originate from something in the past. There is nothing we can do about the past or future now, but we can embrace and take care of our bodies here and now, at THIS moment, and feel better tomorrow simply by loving and nurturing our bodies. I think Yoga and meditation can be of big help here. As soon as we are in the moment, we do not worry

about the future, because in a way the only thing we have stable in our lives is the here and now – we have to start trusting ourselves to deal with the future when it comes, and just take one day, one moment at a time. You could even try it right in this moment, breath in and let go, feel the magic that is really happening now."

Do certain parts of the body symbolize something in particular? What does excruciating pain in the knee symbolize?

"Pains in the knee are emotions and wounds from the past, which need healing, something that needs solving. The knee is holding onto something the victim has given up on."

You are a healer. You practice healing without any diploma hanging on the wall indicating that you may do so. What exactly is healing?

"We have actually been healing each other for thousands of years. We know that being near to and touching another person is a good feeling. A person alone without human contact can simply die. We need support from each other; this has something to do with energy, but I cannot explain exactly how it is done or what happens. This process is some kind of magic, which occurs in the nearness of another person. I go over a person's aches and pains and touch them in a positive way and then this person remembers something of importance. Now this person is actually healing

herself/himself, whereas I am merely an instrument. That is why I do not need a diploma. The person in question comes to me and trusts me with her/his emotions along with her/his body. I am the channel for something, which is magic or energy."

What is energy?

"We are all made of energy, the body, the cells, everything. We are energy, everything is energy. This table is energy. Everything around us is energy, and of course there is the energy of healing and the energy of love."

You are really describing yourself as a kind of a bridge between some energy and an individual who needs this energy. People in general are not blessed with such a gift, are they?

"I really think they are. We are healers just by kissing and soothing our children, or by holding the hand of a friend in need, and by patting one another on the shoulder. We are channels our whole lives. We say something to a person, which turns into a new idea, a painting, just something new."

We are healers just by kissing and soothing our children, or by holding the hand of a friend in need, and by patting one another on the shoulder.

People who have come to you for help tell me that they feel better after their visit with you. Would you say that your work here on this earth is a calling?

"This is a feeling that I have, which I often call 'The God within me'. Ever since I was a little girl I have known in my heart that this was something that I could do. I wish that people would open their eyes a little wider and see how wonderful it is to have the opportunity to live, exist and see the magic everywhere around us. It is a passion of mine to help with these things."

Were you sensitive as a child?

"Yes, and was psychic the first four years of my life."

Can you remember that?

"Oh, yes very clearly. I saw people whom others did not see, and I also saw demons. I met Jesus in a dream. My mother was very spiritual, and I was brought up in that way. She always took part in this with me even though she wasn't able to see anything out of the ordinary. When I was four years old I had my last vision, but I have always been very conscious of how people are feeling when I meet them."

People come to you for healing whether it is for physical or spiritual healing. They gain piece of mind. What really happens? How do you help these people?

"I use several instruments, and I am open for all new things relating to my work. When I meet a client for the first time I try through conversation to find out how she/he feels, where she/he is ailing. I studied Sound Healing in the USA and I also use Flower Remedy therapy in my work."

"Music has always been a very important factor in my life. I have studied music since I was a little girl. When I was in Santa Fe, New Mexico, I started thinking about how music had affected me all my life and how it always changed the way I felt. I wanted to know more about this and when I fortunately heard of a Native American woman living on a reservation just outside of Santa Fe who was using music to heal people, I called her. I told her I was from Iceland, that I was very interested in her work; I asked her if I could come to see her and if she might be willing to teach me the art. I went to see her then and a few times after that, until last year when she died. And she taught me well. People are mostly made of water, approximately 70%, and, as we all know, sound affects water. In the same way sound also affects our state of mind and consciousness. She taught me how to use certain tones which are produced by certain instruments. These instruments produce tones, which are the same as the universe and Mother Earth produce. My mentor used a special instrument that she designed; a cosmic tuning fork to get us synchronized with the



People are mostly made of water, approximately 70%, and, as we all know, sound affects water. In the same way sound also affects our state of mind and consciousness.



tones of the earth and the moon. The healing method simply involves a brief interview with a patient and then I lightly hit a leather strap on my thigh with the tuning fork, thus producing certain tones, and then I apply it to the ailing part of the patient's body. These cosmic sounds go through the body bringing positive and healing energy to the patient."

And the Flower Remedy therapy?

"I started using Flower Remedies in my therapy after learning about their magic through the teachings of Stefanía Ólafsdóttir, the owner of Nýja Land, Seltjarnarnesi, close to Reykjavík. The founder of Flower Remedy therapy was an English surgeon named Dr. Edward Bach in the 1920s – 1930s. He knew that he could give his patients all kinds of remedies for their ailments, but he found out that those medicines were not

working on his patient's emotions and he knew that diseases are often related to emotions. He practiced meditation to a great extent and he realized that he felt much better when he meditated amongst the bed of roses or by the oak tree in the garden. He realized that it was the energy coming from the flowers and the tree leaves that were having such good effects on him so he started working on turning this energy into drops. He learned that

when his patients started taking the drops they soon felt better emotionally. We all know that when we get a bundle of flowers we become very happy," says Uni. "There is something magical about flowers."

[VISIT UNI'S WEB PAGE
WWW.UNI.IS](http://WWW.UNI.IS)

[LISTEN TO UNI'S MUSIC ON
WWW.UNIJON.COM](http://WWW.UNIJON.COM)

THE VINTAGE CARAVAN

Three young men from the capital city of Iceland form a band, which is now growing in popularity both in the country and abroad. First time I heard their music I could not believe they were only about seventeen years old. I was surprised by the classical rock sound dragged out from giants like Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin. My faith in humanity was immediately restored. Maybe, it is the newly dug up hidden treasure of the island of Ice and Fire?



I met Óskar Logi Ágústsson (guitar and vocals) and Guðjón Reynisson (drums) at a local bar and asked them about the group. *You started the band in 2006, the two of you?*

Óskar: Yes.

And what were you playing at that time?

Ó: Actually it is pretty funny. We were like 12-13 years old at the time and we were playing some blues covers but mostly it was original material.

Guðjón: Yeah, it was mainly original material.

Ok, and who is writing the music and who is writing lyrics?

Ó: Mainly, I was doing that at the beginning and then as the time passed my style of writing has changed a lot and we have all been participating in the creation of music.

What about your first, self titled album: when did you guys make it?

Ó: Basically, we were writing that album since 2007 until 2009 and we recorded it in this stinky little place that smelled like fish...

G: (laughing) Yes, most of it.

Ó: We recorded 6 songs over there and then after Músiktilraunir, Battle of The Bands (most accredited musical talent show in Iceland, red.) we got to record two songs in a studio.

G: It was at Tankurinn studio in Flateyri (look it up online, great story behind it! red.) up West. Yeah, and then another song after another songcontest in another studio.

Ó: (laughing) So it was basically a mix of all kinds of studios.

G: And it was very cheap of course.

Ó: Yeah, we didn't have any money.

And why did the album come out in 2011?

G: We recorded the album in 2009 and we had it for almost 2 years.

Ó: Yeah, and even just a few months after recording it we were way much better live than on that record.

G: It took us a while because the bass player, Kalli, quit the band and we needed to find a new one. And it was a long process about getting all sorts of deals and putting the album into stores.

Ó: And we only made like 1000 copies of it, so it is pretty rare. And we are actually glad about it. I would not like to be judged on that one. I don't want people to say "Yeah, this is Vintage Caravan".

So Voyage is the album you want to be recognized for?

Ó: Out of the two albums, definitely.

G: It was the first time we went to a studio and



just stayed there and recorded everything. And of course, Alex (Alexander Örn Númasson, red.) is playing the bass on it and this is the band in its current state.

What happened after you released the first album? Where did you guys play and what lead to releasing the second album?

G: We played all over Iceland.

I remember you at Rokkjöttnar 2012 (rock and metal music event, red.)

Ó: Yeah, it was a fun gig.

G: And then we met a guy called Gunnar Sauermann (a promoter, red.) at Eistnaflug 2012. He is working with a lot of magazines worldwide, like Metalhammer, and he worked for the Season of Mist, the label, and then he developed a big interest in us and started to talk about us with other people. And he talked to us about other possibilities.

And then it started to spin.

G: Yeah, then it started to spin.

Ó: Then we got an e-mail from Walter from Roadburn festival in the Netherlands and he got us in contact with the guys in Nuclear Blast (record label, red.)

So what are your plans right now? You are going on a tour. Where to?

Ó: We're going on a three-week tour.

G: Starting in England, Ireland...

Ó: And then France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria...

G: Yeah, and then we finish in the Netherlands.

Ó: And then we are moving to Denmark.

Ok. And what about Eistnaflug 2014. Are you

going to play there?

Ó: Yes, we are going to play at Eistnaflug, we can not miss out on that! It's the greatest festival in the world!

And Rokkjöttnar, if they are going to happen this year?

G: We will definitely try! Basically our manager started this festival with Snæbjörn from Skálmöld.

Can you tell me something about Voyage.

Where did you get the inspiration from?

Ó: I don't know. We are really big Rush fans. Some of the lyrics are inspired by Nature and just life. It is a very nice experience for us to be able to record with Flex Arnason, he's like the fourth member of the band.

G: He's the same guy that produces with Skálmöld.

Is he helping you out with creative process?

Ó: Yes, he helps us to make the songs shorter (laughs). We tend to write very long songs and he always tells us to make them shorter. At the beginning I was like, "No! Fuck you!" but at the end he is always right.

And what about the next album, do you have anything planned yet?

G: Yes. I've written almost enough of material to release a new album.

Ó: More than enough! It's like 14 or 15 songs.

G: And we were planning to go into the studio this January-February, but then we've made that deal with Nuclear Blast in October, so that has changed, because we released Voyage

and everything got delayed.

Who is going to work with you on it?

G: Hopefully Flexi.

Ó: Yeah, we are planning to get a tape machine this time. Our last album was recorded digitally. And now we want to get out of the city and record it on a tape and get this more organic sound.

What about the music? Is it going to be similar to the last album?

Ó: It will definitely change.

G: The Voyage was already made when Alex joined the band. And now he is taking a big part in the creative process and writing new songs and you can definitely hear that.

Ó: It's much more heavy. I'm not screaming a lot (laughs). It's definitely heavier and more complex. More to take in.

When will it be released?

Ó: Hopefully later this year we will enter the studio.

G: But it is still too early to say.

Ó: Yeah it all depends on how the Voyage will sell. We have been getting a great reviews all over the place. Classic Rock Magazine gave us great review and then an article in Kerrang. 4 out of 5, that's beyond surreal! Same album that got 2,5 stars in Mogginn (Morgunblaðið, newspaper, red.) or whatever gets 8-9 stars out of 10 in the most respected magazines outside of Iceland. So it is pretty funny.

I think you completely deserve it.

Ó&G: Oh, thank you so much.

Thanks for the talk.



PERLAN

– THE TEMPLE OF DREAMS

by Lilja Björk Haraldsdóttir Photos: Kristinn Magnússon and Birtíngur photo collection

Perlan, (the Pearl) situated on top of Öskjuhlíð Hill, is a landmark building in Reykjavík. The construction itself is built on top of and in the middle of six hot water tanks and is about 25.7 meters (84.3 ft.) high. The materials are mostly glass, aluminium and steel, giving it a kind of a futuristic look. The glass dome on top of the aluminium water tanks consists of 1,176 windows and the steel construction that holds it all together also serves another purpose. It is hollow inside with hot water flowing through it during wintertime and cold water in the summer making it a comfortable environment all year round.

INSIDE THE PEARL

Many events are held in the Winter Garden, the big hall on the main floor, such as concerts, art shows, markets and various

expos. Recently one of the hot water tanks was cleared out to make room for the Saga Museum. The museum shows 17 exhibits taken from the Icelandic sagas with life-like replicas and specially crafted weapons, clothing and everyday objects made to resemble the originals from the Viking time.

In the basement there's a great fountain where water rises up and shoots into the air. The height of the water can reach all the way up to the fourth floor. It is popular among Icelanders and especially the younger ones to throw money into the pool at the base of the fountain on their visits to the Pearl.

The restaurant situated on the fourth floor is one of the finest in dining in Reykjavík. Accompanied with the panoramic view, the "star heaven" and a gently rotating floor it will give you a dining experience you can hardly forget.

THE SURROUNDING AREA

The Pearl is situated in one of Reykjavík's best outdoor areas namely Öskjuhlíð Hill, where you can find numerous paths for running, bicycling or walking through a forest, a rarity in Iceland. Just outside the Pearl, you can find a man-made, life-size replica of a geyser where a 30 m deep well has been drilled out and a steel tube planted in it with 125°C hot water flowing through it. So, if you can't get to the real thing in the countryside you can get to the next best thing in the middle of the city.

ARCHITECTURE

The architect Ingimundur Sveinsson designed Perlan even though the idea of a grand building at this location came from the master artist Jóhannes Kjarval. Kjarval (1885 – 1972) dreamt of: "A temple where the sides would be covered in mirrors, so the northern lights



can approach the feet of men – the roof should be decorated with crystal of every color and floodlights should be in the eaves to illuminate the whole area. It should answer to the light of day and the symbols of the night.”

Kjarvals dream was made into reality about 60 years later and now The Pearl serves as a meeting point, cafeteria, restaurant, museum and a panoramic viewing deck for the people of Reykjavik and visitors from all over the world. The viewing deck with its astonishing view over Reykjavik and the surrounding area is equipped with six telescopes mounted on each of the corners where you also can find recorded descriptions in five languages about the amazing view from the deck.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CHECK OUT:
WWW.PERLAN.IS
WWW.SAGAMUSEUM.IS



A DESIGNER'S PARADISE

Pálmi Einarsson is an industrial designer and owner of Geislar (meaning rays), a recently opened shop at Bolholt 4 in Reykjavik. Looking into Geislar through a big picture window from the street, you see a selection of his creations decorating walls, shelves, windows and tables. And if you peek into the room behind Pálmi's desk you might catch the movement of one big piece of equipment cutting away through some material for a project Pálmi is presently working on.

by Paul Michael Herman Photos: Ernir Eyjólfsson



I have four products or services that I offer," said Pálmi. "One is model toys for kids that I design and manufacture in house. Another is gift products, such as wine boxes, lamps and candle holders that I also design and manufacture in house. Another is design consultancy and the last one is laser cutting. I invested in manufacturing equipment for my product lines since manufacturing options for them were not readily available in Iceland. My dream was to build a design business where I could, with minimal overhead, manufacture products in house for myself and for other designers. I have set up my studio in such a way that I can take a product from idea to finished item on the shelf in less than a day (usually couple of hours)."

TOYS THAT LAST

Over the holidays, toys took a prominent role in his production line. Pálmi explained, "If you go into one of the popular toy stores, bring home something for the kids, they'll play with it for a while, then lose interest because there's nothing special about it and it's not challenging their creativity." Pálmi only makes toys in the form of models. "Besides selling them, these toys give me quality time with my 5 and 7 year old boys. I watch them construct and paint them. Because they become products of their own imagination and handiwork, they become more attached to them and appreciate them more, with a feeling that they "created" their own toys." Pálmi's boys also play a key role in his R&D (research and development) department. Their task is to find out what needs to be done to extend the life of the toy by playing rough with them. "Whenever they bring me a damaged one I redesign the parts based on their "testing" so that next time it won't break so easily." This is an expression of Pálmi's quest to end the wanton waste of our limited natural resources and the additional cost of buying replacements. "I read somewhere that in the past 30 years we have used up 1/3 of the world's natural resources. If we go on like this in the next 30 years we'll have nothing left," Pálmi intoned ominously, "and I don't want to leave my children in a world like that." It was because of this sentiment that he decided to become an independent entrepreneur.

MAKING ME

"When I was 6 years old I started creating stuff. I liked working with wood but I also did a lot of knitting gloves, socks and sweaters. There's a huge knitting culture in Iceland,"

Pálmi remarked. "When I was 8, I was sent to a farm during the summer and taught to respect nature and animals. Fortunately I was raised by people with super good ethics." From 14 until he was 25 Pálmi did many different jobs; working in a slaughterhouse, a fish factory, a repair shop fixing cars. He painted furniture, did carpentry, learned farming, worked as a locksmith and waited tables in hotels and restaurants. At 20 after being unemployed for 2 weeks he applied for a job as an accountant mainly because he had never experienced being a white collar worker. "When the owner asked me if I'd had any prior experience in accounting, I told him, 'no, but I'd figure it out' and he hired me."

One common characteristic of Icelanders is that they have few obstacles. Perhaps this has to do with being a small population living on a remote island with only themselves to rely on but it could also be that they inherited some of the bold adventurism of their Viking ancestors. "Three weeks of training under the man whose position I was taking and I was on my own. After one of the most boring years of my life (mostly playing Tetris because there was not enough work to do) I quit and began my formal education as an industrial designer."

"But my informal education began much earlier with all the different positions I'd held and the different ways of doing things I'd learned. People think industrial designers just squeeze ideas out of their head. But it's not like that. Observing, listening, talking to people, understanding materials, learning the mechanics, finding out what's already been made and knowing the legal regulations is all a part of the job. Working in these different fields helped me a lot in knowing what to consider before coming up with a new design. Industrial designing is 90% research and 10% design," he surmised. "After it's properly researched and defined, the design just falls on the table by itself."

FROM SALT SHAKERS TO ...

One neat little product Pálmi designed was a salt and pepper shaker and a matching toothpick holder. These were made from egg shaped stones found along certain coastlines in Iceland, set on a wooden base.



"Whenever they bring me a damaged one I redesign the parts based on their "testing" so that next time it won't break so easily."



MAKING IT IN ICELAND

I was reminded through Pálmi's discourse on the subject that items such as salt a pepper shakers were often ignored. Not so with these! Catch Pálmi at a quiet moment and have him explain the subliminal meaning behind the materials used and the peculiar shape. Then let him tell you about the amazing way the shakers were formed.

For 18 years Pálmi worked in both Iceland and California, for Össur, an Icelandic based company that designs, manufactures and sells braces and prosthetics; five years as their vice president in R&D. "Össur's slogan is, 'life without limitations' and making a huge difference in people's lives is what inspired me to work with them," said Pálmi. Today people can wear a knee brace he and his team designed that alleviates the terrible pain that would have often led them to painful, total knee replacement.

When I asked Pálmi about his teachers he said, "I've had super skilled teachers and now when I need help there's a big network of people I can call on. The most important thing in my work is cooperation. I am pretty good in some areas but other people I know are amazing in theirs. It's really important to know your limits and who to ask for help. That's what experience gives you. The other important thing is to be honest with yourself and others so you can get help when you need it.

MAPPING THE FUTURE

Then Pálmi told me about his vision for the future. "My vision is that Iceland will be a hot spot for design. We have a very good group of designers, educated both abroad and domestically. We just have to start realizing how much value they add to our society and to cater to them better. For a long time in Iceland the designer/artist value has been completely un-mapped. But in 2010, there was a report that broke down the national income from the arts, crafts and design fields in Iceland. According to the report, the annual revenue in the creative sector is even higher to what we get from our fisheries and that it has grown exponentially over the last ten years. Of course, increased tourism will stimulate this growth, but bear in mind these numbers also represent, theater, movies, etc. I think we in Iceland will become well known for our designs and I think there is a great opportunity for designers to design and manufacture small series of products.

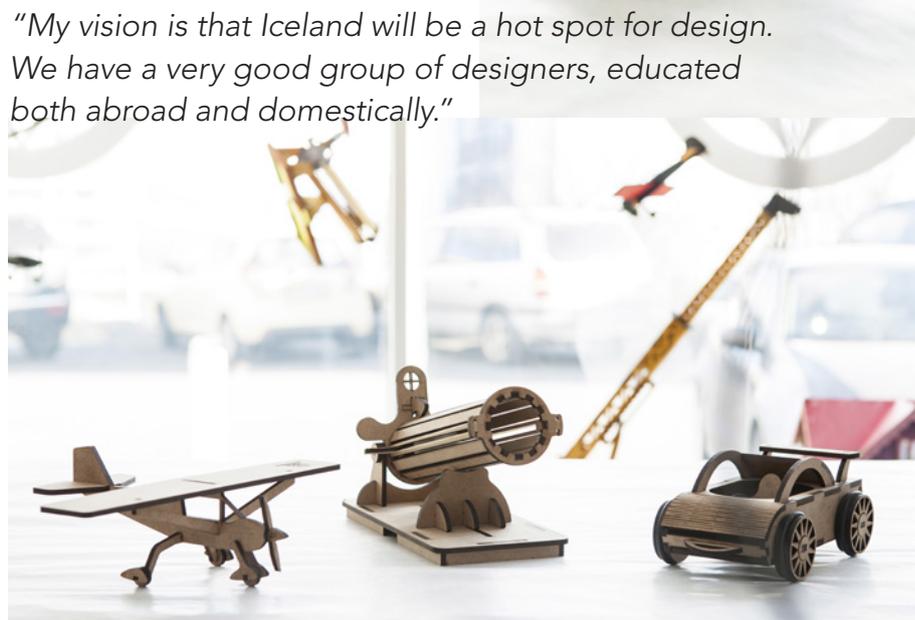
"At Geislar I am focusing on designing and manufacturing small series, say, 25pcs of lamps that are numbered. If you buy a lamp, your name is registered in the master record at our studio showing that you are the owner of this piece. To keep the prices down I design my products to fit my in house manufacturing capabilities and methods so I don't have to invest in expensive tooling etc."

Palmi went on to say, "One of the big things that have been holding Icelandic designers back is raw materials. We manufacture a lot of aluminum in Iceland, but it's not ready for product production. The aluminum is shipped from here in big chunks and then turned into profiles, plates and other shapes abroad. This means that for us designers a small piece of aluminum is probably close to three times more expensive than in Europe. Since we do not have a natural selection of raw material in Iceland, I think we should look for other alternatives. One option is HEMP. Hemp is a fantastic material, and in my personal opinion the best material Mother Nature made for us. A lot of people don't realize that hemp is a great fiber for clothing, paper, buildings, etc. There are a huge number of possibilities: It's easy to form, totally recyclable, strong and cheap. I think it would be a great idea to start growing our own. My goal is to one day manufacture all our toys from locally grown hemp."

A DESIGNER'S PARADISE

Pálmi has a lot of great ideas and I thought it would be interesting to find out how being an Icelander and living in Iceland inspires him and impacts on his work. He said, "We have amazing inspiration all around us, nature is one, culture another. For example we have a great history. Our ancestors were Vikings, with all their culture and stories. We have stories of elves, trolls and spirits in our history books. It's pretty easy for me to find inspiration just by walking through our national museum. Inspiration is all around us. Iceland is a small country. You can go from one end to the other in few hours by car and see lots of great things."

"My vision is that Iceland will be a hot spot for design. We have a very good group of designers, educated both abroad and domestically."





The Danish Pub WHEN IN ICELAND, GO DANISH!

You know that Iceland used to be a Danish colony, right? Even though independence from the Danish Crown was necessary, Icelanders still celebrate every thing Danish, so don't expect to meet a big Danish crowd at The Danish Pub, they are all Icelanders just acting like they're Danish. Really!

This bar has made a name for itself in the Reykjavik social scene and is known locally as Den Danske Kro (we all just want a reason to speak Danish in public). This popular downtown venue serves a remarkable selection of beers including the famous Danish white beers, the darker more malt brews and of course the traditional and almost obligatory Tuborg and Carlsberg. If you come during the Christmas season you can taste some of the renowned Christmas brews, very popular in demand. Just ask for Julebryg ("you-le-bree").

DO AS THE DANES DO

The owners of the Danish Pub strive to create the true Danish atmosphere known among the Danes (and Danish-prone Icelanders) as "hyggelig". If you truly are Danish this can be your "home away from home". And in this spirit, check out the "house" within the pub – an off-the-wall design in its most literal sense!

Get carefree or "ligeglåd" (leeglaath), shoot some darts, try the customary Gammel Dansk bitters or catch some live football. Watch the world go by on the outside terrace and have a taste of the traditional smørrebrød (fantastic open sandwiches). You can pre-order these delicious snacks for larger groups.

DOES THIS SOUND TOO TRANQUIL?

The Danish Pub is nothing if not a place to party. The atmosphere is easy going and you can choose from a variety of shots and even cocktails if you're not in the beer mood (Does that ever happen?). Reminder: If you thought you were in for a quiet night guess again, The Danish Pub features live music every night with special appearances and unadvertised happenings on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Put your musical knowledge to the test at the Wednesday night pop-quiz; the prizes will surprise you.

BEST LOCAL PUB IN REYKJAVÍK

Wherever you're from you'll want to have a great time while visiting Reykjavik. The people of Reykjavik do anyway, so they flock to The Danish Pub for a beer "en øl" during the Happy Hour every day from 16-19. The place is crowded and you're guaranteed to meet some fun, "lee glaath" people.

DEN DANSKE KRO

Ingólfsstræti 3, 101 Reykjavík

Tel: +354 552 0070

Opening hours: 14:00 – 01:00 Sun-Thurs

14:00 – 05:00 Fri-Sat

dendanske.is





CHAR FISHING IN GREENLAND

Greenland is the wildest place on earth for char fishing.

The land is large, empty, rough and pure with thousands of rivers and lakes full of arctic char. Because of the enormous territory and relatively few inhabitants, many of these fishing areas are hardly fished at all and some rivers have not even seen an angler – ever. This is the reason Greenland is a paradise for fly fishermen.

The arctic char you find in Greenland has a super sleek body, beautiful white edged fins and fabulous colors ranging from serene silver to dazzling orange. With an unprecedented fighting spirit, the char is the strongest trout species there is, as wild as the wind. They fight like crazy, punch their weight for every pound of their strong bodies and never give up. If the fishing is not enough, then certainly the nature in which you catch them is. The stunning scenery of Greenland, is so big, so eternal, so awesome and so empty.

Fishing is on a voluntary catch and release basis and mostly light tackle fishing. The size of the fish is around 1-7+ lbs of which you can catch by the dozen a day. The local guides are excellent and know the area extremely well. The river mouths are often very productive when the char runs up the rivers. The lakes that are connected to the ocean by clear rivers provide the best fishing, but the fjords are also extremely productive in the early part of the season. Char start to gather in the fjords near the river mouths in early July and begin to move into the rivers by mid-month.





In the summer of 2012 Angling Club Lax-a erected the first ever permanent proper hunting- and fishing camp on the southwest coast of Greenland, a total of twelve sleeping cabins (twin beds) built around a dining lodge with plenty of room for bigger groups. The dining lodge is equipped with a kitchen, a gas BBQ and a charcoal BBQ. Meals are prepared by the camp chef – most of the menu originates in the area (caribou meat, arctic char and fresh fish from the sea).

Greenland is hard and unforgiving, the wildest place on earth; a country for the true adventurer. Angling Club Lax-a is a 25 year old company that specializes in fishing and hunting tours all around the world, its main operation and offices are in Iceland. The Lax-a team tailors each tour specially for the client, arranging everything such as transfers, comfortable accommodation and other outdoor activities.



The Angling Club Lax-a is Iceland's largest sporting outfitter and offers fishing in about 40 salmon, trout and char rivers in Iceland. Whether you are in the search for "the big one", fishing fun with family and friends or famous Icelandic nature, Lax-a will send you on the trip of a lifetime. Anglers choose their preference whether they are looking for a full service fishing, staying in a comfortable lodge where they are taken care of by staff or if they are looking for a stay in a self catering lodge. Lax-a will customize each trip as preferred by the angler.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON FISHING FOR ARCTIC CHAR IN GREENLAND CONTACT LAX-A@LAX-A.NET AND VISIT THEIR HOMEPAGE: WWW.LAX-A.NET





A TOWN'S RENOVATION

While leafing through an in-flight magazine during a domestic flight earlier this year, yours truly came across an illustrated article about the reconstruction of Siglufjörður.

by Einar Káráson Photos: Kristinn Magnússon

The small fishing town on the north coast of Iceland was apparently undergoing a serious makeover; historic old houses that had been left empty and in a total state of rusty disrepair were now being restored and painted in bright colors. And the driving force behind the town's facelift was no other than the entrepreneur Róbert Guðfinnsson, former managing director of Þormóður Rammi and chairman of the board at SH/Icelandic Group. Seeing Robert's name in the printed media again was exciting. His rise to the top – a young common man from the north becoming an influential figure of Icelandic capitalism – had gotten a lot of attention 'back in the day'. Then Robert disappeared for a while, but now he has resurfaced – coming up for air in his hometown of Siglufjörður.

I found the town's renovations very interesting and was instantly reminded of a trip I took a few years ago to Martha's Vineyard, the widely acclaimed summer colony on the East Coast of the United States.

A popular summer colony for the rich and famous, the island is mostly known for hosting film stars, tycoons and the Kennedys. Crossing over on the ferry, you expect the island to be adorned with the usual mansions born of American enthusiasm, a shrine to bad taste completed with pink palaces, diamond Jacuzzis and Neverlands.

But what actually greets you is quite the opposite. The island is made up of a few villages, built around fishing ports, with modestly sized wooden houses. The scenery reminds you of a traditional Icelandic coastal

town – except that the Icelandic towns are facing depopulation, closures, dilapidation and rapidly dropping property prices while their western counterparts are so in vogue that only the very affluent can afford to partake. Shouldn't there be a happy medium between the two?

FRESH AND COLORFUL

I wanted to investigate and so, with my better half, I drove up north to take a look at the renovations and interview Róbert Guðfinnsson. It's been well over thirty years since I first came to Siglufjörður. Back then, the old decaying and rotting herring stations and wooden piers were still standing – making it the perfect refuge for me, a young city boy with a thirst for melancholic poetry about the end of the world. I went back a few times after that and while my spirits may have livened, Siglufjörður seemed stuck in a dreary rut; and rightfully so if you consider its shrinking population. In its heyday, Siglufjörður bustled with 4000 inhabitants but since the sudden disappearance of the herring back in 1969 it's dropped down to about 1400 people.

This time around, driving into town was a completely different experience. Colorful, freshly painted houses saluted us from the hills as soon as we turned the corner, clearly heralding that some seriously cheerful changes had been made. And as I later found out, they had indeed been made with the help Robert got from his relative, Jon Steinar Ragnarsson, a theater set designer called to "color analyze" the town.

POETRY, FOLK MUSIC AND HERRING

My appointment with Robert wasn't until the following day so I had time to take a good look around town. New cultural institutions have sprung up all over the place: The Icelandic Poetry Center is now situated in one little pretty house, filled with poetry collections and an interesting schedule that include readings and events dedicated to this lovely art form that Icelanders have been engaged in for the longest time. A noteworthy Folk Music Center has also been established with such a bountiful reservoir that you could spend the whole day listening and browsing through it. And then there is The Herring Era Museum, an almost supernatural phenomenon. It's one of the most interesting museums of this sort I have ever visited. In one of its houses, the whole harbor – and everything that comes along with it – has been set up in its entirety: the tools, the working facilities, even the office with its papers and red tape – it's all there! In one hut, a seasonal worker's living quarters have been reproduced, their clothing and baggage and lifestyles have been so well represented that you almost feel like the herring girls have simply gone out for a little while, most likely down to the harbor to attend to the barrels.

COMING BACK

Down by the marina a row of nice restaurants have opened up; "Hafnarkráin", "Hannes boy" and "Rauðka" – it's by that last one that a zestful man comes up to me, cheerful and talkative, the sort of man that apparently has a lot more to say than time to say it in. Standing before me was the one and only Róbert Guðfinnsson. We exchange a few words and I learn that Robert sold all of his Icelandic assets and moved to Arizona in the middle of the Icelandic boom in 2005. He mentioned his childhood and what it was like to live in Siglufjörður after the herring disappeared and how he left the community during a period of decline and confusion. A 10 year-old boy at the time, Robert remembers a once wealthy and vibrant town suddenly plunging into despair, anger and numbness – with many abandoning it. Those who stayed cursed those who left, blaming the fallen "herring lords"



Hannes boy and Rauðka are eating establishments in beautifully renewed old houses in Siglufjörður situated down by the marina and overlooking the fjord. A visit is recommended to enjoy the breathtaking landscape while savoring the region's tasty cuisine. Both Hannes boy and Rauðka are uniquely designed and attention has been paid to every detail, creating a wonderful countryside atmosphere. In Hannes boy the chairs are made from old barrels and in the middle of the restaurant stands an old cobblestone fire-place for customers to cozy up by on cold winter nights. The restaurant Hannes boy, which is only open in the evenings, strives to offer high quality ingredients and great service for a memorable dining experience. The coffeehouse Rauðka serves traditional refreshments such as crêpes, salads, open and regular sandwiches and on the menu you'll also find the "meal and soup of the day". Their cakes and cookies, often homemade, are a delight – and in light of the town's history, ordering the herring is of course highly appropriate.

for everything. "Coming back to Iceland now, after the recession in the fall of 2008, feels like I'm 10 years-old again in Siglufjörður; the atmosphere in Iceland is the same as it was here after the crash of the herring adventure," says Robert. We take our leave and agree to a rendezvous at the same place the following morning.

A NEW HOTEL ON THE HORIZON

As I arrive the next morning, Robert pulls up on his Japanese SUV and invites me on a drive around town to show me what's really going on in the fjord. First, we drive through a small valley then take the mountain pass in Siglufjarðarskarð, arriving at the ski area. The valley is in a poor state due to gravel mines but a golf course can be discerned in the midst of it. Rauðka ehf, Robert's company, is involved in running the ski area (the only privately operated ski area in the country) and also is currently working on turning the golf course into a first class course. Having these facilities is important, especially considering Robert's plans to open a new hotel on the marina, in the center of town. The hotel will stand on the harbor, its architecture matching the surroundings. "I realized a long time ago, that a community like this cannot survive on the fishing industry alone," says Robert as we stand on the soon-to-be hotel premises and he shows me smart phone pictures of what the accommodations will look like. People will be able to sail right up to the hotel and dock by their hotel room door. But – as I later find out – this is only a small part of the great plans that Robert has for his town.

"... in 2010 we had the largest fishing season in the history of single companies in Mexico, 3100 tons of bluefin tuna in pens – which is the equivalent of 30 thousand tons of cod."

"I HAVE NEVER WANTED TO OWE MONEY"

We sit down in the attic of the restaurant Rauðka, sipping on our cups of coffee and I'm curious to know more about him. I ask him whether he's born and bred in Siglufjörður

and he tells me that while his true roots are here, he's actually born in the south of Iceland. When looking further into it, his family tree is quite a tangled one. Robert was adopted by his father Guðfinnur, of whom he talks very fondly, but his biological father is an American who stayed in Iceland for a while and left before Robert was born in 1957. His mother then met Guðfinnur. Until the age of two, Robert was raised by his aunt Erla and her husband Steingrímur, whom he called "dad". They were all common people but Robert got everything he wanted. "I learned to play the game at an early age." It wasn't until later, when he was forty, that Robert met his American father.

So Robert grew up in Siglufjörður, surrounded by piers, boats and open spaces and something tells me that he might have been quite unruly as a child – an energetic kid if you will. "I still get teased and tormented about that," he says, "but an old classmate of mine once said about me: 'Ever since you were a kid, you've never cared about what people think of you!' Being a fisherman or working in the fishing industry was a traditional pathway for many of his peers but a crazy idea had consumed Robert: photography. He prepared for the craft at The Technical College of Siglufjörður and then got admitted into a photography academy in Gothenburg. He was supposed to start his studies in the beginning of '78, at 21 years of age, but in the coming fall he signed up for the School of Navigation in the Westman Islands. I asked him why he didn't go to Gothenburg and his reply was: "I couldn't wait 6 months!"

He finished The Navigation School in 2 years and went back home to work as a helmsman. "I didn't like it. I preferred being a deckhand because a helmsman just steers, he doesn't control anything – that's the captain. So, in '81, when I was 24 years old, I turned





"... an old classmate of mine once said about me: 'Ever since you were a kid, you've never cared about what people think of you!'"

my back on the sea and studied Business Administration at the Technical College of Reykjavik. My dad, Guðfinnur, was absolutely speechless and shocked that I was giving up the helmsman position where the pay was actually good. But along with my studies I had worked at sea every Christmas, Easter and summer – as a diver for example, diving down to boats' propellers – and I earned a laborer's annual income during these periods. I have never been short of money and I've never wanted to owe money to anyone. The collapse of the economy can be blamed on upbringing and on the educational system; a banker that offers you a loan is just like a car salesman, in the end you alone decide whether you buy the car – or take the loan."

"... THEY STOPPED SPEAKING TO MY MOTHER!"

After his studies he pondered on where to go next and the conclusion was: back home to Siglufjörður. From there, his career started rolling. Robert started working as a production manager in a small fish factory and then became production manager at Þormóður Rammi where he was later made managing director at the age of 28. It was the largest company in town, the government owned 70% of it and the rest was owned by the town. "A lot of things needed to change in the company's operations, cut downs were necessary and difficult decisions had to be made. The height of the drama was when a few women in town stopped talking to my mother!"

Without him saying so out loud, I sense that this was a difficult and weary time for Robert, at least it ended with him withdrawing from the Icelandic economy for a while and selling his share in Þormóður Rammi for 115 million Icelandic krona – which in the booming business world of 2005 was not an interesting sum. He moved to Arizona in the US – but his

business days were not over.

"I pulled out of the Icelandic business scene in 2005 because everybody seemed to be making a profit then. That's a condition that doesn't make sense. We had bought a share in a small company out there; a shrimp and sardine company. Like typical Icelanders, we thought we could do it all but circumstances over there were different. Grandi and Þormóður Rammi sold their shares and Vilhelm Már Guðmundsson another young man from Siglufjörður and I took over. I have colleagues and friends in Mexico that I think very highly of and I've learned a lot from the Mexicans. We expanded the business and started, amongst other things, a tuna farm in Mexico and a salmon farm in Chile. In the fall of 2008, all of our pens were full but we had to wait until December because that is the best slaughter season for tuna. However, in September the global economic crisis occurred and everything came crashing to a halt; Japanese banks stopped funding the buyers and prices collapsed. Nearly everybody went bankrupt. Fortunately, we managed to get private funding through our network and kept the fish alive. In the following year, a very limited amount of fishing was done so the prices went up again. So we rented our main competitor's infrastructure, helicopters and large boats, and in 2010 we had the largest fishing season in the history of single companies in Mexico: 3100 tons of bluefin tuna in pens which is the equivalent of 30 thousand tons of cod. It went straight to sushi restaurants in Japan. It was a gamble. We took the chance based on our experience and knowledge of the international fishing industry and we were very lucky."

PRODUCING A NEW DRUG

It's with the money from this adventure that Robert was able to venture into the reconstruction of Siglufjörður. A little bird

had told me however that the renovations: the hotel, the golf course, the restaurants by the marina and so on, were not really the main attractions and not likely to make a profit any time soon. I had heard that there was something else, something bigger in the pipeline and all the rest was just décor around it.

"A news report in '97 was made on TV about us Northerners throwing shrimp shells in the ocean and polluting the area. An old acquaintance of mine then contacted me and informed me that a chemical called chitin can be obtained from the shrimp shells. We funded a company called Primex around the idea and I started researching the subject which then resulted in us building a factory in Siglufjörður. When I quit Þormóður Rammi and left Iceland in 2005, I became interested in developing this idea further and along with the Icelandic Venture Capital we bought Primex's research and development department which has since then been managed by three doctors in Reykjavik. 600 million kronas have gone into research and we have 500 more in liquid assets to start the drug's production process. We have almost completed the research for it and a factory working under the trademark 'Genis' will be manufacturing the drug here in Siglufjörður, by the marina. It's a 'pilot factory' that will be up and running soon and if everything goes according to plan a mass production will shortly follow."

But what does Robert mean when he refers to the reconstructions as a décor? "It's all about the image, we are making a drug that's connected to the ocean – and it's produced here, by the marina – with the small boats outside."

THE OWNER'S GESTURE ...

Now that Siglufjörður is dressed to the nines, with its houses and streets looking lovelier than ever, people will have to take good care of it. At the annual "Herring Adventure Festival" held in the beginning of August, both townsfolk and visitors fill the streets in a festive mood. Sadly, however, people throw garbage and empty cans on the grounds without reservation. An ugly blemish on the newly refashioned town, in Robert's opinion, and he decided to do something about it. He teamed up with his friend and together they walked through the crowded streets – plastic bags in hand – picking up cans and bottles; not only cleaning the streets up but also sending an obvious message to the people: "think twice before littering!" The next day Robert found out that his gesture had gotten a great deal of attention. Amongst others, two ladies whispered to each other: "Isn't that the owner himself, picking up empty cans?" To which the other responded: "Well yes, that's how you get rich."



HANNES BOY AND CAFÉ RAUÐKA

Enjoy great atmosphere at Hannes Boy a unique restaurant located at Siglufjörður.

Hannes Boy restaurant's is located at the marina. Our guest can sit and enjoy watching when the fishermen bring in the catch of the day, who knows maybe it will end on a gourmet Hannes Boy's dishes. At Hannes Boy you can enjoy a good meal in exclusive environment outstanding service and cuisine.

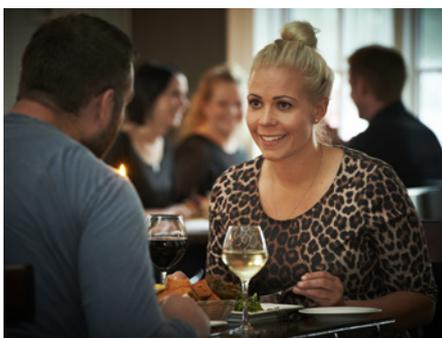
The name, Hannes Boy, comes from an old sailor that used to spend his time outside of the newly renovated houses. He was popular with the locals and the kids which is where he got his name "BOY" from.

Our guests can either enjoy a gourmet meal at Hannes Boy or have light dinners at Café Rauðka also located at the marina.

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DIPPING INTO THE GEOTHERMAL LOVELINESS

by Dísá Bjarnadóttir

One of the very best and most unique things about Iceland is the geothermal energy. While in many other countries people have to pay high prices to heat their homes we Icelanders, we crank up the heat all through the winter, without thinking about the cost. Our hot water is almost free!

We also indulge in super long, hot showers (which in some countries is a luxury), and even go as far as heating our sidewalks to melt away the snow. But one of the very, very best things about our abundance of hot water is our outside swimming pools. They're open all year round, no matter what the weather conditions are, and they're always clean, cozy and welcoming. Almost every town throughout Iceland has its own swimming pool, no matter how many or few people live there. Being able to swim in a public pool is almost considered a basic human right here. Seeing as they are so many, they of course vary in quality, but what you're guaranteed to find at each pool is at least one lap pool, one shallow pool for the kids, one or two hot tubs and usually one sauna or steam room (some have both).

People visit swimming pools for various reasons.

For many it's their main form of exercise. The pools open very early, around 6 am so many like to swim a few laps before starting their day. Many swimming pools have regulars that come at the same time every day, and they get to know the other regulars, so slowly little social groups start to form, usually one that gathers in the hot tub for some gossip or talk of news and politics, as it's called when it's men talking.

When the sun shines, people flock to the swimming pools for that golden opportunity to get an Icelandic sunbathe. Some take

it very seriously and even pack a lunch before they get to a bench, put their towel on it and stay there all day. Many of us love to brag about getting a local sunbathe. The swimming pools are also a fantastic place for kids to splash around; many of them have water slides of various shapes and sizes which can be hours' worth of fun. And as some of us have discovered, that for some reason there is no better cure for a hangover than a visit to the pool.

The biggest swimming pool in the country is in Laugardalur valley which literally means "pool valley". Back in the day before the roads were cemented and all the houses

is 84 meters long and now has LED lights. It's so much fun, that kids can't get enough of it and when the grownups try, they're often tempted to make more than one trip. In the summer time there is a wipe-out style obstacle course in the shallow pool: Some floating pool toys are lined up, with the idea of running across as many as you can, while holding onto a rope that stretches from one end to the other - great entertainment, both for the kids and the adults to watch and cheer them on.

Laugardalur is in one of the few valleys in Reykjavík. Because it's a valley it has excellent shelter from the wind and therefore



were built, the geothermal hot water would puddle up in this valley and women washed their laundry there. Actually, the name Reykjavík (Smokey Bay) comes indirectly from those puddles of hot water. When the first settlers arrived in Iceland they saw the steam coming from those little hot springs and that's where the name comes from.

Laugardalslaug swimming pool was built in 1968 and was recently renovated. It has a 50 meter long swim track, five hot tubs, including one with ocean water, a water slide that

that's where our biggest outdoor sport arena is. Laugardalur is also home to the botanical gardens of Reykjavík, and the open air farm animal park, Iceland's "mini-zoo" featuring only animals that live naturally in Iceland.

For many Icelanders, especially those who only go to the pool on weekends, the trip isn't complete without a hot dog after a good soak. Near most public swimming pools is a little hot dog stand. To do it like a true native: go ahead and treat yourself to a hot dog at the end of the visit. It's well worth it.





Good to know

- ✳ Most swimming pools rent swim suits and towels.
- ✳ If you want to save money it's better to bring your own, both suit and towel.
- ✳ The website www.swimminginiceland.com offers information about all of the pools and their opening hours.
- ✳ Icelanders shower in the nude before and after entering the swimming pool.
- ✳ To find out how to get to the pool (or anywhere in the city) using the Icelandic bus system, visit www.straeto.is

Two Icelandic themed villages



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LUNGA SEYÐISFJÖRÐUR JULY 13 - 20

LungA is not only a music festival. It is a concept. Concept for art and creativity, promotion and celebration. LungA is a state of mind. This festival started in the year 2000. With interesting workshops and lectures during the week and concerts on the weekend. Shortly after that it gained a reputation of something not to be missed, and later gained a prestige. Prestige so great that in 2010 LungA was an inspiration for establishing a school in Seyðisfjörður, under the same name and general idea. The first team start this year, so you can only imagine what kind of festival it will be! It will be epic! Especially when you'll see the line-up.

CHECK OUT: WWW.LUNGA.IS

SECRET SOLSTICE REYKJAVÍK JUNE 20 - 22

That's a brand new one. It will be held for the first time this year and from what I know and read about and sniffed around, it will be amazing! It will be held at a walking distance from downtown, which is great. Sun doesn't set anyway. Or at least it feels like it. And of course the line-up! I will just mention Massive Attack and you can imagine how massive it will be. There we are: Secret Solstice is not so secret anymore. And I'm pretty sure it will be heard of for a while, not only in Iceland. Just check out their amazing web page!

WWW.SECRETSOLSTICE.IS

For the past few years Iceland has been developing more and more amazing music festivals. It is quite a surreal thing, if you think about it. A country with a population of a little over 300.000 people? It's like a small town in Europe. I could totally get away with claiming that Iceland has the biggest active music scene in the world, per capita of course. Anyway I'm just going to tell you what you should definitely see, if you will be spending time on our beautiful rock in the middle of the Atlantic during the summer.



EISTNAFLUG NESKAUPSTAÐUR JULY 10 - 13

The greatest metal/hard rock festival the Earth has ever spawned. And I'm not joking. It takes place in a tiny town with a population of about 1500 people on the East coast of Iceland. Besides the magnificent location, the people attending this event are the best people you will ever meet. You might think I'm talking crazy here, it's a METAL festival after all, but you just have to trust me on that one: it's the friendliest music festival I've ever attended (and I've been to quite a few). The motto of this event is in Icelandic "Ekkert vesni!" which you might translate as "No bullshit!" Or maybe into something even more polite. Which is a callout for people to remind one another that festivals are for everyone and as long as it's about fun and having a good time together, it all makes sense. And it's all about love, peace and heavy metal! This year Eistnaflug (which you can translate into "Flight Of The Balls", don't ask me, ask locals about the reason) celebrates its 10th anniversary and I can promise, this will be a party from hell! Plus, if you haven't been "skinny dipping" in Iceland at Eistnaflug, you haven't lived. Period.

**JUST CHECK THE LINE-UP AND WATCH THE VIDEO HERE:
WWW.EISTNAFLUG.IS**

ATP ICELAND KEFLAVÍK JULY 10 - 12

All Tomorrow's Parties is a fifteen year old British organization specialized in promoting artists and festivals throughout the world. It's not only a music event but, like LungA, it's a concept which enriches the interest and appreciation for art and culture. The event is held in many other countries, including UK, USA, Japan and Australia. Last year's Nick Cave performance on the first ATP held in Iceland will go down in history as the performance where the artist fell off the stage, made people terrified of what they just witnessed but went straight back on, making the performance more dramatic and altogether unforgettable. This year Portishead decided to come over and visit and make us all happier. Let's hope no one will fall off the stage this time!

**MORE INFO:
WWW.ATPFESTIVAL.COM/ATPICELAND**

ÞJÓÐHÁTÍÐ VESTMANNEYAR AUGUST 1 - 3

A taste of Iceland. Literally. If you are looking for something Icelandic to see, to do and to listen to, this is the place for you to be. Just take a backpack full of warm clothes (Icelandic wool is priceless, believe me), a tent and a good mood. Someone to get warm with in the tent is quite a wise option but not a necessity. It is the biggest outdoor event in Iceland. A few thousand people come annually to the Westman Islands on the weekend before the first Monday of August, which is an Icelandic bank holiday, named after shopkeepers. It is a holiday and no labor day. There are a lot of bands and artists performing on a huge stage built up outdoors, there's lots and lots of beer, a large amount of people with families wearing lopapeysur (lopapeysa, traditional Icelandic sweater), and the whole "sing along" atmosphere makes you feel like you are part of the society. I have to mention that Vestmanneyjar are stunning. If you'll ever go there, check out the lava fields formed in 1973 by erupting volcano, Eldfell, which caused a lot of damage and forced the entire population of the islands to be evacuated. I also have to mention that Keiko, the orca that starred in Free Willy, was released to its freedom in that area. So yay! for the whales, beer, volcanoes and lopapeysur!



THE GLOOMY SHORES OF ICELAND



By Hjördís Erna Þorgeirsdóttir and Leifur Þór Þorvaldsson Photos: Birtíngur Photo Collection

Nobody comes to Iceland to sunbathe. The lack of lusciously hot sun-bleached beaches guarantees that. Therefore it might seem somewhat irrelevant to cover the subject of beaches in an Icelandic context. While the concept of beaches is traditionally linked to elements such as brightness, warmth and relaxation, the Icelandic marine environment definitely has a more overall sinister feel to it. In the eyes of most natives the black beaches prevalent in the Icelandic landscape are fairly bleak.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RELEVANCE

The ocean surrounding this remote island and the inhabitants share an intimate relationship. Throughout the centuries, the ocean has served as a lifeline, providing Icelandic people with both food for survival and as the most valuable resource in the country's economy. But nature can be merciless, notwithstanding the cold and vast North-Atlantic Ocean. As the ocean gives gracefully in abundance it also seeks recompense with a vengeance in this dynamic

dichotomy. This resulted in routine casualties explaining the short life expectancy among Icelandic sailors in the past. Such repeated tragedies left its devastating mark on many if not most Icelandic families as well as influencing the collective culture.

In Icelandic popular culture there are countless songs that tell the tales of widows mourning their loved ones, lost at sea. In the song "Án þín" (the song's melody is from The Supremes' "My world is empty without you") performed by Trúbrot back in the early 70's, the aching widow stares at the sea whispering the name of her deceased lover. Then there are timeless paintings from painters like Gunnlaugur Scheving whose subjects included images of stranded vessels, an ominous reflection of life on the ocean. Stories of heroism and tragedies at sea are a common theme as exemplified in Baltastar Kormákur's (Iceland's most successful film director) recent film, "Djúpið" or "The Deep".

The conflicting emotions that the ocean has created in the

nation's psyche are like waves, ranging from respectful gratitude to distress and anger. What's most striking is the fact that people are both dependent on and extremely vulnerable against the forceful elements of nature, symbolized by the black beaches echoing the tragic tones of Iceland's history.

FROM DRAMATIC DESOLATION TO EXTREME SURFING

Unlike most of the Icelandic coastline, which is characterized by impressive fjords, the southern part of the island presents black beaches that stretch for hundreds of kilometers from the east to the west. The beaches are divided by deltas of powerful glacial rivers. The rivers deposit an astronomical amount of volcanic sediment from the glaciers that the ocean distributes along the coastline, forming these vast black beaches.

Skeiðarársandur that lies under Mýrdalsjökull is the biggest sand-plane in Iceland, covering over 1000 square km. The main road passes through the plane, and is regularly washed away





by the eruption of Grímsvötn, sending masses of melt-water rushing over the area. The area is mostly deprived of vegetation but is nonetheless an important breeding ground for many birds. The area is a mere 3-hour drive from the capital and is a popular destination for guided adventure tours.

In Reykjaneskagi where the international airport is located, the sea is thrashing against a fairly recent volcanic area resulting in a very dramatic mixture of cliffs and beaches. Sandvík is the biggest beach in Reykjanes and has now become a popular surfing beach for those with a fair amount of courage and of course protection by thick wetsuits. There are also numerous geothermal grounds in the area, with beautiful hot springs and impressive power stations close to the ocean. A short drive around the peninsula is guaranteed to provide its

“In the eyes of most natives the black beaches prevalent in the Icelandic landscape are fairly bleak”

spectators with a rich visual array.

IVORY CONTRASTS

In Snæfellsnes and the south part of the Westfjords there is a big shift in the scenery as the black beaches give way to a creamy white coastline. Geographically this is the oldest part of Iceland and for millions of years the ocean has been grinding down seashells to form these beautiful beaches. They differ in color between locations, and can go from light brown to dark red, depending on the prevalent seashell species in each particular area.

In the area around Látrabjarg

in the Westfjords there are two beautiful beaches called Kollsvík and Breiðuvík. Remove the surrounding landscape, dominated by dark cliffs and vicious waves, and both beaches could even be mistaken for tropical paradises. Watching the sunset in the area is an unforgettable experience, especially in the summertime when the sun does not even descend below the horizon during the year’s very brightest days. There are also many archaeological remains from old fishing stations on the two beaches, giving the visitor a very real connection to days gone by.

A few kilometers south of this area is an enormous beach called Rauðisandur or “Red Sands”. In this remote part of the country, the exciting music festival Rauðasandur festival takes place during the summertime. At the peak of the summer when temperature is the highest,

the ocean at Rauðasandur can become surprisingly warm, making sunbathing and swimming in the ocean an unexpected and pleasant option.

The locations mentioned above merely reflect a small portion of the whole coastal area of Iceland. There are various other captivating beaches in and around the capital and also in the fjords located in the north and east part of the country.

Icelandic beaches are certainly not the ideal location for those seeking a tropical pleasure. The Icelandic people themselves are more likely to explore the beaches in search for inspiration or in an attempt to connect to or even absorb the immensity of the ocean. In these, mostly vacant, areas people can immerse themselves in the unique solitude resounding in its, at times frantic but always glorious beauty.

THE ICELANDIC WITCH MANIA

There are various kinds of historical sources related to witchcraft in Iceland. Some witch-hunt cases were recorded before the Reformation; the *Nýjiannáll* (The New Annals) documents for instance involved the burning of the nun Katrin from Kirkjubæjarklaustur in 1343. In Resen's *Accounts of Iceland* from 1688 it is reported that a woman accused of keeping a Snakkur (a milk-stealing creature of the Icelandic folklore) was burned in 1580 although Resen never found the woman's sentence. The books of the Icelandic Parliament are a reliable source on witchcraft cases that were fought in court, as well as records of judgments and proceedings. Books of old copied letters, books of the Icelandic synod and church inventories also cast a light on the situation.

By Ragnheiður Gyða Jónsdóttir Photos: Courtesy of The Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft

THE EUROPEANIZATION

The influence of Europe's witch craze reached Iceland through Denmark and Germany in the mid 17th century. The Icelandic witch-hunt differed somewhat from the rest of Europe as it revolved mostly around magical staves and runes that were supposedly used to harm people and livestock. The devil was hardly involved at all and feasting on days of rest even less so. But like in other small communities suspicions of sorcery, fueled by neighborhood quarrels and fear, spread like wildfire. Approximately 20 Icelanders are believed to have died, burned at the stake, from 14th to 18th century while the Icelandic "burning century", as historians call it, lasted from 1654-1690.

THE SORCERY OF STRANDIR

The start of the witch-hunt in the north of Strandir between

the years of 1652-1654 can be traced back to a young girl who was in the service of Þórður Guðbrandsson in Munaðarnes. She became ill after resigning from the household but then regained her health upon returning. When she then left him a second time she became ill again and it was thus believed that Þórður had used black

magic to make the girl sick. His neighbors, Egill and Grímur were entangled in the case as well. Egill was accused of using sorcery to kill sheep and he confessed to "making a pact with the devil for such purposes by inscribing runes and giving the devil his own blood and nail cuttings". Hysteria soon broke out in the region and the Ballaránnáll



(Annals of Ballará) states that in the autumn of 1652 "disquietude, followed by a plague of spirits or ghosts, would arise many times a day, mainly in church while the sermon was being held in Trékyllisvík." The phenomenon seemed to enter people's throats and they would start belching and feel excessively full but once it passed they were unharmed. These sufferings would mostly affect unspoiled girls and they continued to happen throughout the next few years. Þórður, Egill and Grímur were convicted and burned at the stake deep inside Kista, a ravine that leads to the ocean in Trékyllisvík.

"Approximately 20 Icelanders are believed to have died, burned at the stake, from 14th to 18th century"

THE AFTERMATH

Following these three burnings in Trékyllisvík, sixteen men and one woman were burned for sorcery and the last burning in Iceland is believed to have taken place in Arngerðareyrarskógur by Djúp in 1683. A man was burned in Öxarárþing two years later for blasphemy and the case is usually considered as a witch-hunt case due to its form of punishment. The last burning punishment was assigned in 1690 when Klemus



Bjarnason from Steingrímsfjörður in Strandir was sentenced in Öxarárþing to be burned at stake. He was supposed to have caused the illness of a housewife in Hrófberg. The sentence was later changed and Klemus was sent into exile. Two years later he died of an illness in a prison in Copenhagen.

THE LAST WITCH-HUNT

In 1804, the house of Björk in Sölvadalur was inspected and the bodies of two women examined at the master's request, due to suspicions of Snakkur. One of the women, Guðrún Jónsdóttir,

of time. Furthermore, he explains that the book was created in the midst of the "burning century" and is thus not a mere folk tale or piece of fiction but a collection of sorcery resources and a cause that people actually risked their lives for; a truly life-threatening book. This manuscript proves that throughout the centuries the old paganism had been kept alive and preserved, waiting for

"Around 170 people were charged for sorcery and other black magic activities in Iceland"

its window of opportunity to open. The book was regarded as a dangerous study, a soul murdering weapon, and the authorities banned it. Around 170 people were charged for sorcery and other black magic activities in Iceland, and only 10% of these suspects were female. The witch-hunting didn't merely revolve around cases where people were harmed or possessions were involved, it also concentrated on people who used magic for personal gain: using it, for instance, to improve the weather and their own health or those of the people around them. Not all sorcerers were proven guilty but all of them, however, were

sentenced to burn at the stake. The Icelandic legal system based their judgments on the testimony of high-ranked individuals and such evidence that proved the defendant's argument was not taken seriously.

LEARN MORE

The Strandir area has always been notorious for witchcraft, which sparked the idea of The Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft in Hólmavík. There, visitors can learn about the Icelandic witch-hunt of the 17th century, view the many magical tools on display and - on special ghost days - they can take part in the scotching of ghosts!



79 years-old, had a strange growth in her lower abdomen: "a rather big lump or soft tumor, hanging down from her stomach, matching the color of her skin except for slight irritations on its lower half." No actions were taken and this was most likely the last Icelandic witch-hunt case but it nevertheless proves that in the 19th century people still believed in the existence of Snakkur.

AN ICELANDIC SORCERY BOOK

In 1992, Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson, a literary scholar, re-published an old Icelandic sorcery book from the 17th century. In the prologue, Matthías talks about how unclear and strange the manuscript is, stating that it lacks focus as it was written by four men over a long period





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THE ICELANDIC HORSE: FRIEND, SERVANT AND A NATION BUILDER

Icelandic horses, one of the oldest horse breeds in the world, were developed in Iceland. Although the horses are small, standing an average of 13 and 14 hands (52 and 56 inches, 132 and 142 cm) high, which is often considered pony size, breeders and registries always refer to them as horses.

by Jón Kristinn Snæhólm Photos: Einar Guðmann and Photos.com

Several theories have been put forward as to why. One is the breed's spirited temperament and large personality, and another is simply the absence of the word "pony" in Icelandic. Also the breed's weight (between 330-380 kilograms), bone structure and weight-carrying abilities allows it to be classified as a horse, rather than a pony.

THE HORSE OF THE VIKINGS

The first Viking settlers brought their horses to Iceland long before any of the European breeds that we are so familiar with today had been established. Along with only a couple of other rare breeds, the Icelandic horse

represents the closest link we have to the first domesticated horses. Crossing the Atlantic in their small open boats, the settlers could only bring a few horses at a time. They arrived with families and animals in tow, ready to farm, fish, fight each other and form a republic.

For those early settlers and farmers in Iceland the horse was indispensable. It plowed the fields, and during many centuries was the only means of transport; carrying people, cargo, mail and crops, over mountains, crossing glacial rivers and picking its surefooted way over treacherous mountain trails, sharing the often harsh life of its master as an equal partner and a beloved friend. Icelanders have, over the

centuries referred to this amazing creature as "þarfasti þjónninn" (English: The most useful servant).

ORIGIN AND HISTORY

The history of the Icelandic horse can be traced to the settlement of the country in the period between 874 and 930. The settlers brought with them their very best horse, until recently thought to be from various origins, mostly of German descent. New findings though, indicate that the original ancestors of the breed actually came from Siberia, while a comparison between the Icelandic horse, at the time of the settlement of Iceland, and ancient Norwegian and German horses show them to have similar bone structure. Although the origin of





the breed may have been mixed, due to its isolation and the fact that the old Icelandic Parliament (Icelandic: Althingi) prohibited all importation and crossbreeding of horses in Iceland in 982, today this is one of the most purebred horse breeds in the world, remaining pure for over eleven hundred years. Thus today, there is only one breed of horse in Iceland, i.e. The Icelandic Horse. Diseases are almost unknown among Icelandic horses, and their protection is assured by strict regulations of the Icelandic government.

The horse plays a huge part in the Icelandic Sagas where it is frequently mentioned in connection with the time of Viking warfare. The Vikings treated their horses with great respect and like the farmers, warriors often considered it their most prized possession. Through the centuries the Icelandic horse has undergone harsh times due to lack of food caused by inclement weather, volcanic ash poisoning and lava which covered hundreds of square miles of land, drying up many rivers.

CHARACTERISTICS

Icelandic people take pride in the Icelandic horse as can be seen in Icelandic art and literature, where painters, poets, and writers have, throughout the centuries, lauded its extraordinary characteristics. It is intelligent, well tempered, versatile and beautiful. It is also the most colorful breed in the world, with over 40 different colors and over 100 variations. It has a double coat developed for extra insulation in cold temperatures, and is known to be hardy and an easy keeper (requiring a minimum of food to maintain its weight). The horse, heralded because of its sure-footedness is also unique amongst horse breeds because it masters five gaits. In addition to the standard walk, trot, canter/gallop, it also masters two additional gaits, the "tölt" and "flying pace".

The breed is best known for the tölt, which is a smooth four beat gait, similar to the running walk or rack. The tölt is a natural gait; one can often see foals



“Some Icelandic farmers still use the breed to round up sheep in the highlands during the fall, but today most horses are used for competition and leisure riding.”

and grown horses tolt in the pasture. The “flying pace” (Icelandic: Skeið) is used in pacing races, and is fast and smooth with some horses able to reach up to 30 mph (48 km/h). The pace is a two beat lateral gait with a moment of postponement between footfalls; each side has both feet land almost simultaneously. Both tolt and “flying pace” are so smooth that it is said that the rider can hold a full glass of his/her favorite drink in one hand and the reins in the other, without spilling a drop!

THE CONTEMPORARY

Icelandic horses still play a large part in the lives of the Icelandic people despite the increasing mechanization and road improvements during the last 100 years diminishing the practical necessity of the breed. Thousands of Icelanders today own horses for the simple pleasure of riding

them and enjoying the company of a beloved friend. Today there are about 80,000 horses in Iceland (around 100,000 abroad), which is an incredible number for a nation with only 320,000 inhabitants. Abroad the breed is especially popular in Western Europe, Scandinavia, and North America.



Some Icelandic farmers still use the breed to round up sheep in the highlands during the fall, but today most horses are used for competition and leisure riding. Horse racing and horse shows are very popular in Iceland, and held throughout the country mostly during the summer, but sometimes winter events are also held on ice. There are numerous riding tour operators, specializing in riding tours across the country, who offer different riding tours designed for all ages and levels of experience. Over 10,000 people belong to riding clubs, and close to 30,000 Icelanders are said to

be active riders. The relationship between Icelanders and horses that began more than eleven hundred years ago, endures today with a love and loyalty that is hard to describe.

Further information:

The Icelandic language embraces numerous words for the term horse: Hestur (horse), gæðingur (exceptionally good riding horse), hross (horse), folald (foal, filly) jór (in poetry), trunta (very bad riding horse), bikkja (bad riding horse), fákur (mostly poetic), klár (horse), hryssa (female horse), meri (female horse), jálkur (old horse), drösur (solely poetry), trippi (young horse), foli (male foal, colt), graðhestur (stallion), stóðhestur (stallion). Most of all, it's imperative for you as a guest in Iceland, not only to get to know us Icelanders as humans but also get to know our best friend, the primary builder and backbone of modern Iceland; The Icelandic Horse. Happy riding.



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EATS SKATE ALL YEAR

The modern man eats microwave dinners, pizzas, sandwiches and more and blames his lack of time, or his upbringing, for not going to more trouble to prepare food. The young generation is very familiar with this and gradually Iceland's food traditions die out and in a few decades eating f.ex. fermented skate, shark, lumpfish and innards will seem peculiar. People from the West Fjords love this old-fashioned food and Ævar Einarsson of Suðureyri by Súgandafjörður applies centuries old methods to preparing shark, skate and lumpfish. Today Ævar eats skate every week of the year but that must be considered a rather unusual and curious custom.

Text and photos: Róbert Schmidt

"I grew up eating skate and in my home in the old days we always had fermented skate, skate mash or saltfish on Saturdays. Back then we considered ourselves lucky to get a big skate but generally people of the West Fjords eat thorny skate or starry ray with kneaded suet, potatoes and rye bread," says Ævar Einarsson, who lives with his family in a seaside village of 300 on Suðureyri. He grew up there but left home in his twenties when he moved to Neskaupsstaður and lived there for two years. Then he moved back home the wiser. Twelve years later he moved to Tálknafjörður where he lived for two years and among other ventures established there the beginnings of a smoking house, which has grown considerably since then, and smoked skate in a refrigerator. After that he moved to Keflavík where he lived for thirteen years, but then in 2001 he moved back home to „the Mecca of skate“. That was when his interest was sparked in preserving traditional Icelandic methods of preparing shark, skate, lumpfish, singed head of lamb, smoked side of lamb and smoked belly flesh of lamb. „Fermented skate is a custom of the West Fjords and I have eaten skate on St. Thorlak's Day for as long as I can remember, and will continue to

do so. Skate isn't just skate. There are several varieties, f.ex. thorny skate, white skate, grey skate and shagreen ray. The shagreen ray was considered poisonous in the old days and was generally discarded."

SHAGREEN RAY IS THE BEST

„Skates are a deep water fish and most commonly caught in trawls as bycatch, and today most caught skate is sold in fish markets. There are examples of it selling for 400 ISK per kilo. Skate is also caught on lines and is called thorny skate. What once was generally discarded is now preserved and eaten. Fermented and salted shagreen ray is my favorite, it has a relatively sweeter taste after desalination than the other skates. The pectoral fins are also thinner and I must admit that I like it so much that I hoard it like a lindworm.“ Methods for preserving skate and other specifically Icelandic foods changed with the advent of the refrigerator. It is best to ferment skate in a cold place and avoid heat. The pectoral fins are cut off the skate, spruced and put into a closeable fish tub where the fermentation begins and is on-going for two to three weeks. After that the fins are rinsed and the spiny leather is removed

with pliers. It is allowed to settle overnight and then vacuum packed and frozen. For a few years Ævar and his friend, Valgeir Halbjörnsson, have prepared skate together for the Christmas market, and have had success with it. „Valli and I have been developing our own methods of preparing skate and it sells widely. We also prepare lumpfish in the summer and shark when it is available.“

SKATE IS BECOMING A FASHIONABLE FOOD

The aroma of fermented skate is very strong due to urea in this peculiar cartilaginous fish. The skate is considered best when it is fermented to the point that tears well from the diner's eyes and preferably so thoroughly that it literally takes their breath away. Restaurants both in the capital area and around the country offer skate on St. Thorlak's Day and according to Ævar skate dining is gaining popularity these days, even becoming fashionable, which is very positive in modern day's society. "I make my own kneaded suet which is indispensable with the skate. I hang it to dry in a shed and let it mold in a gauze bag for a few weeks until it has started to "feather". It is good to put in ¼



olive oil when the suet is melted, it prevents the fat from solidifying. For those who can't eat melted fat a good alternative is using olive oil and garlic oil as seasoning. I am aware of restaurants beginning to use my methods with the oil and that is great," says Ævar, but he founded a skate club on Suðureyri that holds weekly meetings in an old fish factory by the harbor where they have boiled skate, catfish heads and other specifically Icelandic foods. "We are a group of 10-14 guys that meet irregularly to cook, have fun and tell stories, both true and untrue. It works best to keep the food as simple as possible. No salad or side dishes, only skate, kneaded suet and potatoes. That is best."

SMOKED LUMPFISH

Catching lumpfish in nets is an old tradition in Iceland and the fish was usually smoked in turf huts around the countryside. It is probably on account of a lack of facilities that for a time the smoking method stopped being practiced and people started salting and drying lumpfish. "People only smoked lumpfish in the spring during the lambing period back in the day. These days lumpfish is smoked all through the summer. We had a good catch last year, Valli



Gæfan ÍS 403 anglerfishing in the mouth of Súgandafjörður, that summer the brothers caught 8000 kg of anglerfish.

and I caught well into a second thousand. Not so good the years before that. In the past many placed nets in various locations around the fjord and individuals had their own spots. There was more fishing back then. Only a handful of us are utilizing the lumpfish in Súgandafjörður and we try to prepare and smoke every last bit that doesn't get boiled. It is an old custom of ours to present the first catch (the harbingers of spring) to the elders of our town. The method of preparation is such that the head, stomach and comb is cut off and the rest gets salted for a few hours. Rinsed in water after that and put together into bunches, then hung in a shed for two to three weeks. Eventually it is smoked. I find it best to use peat, beech dust and lamb manure for the smoking, but not everyone likes the manure. Smoking takes about a week, but it depends on the weather," says Ævar, who at an early age began rowing about the fjord with old and worn-out lumpfishnets. "I observed the old fishermen a lot, as well as my cousins Guðmundur and Þorleifur (who was nicknamed Leifi Noggi), I learned a lot from him. He was my role model in this business and we were great friends," says Ævar and remembers his cousins who passed on some years ago.



A FULL SEA OF ANGLERFISH

Ævar goes fishing for more than lumpfish in Súgandafjörður. With his brothers, Elvar and Guðni, he owns and operates the motorboat Gæfa ÍS 403, which once belonged to their uncle Guðmundur Guðnason who used it to fish for female lumpfish years ago. In 2010 the brothers shipped their boat out for anglerfishing which turned out to be an adventure, they caught 8000 kg of anglerfish by the coastline from Súgandafjörður to Önundarfjörður in only a few weeks. "Yes, it was an incredible catch and it surprised us how much anglerfish there is in the

◀ Ævar Einarsson and Valgeir Hallbjörnsson baiting for Atlantic halibut a few years ago on board Tjaldur ÍS.



Members of the skate club gathered together in Tensen, Ævar's kitchen by the harbor. There they feast weekly on fermented skate among other delicacies.



Ævar's friend, Örylgur Ásbjörnsson, with some bunches of lumpfish.



Suðureyri by Súgandafjörður

shallower waters and all the way to the harbor. In the past this ugly bottom dweller was occasionally caught in deep sea trawls and nobody thought it to be good for eating. Global warming has had the effect that now the shallower waters and fjords are full of anglerfish. The bycatch can often prove to be quite curious and we have had porpoises, birds and seals in the nets, and once we had a 60 kg porbeagle shark." The brothers have shipped the boat out for lumpfishing before and now for coastline fishing, when weather is mild they also use the boat to keep ancient fishing methods alive and always take care to utilize their catch efficiently.

THE SHARK

„After I moved back home from Neskaupsstaður in 1981 I started paying more attention to the old fishermen here. My friend Bjössi from Geltir had some sheep that he sold me and that's when I began to prepare smoked belly flesh, smoked meats, singed heads, innards, kneaded suet and wind dried mutton. All of which is traditionally Icelandic viking cuisine, and I still try to work the wind dried mutton even though I don't have sheep anymore. My cousin Leifi lived with a woman from the Faroe Islands who taught me the ways of working wind dried mutton, and she always found my meats to be the best. Leifi and his friend Ölli used to prepare shark together and they caught lumpfish and smoked it. I found this exciting and interesting and used to spend

my time around them. My lifestyle changed and I followed them and learned from them how to prepare shark and smoke lumpfish among other things. When I lived in the south I had been a shark salesman for the pair of them. Back in the day the shark was buried on the beach and fermented there. Later people started using specially made wooden boxes. The sharkbait was assorted into the box and first a shutter was put on top of it, and then beach rocks, to press the fluids from the bait which ran out through small holes in the box. Now we use plastic tubs when working the shark. Once I had a plastic tub which was originally used for shark preparation but later turned into a hot water tub," says Ævar and laughs. „It is important to know the right procedures when working shark. It is best to hang it up in May and let it cure well before the fly season, so that it will be ready for the midwinter festivals. Or hang it up in the autumn, because the sun and the flies spoil the shark. It is put in a heap for 6-8 weeks and hung in a shed for over eight months, but the preparation period lasts about 8-10 months in total. We use the shark that is caught on line locally but the dream is to ship out for shark fishing in Súgandafjörður myself, and maybe one day that dream will come true," says Ævar Einarsson to conclude and invites the reporter to a catfish head feast at the end of the week, which is fitting to thankfully accept and partake in preserving this ancient Icelandic food tradition.



A 680 kg shark that was caught on line. Ævar and Valli watch the unloading, afterward they worked the shark.



The shark being cut in the snow and then the cuts are fermented. Ævar and Valli work together and Örlygur Ásbjörnsson observes.



Let's go to the...

LEBOWSKI BAR

The Reykjavik venue that rocks!

From the entrepreneurs that brought you Café Oliver and Vegamot, comes Lebowski Bar. You can take a quick guess where the name and inspiration comes from and even if you didn't like the infamous 1998 movie we are certain you will love this bar.

Just walking in to this retro American bar puts a smile on your face and the mood is very 1960's. You can hang out at the old fashioned porch and imagine you are in a real action movie. They don't make bars like these anymore ... oh wait they do, this one! Four big screens adorn the walls, so it's also a great place to hang out when there are big events and sporting highlights to be seen. And there's also an "outside" area decorated in a zappy Miami-sunshine yellow that will cheer even the dullest of days.

DINE AND JIVE

Lebowski Bar really captures the diner style with cosy booths and a fabulous jukebox containing over 1,600 songs guaranteed to get those hips swaying. If that's not enough there's a DJ on every night of the week so you won't feel the pressure of selecting all the music by yourself.

The menus are the biggest in Iceland ... no literally! Their physical dimensions are huge! Doesn't everyone say that size really does matter? Try their amazing burgers, there's cheese, bacon, a béarnaise sauce option and succulent beef tenderloin. If that's not enough, choose from one of the 12 kinds of milkshakes to go with it. "Careful man, there's a beverage

here!" Jeffrey 'the Dude' Lebowski, the protagonist of the Coen brother's comedy, is renowned for his penchant for 'White Russians' – vodka based cocktails featuring coffee liqueurs and cream or milk. Lebowski Bar has taken this now-iconic drink to a new level, offering an astounding 18 varieties of White Russian, along with an extensive bar list.

BOWLING AT THE BAR

The real icing on the Lebowski cake, however, is the bar's genuine bowling lane – it's a classic. How many bars have a bowling lane? In Iceland, not many, unless you count the bars at actual bowling alleys that certainly don't have the cool vibe of Lebowski Bar. DJs and a bass player add to the music mix at weekends and there's room to dance. Check it out dudes, you're guaranteed a good time.

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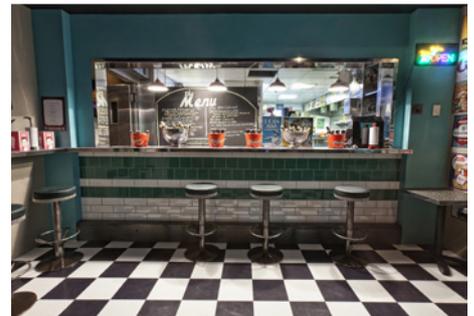
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Lebowski Bar is my favorite place to hang out at. I love grabbing a good beer, a burger & topping it with a delicious milkshake.

Lebowski Bar plays oldies music which makes the vibe like none other in Reykjavik. They also have happy hour from 4-7pm and who doesn't love that! Bottom line, Lebowski Bar is a great mainstream bar where you can meet fellow travelers and have a drink with locals. Practice the word 'SKÁL' (Cheers) ~ Inga,@TinyIceland

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