

ISSUES AND IMAGES ICELAND



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Q&A

A selection of questions and answers.

Compiled by Zoë Robert from icelandreview.com/ask-ir
Photo by Páll Stefánsson.

ICELANDIC NAMING LAWS

Q: If a foreigner is given Icelandic citizenship, can they change their name to a patronym (or matronym) to fit with Icelandic naming patterns? For example, if an Englishman's name is Eric Smith and his dad's name is John Smith, could he take the name Eric Johnsson/Jónsson upon naturalization?

A: A naturalized Icelandic citizen can take up a matronymic or patronymic after either their own parents, or their partner's parents. So Eric Smith could take up the name Johnsson or Jónsson. And if he married Árný Þórsdóttir, he could take the name Þórsson and become Eric Þórsson, or even Eric Þórsdóttir if he so pleased.

He would also be permitted to take the last name of his partner, so if he instead married Árný Briem, he could then become Eric Briem. This is an important distinction because Icelandic-born citizens are not permitted to use their spouse's last name, except as a middle name.

EOK

CULTURAL HISTORY OF CAIRNS

Q: I am interested in learning more about the cairns that dot the landscape in Iceland. I'd like to read a cultural history of them.

Erin

A: The making of *vörður*, as cairns are called in Icelandic, goes back centuries; the Icelandic settlers of the 9th and 10th centuries AD used cairns to mark their way on expeditions before there were roads. They would be placed close enough together so that standing at one, the next was always within sight.

The word *varða* (singular of *vörður*) means 'guardian.' So the *vörður* guarded travelers trekking across the highlands, often in bad weather. More than just literally guarding them from getting lost, they were also believed to protect people from ghosts, trolls, outlaws, *huldufólk* (hidden people) and evil spirits.

Some place names in Iceland indicate the presence of cairns, such as Fimmvörðuháls ('five cairn ridge').

Nowadays, while yardsticks are used to mark hiking paths, people sometimes make cairns just for fun or add stones to cairns on mountaintops to leave something behind.

While they are common, the building of cairns is not encouraged.

Item number four on the Environmental Agency of Iceland's Traveler's Code reads: "Never dislodge stones or build cairns."

As Guðbjörg Gunnarsdóttir, national park ranger at the Environmental Agency of Iceland, told *Iceland Review*, a campaign is needed to bring awareness about the impacts of building cairns; the removal of rocks from the terrain leaves scars in the land.

ZR/EOK

LAVA LANDSCAPE

Q: I have read in a few sources that 11 percent of Iceland is covered by glaciers. How much of the island is covered by lava? I have read different percentages in different sources. Some say 11-12 percent others say close to 30 percent. Which figure is closest?

Thanks,

Linda, U.S

A: This question was answered by Kristján Jónasson, project manager of geology and curator of mineralogy and petrology at the Icelandic Institute of Natural History:

Postglacial lavas cover 11.4 percent of Iceland.

This is based on the geological map of Iceland 1:600.000 published by the Icelandic Institute of Natural History. It includes all lavas that have formed after the Ice Age, or within the last 11,000 years or so.

Lavas that have formed in historic time (the last 1,100 years) cover 2.5 percent of Iceland. Older bedrock in Iceland is largely made up of layers of lava-flows, so you could argue that most of Iceland is built up of lavas.

However, these have been heavily eroded by glaciers during the Ice Age, so they are generally not included.

ESA

ICELAND CRISIS RESPONSE UNIT

Q: Is it true that the Iceland Crisis Response Unit isn't armed anymore and that they are now strictly an unarmed civilian peacekeeping force?

Anthony, U.S.

A: Svanhvít Aðalsteinsdóttir, senior advisor at Iceland Crisis Response Unit, revealed that the members of the Iceland Crisis Response Unit have not carried arms since 2007. Before that they were trained to use weapons.

However, in 2007, when Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir took over as foreign minister, it was decided that the Iceland Crisis Response Unit should be a strictly unarmed peacekeeping force and that has been the case since.

The Iceland Crisis Response Unit is primarily involved in international peacekeeping in Afghanistan and in United Nations projects, such as with UNICEF, the Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the World Food Programme.

ESA

WEBSITE FOR SNOW CONDITIONS

Q: What is the best website for snow conditions in Iceland?

Larry, U.S.

A: It depends. If you are driving, vegagerdin.is (the website of the Icelandic Road and Coastal Administration) is best for its combo of web cameras and up-to-date traffic and weather information.

For an ordinary weather forecast, the Icelandic Met Office has a very good site at vedur.is.

For long term forecasts, our friends in Norway have the best site for Iceland at yr.no

PS

SHARING SECRETS

A collection of special places in Iceland.

Promote Iceland has run several successful tourist marketing campaigns in the past years, including the original 'Inspired by Iceland' campaign after the 2010 volcanic eruption in Eyjafjallajökull, when a video of people dancing in different locations around Iceland proved a major hit. Since then, Icelanders have invited tourists to join them for various activities, such as coffee or dinner. (President of Iceland Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson served pancakes at his personal residence). Visitors have been asked to rename Iceland based on their experiences of the country.

Now, both locals and travelers are being encouraged to 'share their Iceland secrets,' - special places that they've discovered and enjoyed and would like others to know about. Here are some of the secrets people have shared. If you know of a place in Iceland that is dear to your heart, lies off the beaten path and you're happy to reveal, go to: inspiredbyiceland.com/secrets



SHORE-SIDE HOT TUB

Hellulaug is a natural pool on the shore close to Flókalundur in the southern West Fjords with an amazing view.

Secret shared by Manuela Elcher.



HIGHLAND COTTON FIELD

At the right time of year, white, fluffy cotton grass dots a field near Landmannalaugar in the south-central highlands.

Secret shared by Ann Hogan.



FISHING ON A BLOND BEACH

"Fishing in the blond sand of Örlygshöfn beach with the amazing and majestic Patreksfjörður showing its beauty."

Secret shared by Oscar Vispo.



SECLUDED WATERFALL

"Hengifoss in Seldalur is one of my favorite places to go. Just a short hike from the road and you are standing on a precipice watching the water cascade into the narrow gorge."

Secret shared by Sigurður Ólafsson.

Secrets compiled from inspiredbyiceland.com and edited by Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir. Photos courtesy of Inspired by Iceland.

THE VALLEY



If Austurvöllur square is the heart of Reykjavík, Laugardalur valley is the lungs.

In Laugardalur valley you'll find the largest outdoor thermal swimming pool in the capital and the Reykjavík Family Park and Zoo, where most Icelandic animals can be viewed.

Next to the zoo is the Laugardalshöll arena, a multi-purpose indoor venue built in 1965. In addition to large pop and rock concerts, trade shows, exhibitions and the 1995 World Handball Championship, Laugardalshöll hosted the famous 1972 World Chess Championship where U.S. grandmaster Bobby Fischer defeated Russian Boris Spassky.

A short distance away is an indoor ice rink and Laugardalsvöllur, the national stadium for football (soccer). At the stadium Iceland has suffered heart-breaking losses and triumphed over much bigger nations. Iceland even made it to the play-offs to the last World Cup in Brazil at Laugardalsvöllur—later losing to Croatia at an away game.

In Laugardalur you will also find a youth hostel, the country's grandest campsite, and a botanical garden, featuring an impressive

selection of Arctic flowers and the small and lovely Café Flora.

In the valley you will find the studio of artist Ásmundur Sveinsson (1893-1982), a strangely-shaped domed white building, now housing the Reykjavík Art Museum's Ásmundarsafn. Ásmundur was a pioneer of Icelandic sculpture. In addition to the display inside, there is a sculpture garden around the building exhibiting many of the artist's monumental works.

So, the valley has everything, even four sports clubs: Ármann, mostly focusing on gymnastics and wrestling, the great football club Próttur, which also has a volleyball team, SR for skaters and Ægir for swimmers.

And back to the Laugardalslaug swimming pool... in an adjacent building you'll find World Class, the biggest gym and spa in the valley, if not the whole of Iceland.

Words and photos by Páll Stefánsson.







HEALTH AWAKENING

In the years since the crash, there's been more emphasis in Iceland on eating local and healthier food.

Fresh bunches of green kale, rainbow chard, spinach and arugula, aromatic herbs, green, red and yellow peppers, alfalfa and bean sprouts, radishes, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, celery, mushrooms, rutabaga and tomatoes galore... The shelves of Iceland's grocery and health food stores have come a long way in recent years.

Apart from the fish in the ocean, Iceland's settlers arrived in a country almost devoid of food. Everything had to be brought with them, including livestock, and the harsh climate and absence of refrigeration put its mark on the traditional Icelandic diet: lamb and dairy products, smoked, pickled and soured, featured strongly while fruit and vegetables were largely missing.

During World War II, Iceland's economy started to boom. This had a profound impact on the nation's dietary habits, according to Dominique Plédel Jónsson, president of Slow Food Iceland. "When market policy took over—the war played a large part in this as Icelandic export of fish became vital for the British [and American] market—a feeling of being new rich, combined with the proximity of American interests at the military base of Keflavik turned the country onto fast food," she wrote in a chapter on Icelandic food in the book *Hræringar – the Nordic House and Iceland/2007-2013*.

Although Icelanders live longer than almost all other nationalities, as in the rest of the western world they have been succumbing to obesity. Iceland now ranks as the fattest nation in Europe and the second-fattest western nation after the United States. Around 21 percent of adults suffer from obesity, almost double that of Sweden. In recent years, though, the diet of Icelanders seems to have improved.

According to a 2012 study conducted by the Directorate of Health, the Icelandic Food

and Veterinary Authority and the Unit for Nutrition Research, the diet of Icelanders is healthier now than in 2002. Consumption of hard fat, salt, sugared soda and added sugar has decreased. Meanwhile, consumption of fruit and vegetables has increased by 54 percent and 19 percent, respectively, since 2002 and whole wheat bread and oatmeal has doubled since 2002, whereas cookies and cakes have decreased in popularity.

Since the 2008 financial crash, there's been a return to basics with many Icelanders eating simpler, healthier food that is produced locally. At the same time, the production of Icelandic vegetables has also taken off. Sólveig Eiríksdóttir, or Solla as she's known, head chef at the popular Gló restaurant and Iceland's best-known health food guru, is among those to have noticed the trend. "After the crash, people took a good look at the things that actually make a difference in life. Some saw that all this money didn't really make all that much difference. There are some things you just can't buy, like good health," Solla says.

As far as Solla is concerned, eating local and eating healthy goes together. "As soon as you start thinking about where your food comes from, you become a lot more aware of what you eat." Despite the positive trends, though, Solla is vocal about the need for continued improvement. At 239 grams per day, consumption of fruit and vegetables is still far below the recommended 400 grams, according to the aforementioned 2012 study by the Directorate of Health. Solla is also keen to highlight Iceland's potential to produce a great deal more fresh produce. "We really can grow fruit and vegetables here. It could be a paradise for food production, if we want."

By Zoë Robert. Photos by Áslaug Snorraddóttir.



A FORCEFUL VOICE FOR INDUSTRY

The Federation of Icelandic Industries has a cool new chairperson, coming from Iceland's largest ice cream producer. Guðrún Hafsteinsdóttir was elected chair of SI, the Federation of Icelandic Industries, in the spring of 2014.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

Guðrún is the marketing manager of Kjörís, Iceland's largest ice cream producer, a family company founded by her father, Hafsteinn Valdimarsson, in 1969. She started working for the company at the age of five when she helped with packing the ice cream during a strike, and on a regular basis from the age of 12. When she grew up she started running the day-to-day operations with her brother Valdimar, who is managing director of Kjörís.

Their sister, Aldís Hafsteinsdóttir, is Mayor of Hveragerði, a town of about 2,300 people in South Iceland, where the siblings grew up. The Kjörís factory is, of course, Guðrún says, located in Hveragerði. "We are an important employer and we try to contribute to the community beyond our obligations in taxes. It is very important for a company to be in agreement with its neighbors."

MORE VISIBILITY NEEDED

Guðrún says that she wants the Federation of Icelandic Industries to be more forceful and visible in society. "The voice of industry has to be heard loud and more often. I am also very interested in activating the general members of the Federation of Icelandic Industries and hence strengthening its foundations. We must stress the issues that unite us, not the ones that divide us."

One of the biggest issues in Iceland at the moment is the country's pending application for membership to the European Union. The issue is controversial, but Guðrún says that she supports finishing the negotiations so that the nation can vote on a treaty. She does stress, however, that any agreement must give consideration to the special needs of Icelandic fisheries and agriculture. "Even though tourism is now creating more revenue than the fishing industry, Iceland is still very dependent upon fisheries. Hence, it is of vital importance to Iceland that we are in full control of our fishing grounds."

BIG AND SMALL SHOULD COEXIST

Guðrún thinks that small and large companies can and should coexist in the Federation of Icelandic Industries. "We all want stability. Of course we are all proud of the big companies like Marel, Össur and Alcoa, to name a few, but let us not forget that many other companies have been created around these 'giants.'"

*By Benedikt Jóhannesson
Photo by Geir Ólafsson*

QuizUp is a beautiful, social and highly addictive quiz game, made on Laugarvegur in 101 Reykjavík.

I met the founder and CEO of Plain Vanilla, Þorsteinn (Thor) Baldur Friðriksson, while I was looking for answers on the runaway success of the mobile app QuizUp, released in November 2013.

PS: *How did QuizUp come to be?*

PBF: I needed something creative to do. The banking crisis in 2008 was in many ways good for Iceland. The banks used to claim all the good people, but after the crisis hit, talented and creative minds needed something to do. One of the industries to prosper was the ever-growing mobile app business, including my company, Plain Vanilla, and QuizUp is one of the fruits of our labor.

PS: *Are you a one-hit-wonder company like Finnish Rovio with Angry Birds?*

PBF: Yes and no... we want to be a one-hit-company like Facebook. And we have grown faster than they did with three million users after the first three weeks.



GAME CHANGE

PS: *Only a few of the questions in QuizUp are long. How long can a question be?*

PBF: Yes, some are long, but we have editors who are working hard to make the questions snappy. But this can be difficult; you have long names in capitals, cars, cows and currencies. The good thing about a quiz game like ours is that we are constantly able to refresh the questions and add new topics to the close to 400 we have today.

PS: *Currently, 1,000 new apps are published every single day, how did you succeed?*

PBF: QuizUp behaved a bit like a virus. We found out that it spread through word of mouth, friends showing friends, and that's how QuizUp got downloaded. The first marketing research shows that the average user spends 40 minutes a day playing. That is more than we expected.

PS: Let's talk about revenue, how are you going to make money on a game, how can it be free of charge?

PBF: This is the million dollar question. Now we are concentrating on getting bigger user base, like Instagram. We do not want to change the experience of the game for example by add ads. But in the future we could sell question carousels to companies. There is a lot of revenue potential, but it has to be done right.

Back home from the interview, I wanted to play one quick game, to get a better feeling for it. I chose my favorite topic, Africa, and got started. It was impossible to stop; I had to play just one more game, then one more, and then one more after that...

Words and portrait by Páll Stefánsson.





DRY DELICACIES

Once vital to the national diet and with a history of more than 1,000 years of export, Icelandic stockfish is as valued as ever.

Making stockfish by drying is an ancient conservation method, mainly practiced in Iceland and Norway. Hung outside on wooden racks, the fish was dried by wind and sun. Stockfish has been exported from these countries for more than 1,000 years: the Icelandic *Egils Saga* states that Þórólfur Kveldúlfsson, the protagonist's uncle, exported stockfish from Norway to England. Through the ages the diet of Icelanders consisted mainly of dried fish. At larger farms, dried fish and butter was rationed for farm hands at the beginning of each week, year-round. To this day, *harðfiskur*, dried and beaten stockfish, remains a popular snack in Iceland, whereas dried heads and other fish parts are a thing of the past. However, in West Africa, these products are considered a delicacy, which is where Icelandic seafood exporters have found a new market for stockfish, or *skreið*, as it's called in Icelandic.

Among stockfish exporters is Salka in Dalvík. Founded in 1987, the stockfish department was first an entity within it but has since become the focus of operations. Salka

sells dried fish products from Iceland, Norway, the Faroe Islands and Russia to Nigeria, from where the fish is also distributed to other African markets. Salka exports 35 percent of the dried fish produced in Iceland, where the total export value of dried fish amounted to approximately ISK 12 billion (USD 100 million) in 2013. Primarily cod qualifies for drying, but also haddock, saithe, tusk and ling. The heads, head bones, spine and even the gills are classified in 30 to 40 categories and sold—nothing goes to waste. Today 97 percent of the stockfish is dried inside, with factories taking advantage of geothermal heat. Outside it takes two to three months to dry the fish, compared to eight to nine days in a drying compartment, resulting in a milder and more stable flavor.

Don't let the smell or texture put you off. Buttered *harðfiskur* is really a treat and something every visitor to Iceland should try.

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir.

Photo by Páll Stefánsson.

OF CHRISTIANS AND CRATERS

In the heart of South Iceland lies the scenic village Kirkjubæjarklaustur, Klaustur for short, the site of an ancient convent.



The surrounding region of Kirkjubæjarklaustur in South Iceland, part of Katla Geopark, is famous for its geology and extraordinary landscape shaped by volcanic eruptions and the glacial river Skaf-tá. It also has an interesting history.

PAGANS NOT WELCOME

Known as Kirkjubær ('Church Farm') before 1186, when a Benedictine convent was founded and the suffix-*klaustur* ('-cloister') added, the site is believed to have been inhabited by Irish monks, *papar*. In the 9th century AD, Norse settler Ketill 'the foolish' made Kirkjubær his home. However, when pagan Hildir Eysteinnsson attempted to move there, he is said to have dropped down dead on the spot. Legend has it that he was buried in Hildishaugur ('Hildir's Mound'), just east of Kirkjubæjarklaustur. The convent was in operation until the Reformation in 1550. Many local place names reflect the nuns' presence

and the location's ecclesiastical history, including Systrafoss ('Sister Waterfall'), Systavatn ('Sister Lake') and Kirkjugólf ('Church Floor'). The natural monument was never the site of an actual church, but the extraordinary columnar basalt looks like the tiles of a church floor.

GEOLOGY GALORE

Included in Katla Geopark, a number of destinations in the region bear witness to its violent volcanic history, most notably the Lakagígar craters and Skaftáreldahraun lava field. The disastrous eruption of Lakagígar in 1783-1784 caused years of hardship in Iceland and beyond—it's even theorized to have contributed to the start of the French Revolution. The eruption produced one of the greatest lava flows in a single eruption in the world's history, measuring around 580 square km (224 square miles). Also visit Álfaver, a cluster of pseudocraters,

Laufskálavarða lava ridge and the 40-km (24-mile) long volcanic fissure Eldgjá. Other attractions include Langisjór, a placid lake between the mountains Tungnárfjöll and Fögrufjöll.

SMART GUIDES AND TREASURE HUNT

Visitors to Kirkjubæjarklaustur should check out the free Locatify SmartGuides, available on visitklaustur.is. These include a guided tour of a 20-km (12-mile) trail highlighting the area's history and geology, an app allowing users to experience the full force of the Lakagígar eruption and a treasure hunt with fun facts for the whole family. Also, by using a treasure map, travelers can collect samples of sand and moss in a special glass jar and create their own souvenir with heaps of memories to treasure.

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir.

Photos by Páll Stefánsson.





IN MEMORY OF THOSE LOST AT SEA

After years of renovation, the old French hospital in Fáskrúðsfjörður, originally built in 1903, opened as a hotel and museum in 2014.

Dating back to 1903, the old hospital in Fáskrúðsfjörður, East Iceland, was one of three built by the French government in Iceland.

FROM DECAY TO RENOVATION

While originally established to service injured and ill French fishermen, as well as Icelandic patients, the hospital building was used as a school and home from 1939 to 1964 with 50 to 60 people living there. However, after that the building stood empty for nearly 50 years and was in a state of almost complete decay when Minjavernd, a limited company owned by the Icelandic state, City of Reykjavik and NGO Minja, launched its renovation in 2008. Only a small fraction of the original timber could be used.

The renovated building has now been connected with Lækna-húsið, the old residence for physicians, built by the French government in 1907, with a tunnel underneath the street Hafnargata. The old French chapel from 1898, the morgue and medical shelter from 1896 have also been renovated and placed near the main building.

FISHERMEN OF TIMES PAST

A museum dedicated to the thousands of French fishermen who operated in Icelandic waters until the early 20th century, is now oper-

ated inside Lækna-húsið and the underground tunnel. Visitors have commented that the real-size wax puppets representing fishermen of times past are incredibly life-like.

“They worked up to 20 hours per day. Between 4,000 and 5,000 fishermen died ... and therefore there are many graves in a cemetery in Paimpol where the headstone simply reads: ‘Lost off the coast of Iceland’ or ‘Died off the coast of Iceland’,” museum guide Annette Schaafhirt told Icelandic national broadcaster RÚV.

HOTEL WITH A HISTORY

Fosshótel is renting part of the buildings, operating 26 hotel rooms and a restaurant in the old hospital and shelter, as well as on the upper floors of Lækna-húsið. The restaurant is called L’Abri, which is French for ‘shelter’ and serves dishes made with Icelandic ingredients and a French twist.

“[The renovated hospital] opens up a lot of opportunities for us to provide our guests with recreation and services. Tourism companies here in Fjarðabyggð [municipality] can work together. Hopefully it will encourage people to stay longer, travel between places and enjoy what we have to offer,” Annette concluded.

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir. Photo by Páll Kjartansson.

UNIQUE HORSE SHOW



The ambitious Icelandic Horse Park, Iceland's only horse theater, opened in South Iceland in 2014.

Fákasel, the Icelandic Horse Park, features a 45-minute 'edutainment' performance, called *The Legends of Sleipnir*, which introduces visitors to the history of the Icelandic horse, highlighting its special qualities, and showing scenes from Norse mythology.

HORSE SHOW EXTRAORDINAIRE

There's a long tradition for horse shows in Iceland, where riders compete against each other, demonstrating their horses in different gaits. Fákasel is something else—a horse theater has never been available in Iceland before. Great resources have been put into creating sound, visuals and special effects. A 40-m (131-foot) long screen serves as a backdrop for the show and an original soundtrack was composed by one of Iceland's leading musicians and producers, Barði Jóhannsson. Professionals in the field of theater were consulted on everything from lighting to costumes. The 1,600-square-meter (1,913-square-yard) stage is the biggest in Iceland.

THE LEGEND OF SLEIPNIR

In Norse mythology, Sleipnir is the eight-legged steed of chief god Óðinn, the offspring of two-faced god Loki and stallion Svaðilfari. Legend has it that the horseshoe-shaped canyon of Ásbyrgi in Northeast Iceland was formed when Sleipnir stepped down on Earth, leaving a hoof print. Sleipnir is said to be the ancestor of all Icelandic horses.

The show emphasizes the Icelandic horse's special features and pays tribute to its historical relationship with humans throughout Iceland's history. The result is a fun and educational experience suitable for the whole family and people of all nationalities. The show begins at 7 pm and it can also be combined with dinner at the in-house restaurant and a visit to the stables.

LATEST ADDITION TO GOLDEN CIRCLE

Fákasel is located near Hveragerði in South Iceland, just 30-40 minutes from Reykjavík, and can be included in Iceland's most popular day tour, the Golden Circle. "You don't go to Orlando without visiting Sea World. In the same way, we hope that most tourists will come here, that everyone who visits Iceland will stop at Gullfoss, Geysir and Fákasel," assistant manager Guðmar Þór Pétursson told horse magazine *Eiðfaxi* at the park's opening in February, referring to the waterfall and erupting hot spring the day tour is famous for.

For further information, go to icelandichorsepark.com

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir.
Photo courtesy of Fákasel.

SOLAR POWER

Silicor Materials, which produces solar silicon and aluminum byproducts, is set to build a plant in West Iceland.

When we consider the potential sites for our first commercial-scale plant, Iceland is a leading candidate for a number of reasons,” CEO of Silicor Materials Inc. Theresa Jester said in July 2014 when the company announced its plans to construct a solar silicon production facility in Iceland. It will be located at the port of Grundartangi in Hvalfjörður, West Iceland, near Century Aluminum’s smelter. “In addition to its world-class manufacturing and transportation infrastructure, the country provides low-cost renewable energy, enabling Silicor to produce the only truly ‘green’ silicon in the world. Further, Iceland ranks among the top aluminum producers worldwide, providing Silicor with a built-in market for its premium aluminum-based products. With the support of Arion Bank, we are well positioned to bring this venture to realization,” Jester reasoned.

Silicor has obtained heads of terms and a letter of intent from two of Iceland’s largest power producers, Landsvirkjun National Power Company and Orka Náttúrunnar (ON Power), to supply the plant with renewable energy. Pending final negotiations, Silicor aims to break ground in late 2014 and launch operations in 2016. The plant could create up to 400 full-time jobs in addition to as many as 100 construction positions. The Iceland facility will have a nameplate capacity of 16,000 metric tons, with the ability to yield up to 19,000 metric tons of solar silicon each year. Silicor has already secured sales commitments and letters of intent with several leading global solar wafer, cell and module manufacturers, and expects to have the facility’s nameplate capacity sold out by the end of 2014.

Silicor’s solar silicon is produced specifically for the solar sector and, while producing silicon to meet the exact specifications of its



customers, has developed the industry’s lowest-cost manufacturing process. The company’s process is also environmentally friendly, requiring two-thirds less energy than conventional processes. No toxic chemicals are used, allowing manufacturing facilities to be sited in light industrial parks.

The company selected Grundartangi with support from the Associated Icelandic Ports. “Silicor offers a tremendous economic development opportunity to the Icelandic community, all without compromising its dedication to environmental stewardship,” said Gísli Gíslason, Director for the Associated Icelandic Ports. “Simply put, this facility is a win-win opportunity for Iceland and Silicor.”

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir. Photos courtesy of Silicor Materials.

POWER ON

Explore the inner workings of the world's greenest energy system.

Iceland is long famous for its use of renewable energy. The use of geothermal energy for heating in Iceland began in 1907 and today around 99 percent of the country's electrical energy is derived from renewable hydroelectric and geothermal sources. Landsvirkjun (the National Power Company of Iceland), a public company founded in 1965, and the largest electricity generator in the country, operates visitor centers at two of their power stations. There you can see for yourself how the energy is harnessed, be it in the form of geothermal heat, hydropower or even wind. The visitor centers, open from June 1 to August 31 every year (groups can arrange for openings over the winter) are proving popular.

In Þjórsárdalur, South Iceland, right next to the frequently-visited Þjóðveldisbærinn, a reconstructed Commonwealth Era turf farm, is Búrfellsvirkjun, about an hour-and-a-half's drive from Reykjavík. At the hydroelectric station, you can take part in an interactive exhibition on the construction and functional capabilities of the power plant. In another corner, plugging in some common household appliances brings up columns on a screen, telling you how many kilowatt hours each device uses, and how much the electricity costs. Don't forget to take a peek into the powerhouse itself where you can witness the water turbines in action.

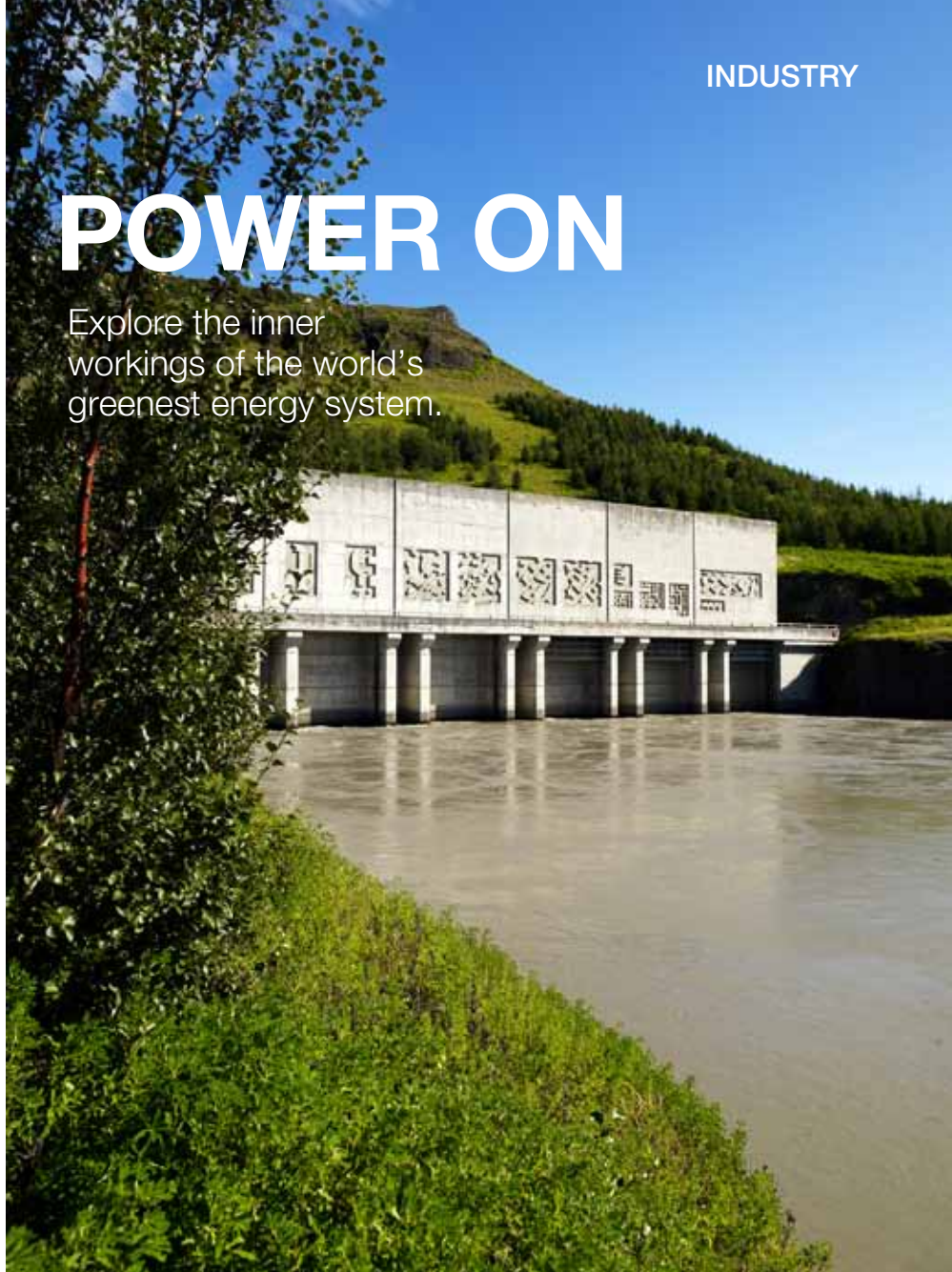
In addition to the main visitor center at Búrfellsvirkjun, travelers can visit the two wind turbines—two of just a handful in Iceland—erected in Búrfell for research purposes in 2012. The turbines are between 70 to 80 meters in height with the blades spanning 110 meters (360 feet).

Visitors to Búrfellsvirkjun should use the opportunity to visit Þjóðveldisbærinn, which is run by Landsvirkjun, as well.

In the Mývatn area, North Iceland, visitors can take a pit-stop at Krafla Power Station and learn about the internal workings of a geothermal station through informative posters and videos. Tours are also available over the summer by request at Kárahnjúkavirkjun, a hydropower plant in the highlands just north of Vatnajökull, East Iceland.

landsvirkjun.com/company/visitus

*By Emillía S. Ólafsdóttir Kaaber.
Photos courtesy of Landsvirkjun.*



LÁTRABJARG— A PARADISE FOR BIRDS

Látrabjarg is one of the places where you can feel that you are on the border between life and death.

The cliff is magnificent, tall and steep, yet eerie. You see the beautiful puffins welcoming all the visitors, hear the cry of the seagull, watch the razorbills stretching their necks, and may wonder: have I stepped into a bird paradise?

But then you might look down and see that if you take a step too far, you will be in a freefall to your demise. The sea constantly hammers at the cliffs, chiseling away one little bit at a time, until it may finally shake the whole foundation on which you stand. That might take centuries, or it might happen in the very next moment.

At 14 km (8.7 miles) long and 440 meters (1,440 ft) high, Látrabjarg is the largest bird cliff in Europe. Tourists flock to the spot every year with more people traveling the gravel road on the south side of Patreksfjörður than any other road in the stunning West Fjords. The road takes you to the westernmost part of Europe, but most people don't think much about that. They concentrate on the landscape and the birds. After driving for about 40 minutes on the country road you suddenly find an unexpected bump; a speed bump marks the beginning of the tiny village of Látrar, where the population might go up to 20 on a good summer's day.

Most people take the path along the cliff but don't go very far, walking maybe ten to 15 minutes. That's enough to find a spot to take that unforgettable super portrait of your favorite seabird. Most people love the puffins and they are indeed tourist-friendly. Everyone takes out their camera, whether it be in their Smartphone or with a foot-long lens.

The more adventurous take the trail towards Keflavík, an inlet at the other end of the cliffs. They walk past the place where many ships and boats have met their final destination. Látrabjarg is infamous among sailors, for during high seas in the cold Icelandic winter the cliffs offer no place to land. Those who venture too close will never sail out again.

Yet some lives have been saved. In 1947, a British trawler became stranded at Látrabjarg, just before Christmas. The farmers in the neighborhood staged a daring rescue

operation, saving many seamen from certain death. A short movie about the operation can be seen at Hnjótur museum, which is along the road back and well worth a stop.

A visit to Látrabjarg is unlikely to fade away in your memory. It is a unique experience knowing that you looked over the border between life and death and made it back

By Benedikt Jóhannesson

Photo by Páll Kjartansson



EASY PIECES

German Icelandic design duo and couple Susanne Ostwald and Ingvar Helgason are making a splash in the fashion world with their elegant yet playful clothing, which is sold in 29 countries.



Having staged its first proper catwalk show last Spring at New York Fashion Week, Ostwald Helgason has garnered popularity among fashionistas worldwide thanks to its winning formula: easy pieces, such as T-shirts, skirts, dresses and jumpers made from light and soft fabrics of the highest quality. The textiles factory also makes fabrics for leading fashion houses such as Dior Couture. “We wanted to make top quality clothing more accessible,” explains Ingvar Helgason. “Our typical customer works in the creative industries; she is interested in fashion but wants to stand out. Her look is a bit preppy, she enjoys being feminine without being sexy; she’s a bit quirky and has a great sense of humor.” In addition to a number of international style icons, recently pop divas Rihanna, Beyoncé and Solange Knowles have been spotted wearing these designs. “We’re always happy to see someone wearing our clothes; it really is the biggest compliment,” he says.

It all began in 2002 when Iceland-born Ingvar (1980) and German-born Susanne Ostwald (1979) met while working as interns for fashion designer Marjan Pejoski, perhaps best known for designing Björk’s famous swan dress. A year later they became a couple and in 2008 they founded Ostwald Helgason and set up their London studio. Susanne has an M.A. in clothing design whereas Ingvar is more or less self-taught. “The first years really were a struggle,” he admits. “It took us four years to find our niche in the

market—the thing we can do better than the rest. There are so many talented people in the fashion industry, so this is quite difficult. But we have been very lucky and continue to learn as we go along.” Evidently they are doing something right. Now, six years later, their collections are available in 90 stores in 29 countries, including Kazakhstan, Singapore and Saudi Arabia. “Along with Italy, the United States is our biggest market.” Now that the company is in steady growth Ingvar and Susanne are assembling a design team led by her while he focuses on running the business. About ten people are currently on its pay roll.

Many things are on the horizon for Ostwald Helgason, including adding a range of shoes and handbags. They already have experience in that field after a highly successful collaborative project with British accessories brand ALDO. The key to success? “Patience. Also, finding people who can give you good business advice and speak from experience. But of course it really comes down to luck. And last but not least: Being prepared to work seven days a week for many years. You have to really want it.”

*By Ásta Andrésdóttir
Photos Courtesy of Ostwald Helgason*



FISHY FOIE GRAS

A valuable export product, Icelanders are catching on to the fad of fish liver.



Fish liver has long been highly-valued in Iceland, consumed in liquid form as *lýsi* ('fish liver oil'), for centuries. Traditionally, it has also been served boiled with roe, potatoes and yellow turnips. However, only recently have Icelanders come to appreciate it smoked and served as a type of 'fishy foie gras,' or as a spread in the form of paté.

FINDING NEW VALUE IN FISH

In spite of its long tradition as a fishing nation and while appreciating some fish by-products, Icelanders have, up until recent years, been picky in terms of what fish species and parts of the fish are consumed. Especially after the economic collapse in 2008, calls have been made for innovation in seafood production and finding new value in fish.

Making use of what otherwise would go to waste, canning factory Akraborg—founded in Akranes, West Iceland, in 1989—is among companies exporting fish by-products. For more than 20 years, Akraborg has been a leader in the production of high-quality cod liver. Today it turns out approximately 11 million cans per year, making it the largest producer of cod liver in the world.

While specializing in canned cod liver, Akraborg also manufactures other products, such as cod liver paté, canned milt, canned monkfish liver and hot-smoked capelin. Akraborg buys the raw ma-

terial for its products from both small and large-scale fishing companies around the country and exports its products to markets in Europe, Canada and Asia.

FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

Akraborg's products can now also be found on shelves of Icelandic supermarkets, where cod liver paté and smoked cod liver are enjoying increased popularity. The products have found friends in high places, such as Dorrit Moussaieff, wife of President of Iceland Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, who has been vocal in her affection for cod liver.

Dorrit passed her affection on to her friend U.S. celebrity chef Martha Stewart when she visited the country in 2012, resulting in Stewart promoting the first lady's recipe for 'Flambéed Cod Liver' on the *Martha Stewart Show* and posting it on marthastewart.com. Judging by the recipe's four-out-of-five star rating, fish liver is getting people fired up.

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir. Photo courtesy of Akraborg.

HAND IN HAND

Ceramicist Ólöf Erla Bjarnadóttir and mixed media designer Margrét Guðnadóttir learned that good ideas come from great collaboration when they paired up for the 2014 DesignMarch festival.

Ceramicist Ólöf Erla Bjarnadóttir and mixed media designer Margrét Guðnadóttir from Kirsuberjatréð, a store in downtown Reykjavík run by 12 artists and designers, came up with the idea for these kitchen utensils when they started collaborating in the lead-up to this year's DesignMarch, Iceland's annual design festival.

Made from porcelain and the wood of the basket willow, grown on Margrét's property in Skorradalur, West Iceland, the utensils come in several different types, including salad spoons and ladles. The project is a labor of love with much care going into both making the individual pieces and ensuring that they match in form, color and functionality.

Ólöf starts by hand molding the spoons from porcelain in her palm or on a potter's wheel. Then she glazes the spoons, using blue, green and brown tones, and then fires them. Next, Margrét carves the handles to fit each piece.


Ólöf, who graduated from the Icelandic College of Art and Crafts (now the Iceland Academy of the Arts) in 1982, has been working with porcelain for the last 15 to 20 years while Margrét studied design, textiles and basket weaving in the United States and mostly works with paper, reed and other natural materials.

By Zoë Robert. Photo by Áslaug Snorradóttir.

THE ILLUMINATED SKY

You only need two things to witness the northern lights: A clear sky and a little bit of luck.





What are the northern lights, or aurora borealis? French philosopher Pierre Gassendi named the phenomenon in 1621 after Aurora, the Roman goddess of dawn, and Boreas, the Greek name for the north wind.

This natural light display in the sky, in the high-latitude regions, is caused by the collision of energetically-charged particles with atoms in the high-altitude atmosphere, 80 km (50 miles) above us. The charged particles originate in the magnetosphere and solar winds and are directed by the earth's magnetic field into the atmosphere.

The first written account of *norðurljós*, which is what the northern lights are called in Icelandic, can be found in ancient Norse literature, in the chronicle *Konungs Skuggsjá*, dating back to 1230. The chronicler had heard about the phenomenon from a compatriot returning from Greenland. He gives three possible explanations for the northern lights: either the ocean was surrounded by a vast fire, the sun's flares could reach the night, or perhaps the glaciers stored energy, which eventually caused them to become fluorescent.

How do you capture the northern lights? First you need a clear dark sky. Checking out the Icelandic Met Office's aurora forecast on *vedur.is* should be your first step in planning the perfect shot. Next you need a sturdy tripod that won't shake in the Icelandic wind and long exposure. Then put a wide-angle lens on your camera and focus the lens at infinity.

The first image in this article was exposed for 49 seconds, at f: 2.2, and the ISO was 400. The trick is to be patient. That night, the aurora forecast was perfect and when I arrived at Lake Kleifarvatn at 8:30 pm in early March, the road was lined with cars, waiting for the spectacle. By midnight, everybody had left because nothing was happening. Then, an hour later, as I was standing alone by the lake's shore, the sky lit up and the northern lights started to dance for me for a brief moment. Then they left, as suddenly as they had appeared.

Words and photos by Páll Stefánsson.





AN EMBRACE FROM THE PAST

Named after its original owner, the poet and first Icelandic Minister of State, Hannes Hafstein, Hannesarholt is a new cultural center in one of Reykjavík's most striking and historic houses.

There's an air of grandeur about the large, white house that proudly stands at 10 Grundarstígur amidst the colorful corrugated iron houses of Pingholt, 101 Reykjavík. After all, this is no ordinary house. It was commissioned in 1915 by Iceland's beloved statesman and poet Hannes Hafstein (1861-1922) who lived there with his family until his dying day. It has now been renovated and turned into a flourishing cultural center, restaurant and café, attracting guests from every corner of the world. "The idea is to invite the public to enjoy its atmosphere and fall into its rhythm, stepping into a place where the past connects with the present," says its owner and founder, Ragnheiður Jóna Jónsdóttir. "Many people who come here don't pay much attention to Hannes—the house makes them remember their grandmother or their old aunt, leading them back to their own personal roots."

Hannesarholt is a non-profit organization, midway between a home and an institute; a meeting point for the public and for scholars. "It is a place for preserving our cultural history; remembering where we came from and where we are going. Retrieving our cultural memory," Ragnheiður explains. "That way, we will be better equipped to face the future. Icelanders sprinted from the middle ages to modernity in the short span of a hundred years. The way

the nation managed to rise from poverty and ignorance is truly admirable but Hannesarholt is about slowing down; looking back to the people who built the society in which we live."

This charming four-floor house has been restored in the spirit of the time it was built. The entry level floor is home to a restaurant and café while the upper floor has cozy meeting rooms. Another room contains items once belonging to Hafstein, including his desk, which he must have used to pen his striking poems that encouraged the Icelandic people to take the leap into modernity. In the auditorium, various events are hosted, including sing-alongs, where people get together and sing classic folk songs – a way of preserving the cultural heritage. Other events include philosophical debates, lectures, literary nights, reading circles and historic city walks around the area. "We committed to getting Hannesarholt up and running but eventually it has to become self-sustainable. It opened in February of 2013 and things are looking promising. People's appreciation for this project has been both rewarding and encouraging. I really feel privileged in this work and hope that it can make life in Reykjavík more meaningful, for its inhabitants and visitors alike."

By Ásta Andrésdóttir. Photo by Páll Stefánsson



ALL THAT JAZZ

Reykjavík Jazz Festival celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2014.

Last year a visitor to Iceland remarked that it was unbelievable how many jazz groups there are in Reykjavík. His hometown has about ten times the population of Iceland and “they manage to put together one for a special occasion. We could never have a whole festival.” It is true, that during the Reykjavík Jazz Festival a whole week of concerts fills the heart of every jazz lover in town with joy.

The Reykjavík Jazz Festival has a long tradition. In August 2014, the festival celebrated its 25th year and it keeps getting bigger, attracting more and more people each year. This year almost all the activity took place in Harpa Concert Hall on the waterfront. The festivities started with a parade, led by big band guru and composer Samúel Jón Samúels-son, from Hlemmur square down Reykjavík’s main street Laugavegur. At Harpa the artists and fans took part in the opening ceremony, with unbelievably enjoyable speeches (ac-



cording to the organizers), and of course music, for music is what it is all about.

The festival was a blend of the conventional and the unusual. Well-known Icelandic writer Einar Kárasen came on stage with Voices of a Nation, and read chapters from the *Fóst-bræðra Saga*, which features the loves and cruelty between two friends and Vikings. The evening continued with a blend of tributes, jams and concerts.

The list of performers read like a who’s who of Icelandic jazz. Óskar Guðjónsson was there with his tenor sax, guitarist Björn Thoroddsen, piano players Agnar Jón Agnarsson,

Gunnar Gunnarsson and Ástvaldur Traustason and bassist Tómas R. Einarsson. Pianist Sunna Gunnlaugs, the queen of Icelandic jazz, has been touring Europe and the U.S., but returned home with her trio.

A number of new CDs were also published during the festival. Trumpet player Snorri Sigurðarson celebrated his first solo album *Vellir* and composer Tómas R. Einarsson came out with a collection of old and new songs on CD *Mannabörn*. Sigurður Flo- sason’s Copenhagen Quartet came back to the festival with a celebration of his CD *The Eleventh Hour*.

The list goes on and so does the music. The Reykjavík Jazz Festival is here to stay and attracts more and more visitors every year. If you’re a jazz fan, it’s certainly worth the trip.

By Benedikt Jóhannesson.
Photos by Páll Stefánsson.

GLOBAL LEADER FROM DALVÍK

With humble beginnings in North Iceland, Promens has grown to become a global leader in plastics manufacturing.



Icelandic plastics manufacturer Promens has come a long way since its beginnings as a producer of plastic tubs for storing fish in Dalvík, North Iceland, in 1984. Driven by demands from the Icelandic fishing industry to develop a product that extended the quality lifetime of fish, the company, which was then known as Sæplast, developed its revolutionary double-walled insulated plastic tub. After huge demand for the product in Iceland, exports began and the company was listed on the Icelandic Stock Exchange in 1993.

Fast forward 30 years and the company is a leading global plastics manufacturer operating 41 manufacturing facilities in 22 countries in Europe, North America, Asia and Africa, and employing around 3,800 people. Promens has now diversified and also manufactures packaging for food, cosmetics, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, serving multiple industries, such as food processing, chemical and medical industries, as well as the automotive, heavy machinery and electronics industries. In 2013, the company listed record-breaking sales of EUR 594.5 million (USD 780.7 million) in sales and a net profit of EUR 19.9 million (USD 26.1 million). The company plans to float its shares on the stock market before the end of 2014.

Innovation is key to Promen's strategy, earning the company nu-

merous awards, including the Dutch Packaging Innovation Award De Gouden Noot 2008 and WorldStar 2008 Award from the World Packaging Organisation. Promens won the award for a multi-trip, UN-approved transport container for chemicals with integrated spill containment and a tracking and tracing system. The company was also granted the ScanStar 2012 Award for CombiRound, an environmentally-friendly cup and the WorldStar 2008 Award for the Shellfish Tank for Aqualife, designed to transport living shellfish by sea and road. In 2014, the company's success continued when it was awarded the Sustainable Plastic Packaging Award and MTP Gold Medal for Slidissime, the first airless cosmetic jar with a tactile pump, which incorporates the new 'slide' gesture, which is widely found in touch screens of tablet computers and smart phones.

And Promens' future continues to look bright, CEO and president Jakob Sigurðsson says. "Having enjoyed yet another robust year we have every reason to expect stronger earnings moving forward as we pursue our refined corporate and segmental strategies, especially based on our entry into new geographical markets and segments with some of our global blue chip customers, although European/Russian uncertainty may have a short-term impact."

By Zoë Robert. Photos courtesy of Promens.

STRONGER, STRONGEST

Iceland has a strong case to become the ideal place to produce extremely strong and light carbon fiber.

Few industrial products have as bright a future as carbon fiber famous for high strength-to-weight ratio and rigidity, and used mainly in aerospace and automotive fields, such as Formula One racing and top-end bicycles. As manufacturing techniques improve and cost reduces, carbon fiber is becoming increasingly common in small consumer goods that require strength and lightness.

Carbon fiber production in Iceland is an exciting prospect based on a variety of economic, environmental and political advantages and has the opportunity to be—with lower cost—more efficient and more environmentally friendly than on both sides of Atlantic Ocean.

WHY ICELAND?

COMPETITIVELY PRICED, RENEWABLE ENERGY

Iceland's unique resources of clean, green, low-cost energy—through access to steam and hydro power—can be hugely beneficial to carbon production. This makes for an exciting opportunity for a production process that is lower cost—and that utilizes green resources to create products that help the world lessen its carbon footprint.

LOWER PRODUCTION COSTS PER KILOGRAM OF CARBON FIBER

According to research, the production cost per kilogram of carbon fiber has the potential to be significantly lower than elsewhere. Backed by a favorable corporate tax system, this makes Iceland a hugely attractive prospect.

PLENTIFUL RESOURCES—FROM LAND TO WORKFORCE

Land is widely available in Iceland, and therefore available at a lower cost, making carbon production more economical than elsewhere. Iceland also offers a highly educated workforce in the science sector.

INVESTING IN CARBON FIBER PRODUCTION IN ICELAND—FIND OUT MORE OR GET IN TOUCH

For more information about opportunities in the carbon fiber sector in Iceland please feel free to contact Invest In Iceland, +354 561-5200, info@invest.is.

By Páll Stefánsson



OF MAMMÚT PROPORTIONS

A decade after exploding onto the scene, Mammút has continued to go from strength to strength, this year earning eight nominations at the Icelandic Music Awards.

We played three concerts in three days. Fun, but a lot of work,” guitarist Alexandra Baldursdóttir of the Icelandic rock band Mammút (meaning ‘mammoth’) tells me following the Verslunarmannahelgi (Merchants’ Holiday) long weekend, held the first week of August. “We started by playing Edrúhátíðin [a ‘sober’ festival in South Iceland], then we went to Þjóðhátíð [a popular festival held in Vestmannaeyjar] and then to Ísafjörður to play at the closing of Mýraboltinn [the European Championship in Swamp Soccer], by which time everyone had been playing for three days and was pretty tired, so the atmosphere was completely different at each of the concerts.”

This year has certainly been a busy one for the five-piece. So far this year, Mammút has performed at The Great Escape in Brighton, the U.K.; at Prieks par neatkarību in Riga, Latvia; Aldrei fór ég suður in Ísafjörður; ATP in Keflavík; Secret Solstice in Reykjavík and Eistnaflug metal festival in Neskaupstaður, East Iceland. The girls in the group also collaborated with Icelandic designer Kyrja on a new clothing line earlier this year. Premiering at DesignMarch 2014, the line was named after Mammút’s third and latest album, *Komdu til*

mín svarta systir (‘Come to Me Black Sister’), released in late 2013 by Record Records.

The band, consisting of Alexandra Baldursdóttir and Arnar Pétursson on guitar, Andri Bjartur Jakobsson on drums, Vilborg Ása Dýradóttir on bass and vocalist Katrína ‘Kata’ Mogensen, formed in 2004, later going on to win Músiktilraunir, the Icelandic annual Battle of the Bands, that same year.

Komdu til mín svarta systir—made up of both calm and ‘aggressive’ tracks, as described by Katrína—garnered critical acclaim and earned Mammút eight nominations at the 2013 Icelandic Music Awards. They went on to win three—Album of the Year – Pop & Rock, Song of the Year – Pop & Rock (for ‘Salt’) and Album Cover of the Year—and have made waves in the Icelandic music charts with their singles ‘Blóðberg’ (‘Thyme’) and the aforementioned ‘Salt.’

After a busy schedule of live shows, the band is getting ready to return to the studio in the autumn with a new release due to be rereleased in early 2015.

By Zoë Robert. Photo courtesy of Mammút.

VICTORY FOR SNÆFELL

A women's team from Snæfellsnes makes Icelandic basketball history.



The town of Stykkishólmur is buzzing with excitement. It's a Sunday night in early April and one by one the seats in the indoor basketball arena are filling up. Extra chairs are lined up courtside and children claim space on the gym mats at the back of the room. The women from both sides are warming up for the big game and as the anticipation builds, pop star Páll Óskar makes a surprise appearance leading up to tip off.

By 7:15 pm, 600 spectators pack the hall—no small number for a town of 1,100 inhabitants. Local team Snæfell, named after the West Iceland mountain on which Snæfellsjökull glacier sits, is about to make history and their supporters are here to cheer them on.

By winning against Haukar from Hafnarfjörður in the final of three playoffs, they'll earn the title Icelandic Champions in Women's Basketball for the first time since the town formed its inaugural team in 1938. The men won the title in 2010.

Despite star player, and the sole foreigner on the team, Chynna Unique Brown from Texas, being injured, Snæfell takes the crown, winning 69:62 (10:12, 23:25, 46:34, 69:62). Brown was out injured for the first two playoffs but managed to play 20 minutes of the final. "It's an amazing feeling, in my first year here, to help take the team to champions," she tells *Iceland Review* following the match.

Head coach Ingi Þór Steinþórsson is naturally thrilled about the result too. "We've written a big chapter in the history of women's basketball today," he says. Hildur Sigurðardóttir, who was named Player of the



Match, scoring 20 points, makes sure to acknowledge the support of the home crowd. "Everyone in town is here and they've been great."

For Gunnhildur Gunnarsdóttir, who scored 12 points for Haukar, the loss was particularly hard. She used to play for Snæfell—her sister Berglind still does—and her father, Gunnar Svanlaugsson, is the head of the town's basketball division. "At least we can say that we lost against the best team in Iceland," Gunnhildur reflects when the photographer and I run into her at a pit stop on the drive back to Reykjavík.

At the awards ceremony, Páll Óskar returns for a rendition of Queen's 'We Are the Champions' as the town gets ready to celebrate the night away.



By Zoë Robert. Photos by Páll Stefánsson.

WORTH VISITING

Four museums you should check out on your next trip to Iceland.



Reykjavík Museum of Photography – Reykjavík

When in Iceland's capital, be sure to stop at the Reykjavík Museum of Photography, exhibiting both historical and contemporary works in artistic, social and cultural contexts. The museum preserves various photo collections from professional and amateur photographers and has around five million photographs from the period around 1870 to 2002.

Tryggvagata 15, 101 Reykjavík.

ljosmyndasafnreykjavikur.is/en ZR



ICELANDIC MUSEUM OF ROCK & ROLL – KEFLAVÍK

The Icelandic Museum of Rock & Roll opened in Keflavík, Reykjanesbær, next-door to Iceland's main international airport, in 2014. Here you meet Björk, Sigur Rós and Hljómar, the first real rock/pop band from Iceland and Keflavík, where Icelandic pop was born. Here you're introduced to the history of Icelandic popular music and hear sound bites of the best songs from the rock called Iceland. Hjal-lavegur 2, 260 Reykjanesbær. Contact info@hljomaholl.is ahead of your visit to arrange a guided tour. rokksafn.is/en PS

Earthquake Center – Kópasker

Don't miss a visit to the Earthquake Center (Skjálftasetrið) in Kópasker in Öxarfjörður, North-east Iceland. Here you can see close up what happened when the big earthquake hit the village on January 13, 1976, and 90 out of the 130 inhabitants had to be rescued in an Arctic blizzard at nighttime.

Akurgerði 6, 670 Kópasker. Call 864-2157 to arrange a visit outside summer. skjalftasetur.is PS

Photos by Páll Stefánsson.



Ósvör – Bolungarvík

Ósvör, the maritime museum in Bolungarvík in the West Fjords, contains a double 19th century fishing base, salting hut, fish drying area and drying hut. The curator greets visitors wearing a leather suit similar to the one Icelandic sailors wore at that time and describes what there is to see, like the row-boat Ölver.

Vítastígur 3/Aðalstræti 21, Bolungarvík. Call 892-5744 before visiting outside summer. osvor.is PS



FINDING INSPIRATION IN THE LAND OF THE SAGAS

The Iceland Writers Retreat offers workshops and literary tours.



There is an Icelandic expression that everyone “carries a book in his stomach” (*að ganga með bók í maganum*). Love for the written word is strong in this country and so, while it is only an expression, it certainly feels true that all Icelanders have a story in their hearts.

Many of them will publish these tales too. Icelanders read, buy, write, and publish more books per capita than most other nations on earth. And Reykjavík is the world’s first non-native English speaking UNESCO City of Literature.

This rich literary tradition, combined with an inspiring, unique natural environment, are the founding pillars behind the Iceland Writers Retreat, a new, annual holiday package that was held for the first time in April 2014.

The retreat was conceived for aspiring and published book writers—or just anyone with an interest in writing—to come to Iceland to work on the craft of writing. Participants at-

tended several small-group workshops led by world-famous authors, including (in 2014) Pulitzer Prize winner Geraldine Brooks and New Yorker staff writer Susan Orlean.

An equally important component of the concept, however, was showcasing Iceland as a global literary nation, and readings by local authors were very popular. Highlights of the inaugural event included a special literary-themed Golden Circle tour, pub night with a concert by the popular Icelandic musician Lay Low, and a reception hosted by the President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson at his official residence, Bessastaðir.

“To participate in a writers’ retreat that took place in Iceland only made sense,” wrote participant Arielle Demchuk from Edmonton on her blog. “Writers from around the world flocking to literature’s most fostering and nurturing country.”

Four Seasons magazine named the IWR one of the Top 10 “Reasons to Travel in

2014,” along with the Sochi Olympics and the World Cup, while the Singapore Straits Times said the event was “extremely inspiring ... superbly run.” The Sydney Morning Herald listed it as one of the world’s best writers’ retreats.

The second Iceland Writers Retreat will take place 8-12 April, 2015. Confirmed instructors include the bestselling and critically acclaimed Barbara Kingsolver, Adam Gopnik, Ruth Reichl and Iceland’s own Sjórn.

After five days of workshops, readings, and sightseeing, the organizers hope that all participants will be carrying a book in their hearts, and that the IWR will ultimately become a permanent fixture on Iceland’s cultural calendar.

icelandwritersretreat.com

Eliza Reid is the co-founder of Iceland Writers Retreat.

By Eliza Reid. Photo by Kent Lárus Björnsson.

SAGA TRAVEL'S SUCCESS STORY



Founded in 2009, Saga Travel in Akureyri has grown from having two to 18 positions in the high season of summer 2014.

Saga Travel founder and general manager Sævar Sigurðsson's goal was to market North Iceland as an all-year tourist destination and the company's creative tours certainly give people a reason to visit the region in all seasons. "Our biggest sell to foreign visitors is to be able to offer tours, in all kinds of weather and under any conditions, tours that can be meaningful and good experiences to nature destinations." These include the culture-based tours 'Local Food and Gourmet,' 'Akureyri Art & City Walk,' 'Siglufjörður & the Coastline Culture,' and 'Icelandic Churches.'

Frequented destinations, such as Lake Mývatn and Dettifoss waterfall, are not overlooked but given a special twist, Sævar explains. "We visit Dettifoss in winter and travel the Diamond Circle [the town of Húsavík, Ásbyrgi canyon, Mývatn and Dettifoss] at night and travel through the Mývatn area from

noon until midnight, including the Mývatn Nature Baths and the northern lights on the way back," he says of one of Saga Travel's most popular tours. Lofthellir cave exploration is another big hit.

New tours are often created following enquiries by prospective visitors. "We're developing package tours where we pick people up at Keflavík International Airport and take them on a tour of the country—'slow travel' is the key word here," Sævar reveals. One of the packages is a nine-day tour from Snæfellsnes in the west to Langanes in the northeast, called 'Arctic Iceland at Afternoon and Evening.' "We travel from noon until midnight. The advantage of this type of traveling is that first of all, people can wake up at ease and take a walk where we stay—we make sure that there are beautiful walks in the area—before getting on the bus and driving off. Secondly, we arrive at destinations at

other times than other tourists and thirdly, we get to experience the midnight sun in the spring and northern lights in the fall without compromising a good night's sleep."

Ideas are aplenty. "Under the 'slow travel' concept, we're also developing tours in connection with golf in North Iceland, including the Arctic Open, bird watching and city breaks of Akureyri and the Mývatn area where people have five to seven days to explore the surrounding environment in closer detail."

Demand determines supply, Sævar states. "What describes our company the best is that we don't expect our customers to adapt to our needs; we adapt to our customers' needs."

*By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir.
Photo by Páll Stefánsson.*

BATH WITH A VIEW

While enjoying a relaxing soak in the Mývatn Nature Baths, bathers can marvel at the view of Lake Mývatn and Hverfjall volcano.

Taking advantage of the region's geothermal activity, the Mývatn Nature Baths give bathers the chance to soak in naturally warm water drawn from depths of up to 2,500 meters (8,200 feet). Visitors can also access two steam baths located where natural steam rises straight from the ground. For luxury treatment, guests can book massages, both in a special room and in the lagoon itself.

Opening in 2004, the Mývatn Nature Baths are based on a centuries' old Icelandic tradition of bathing in natural hot springs. The region is famous for Grjótagjá, a small lava cave with a thermal spring inside. The Mývatn Nature Baths, however, have the advantage of modern changing rooms, stable water temperature and a view like no other of Lake Mývatn and Hverfjall volcano. The on-site café Kaffi Kvika offers light meals and drinks in stunning surroundings.

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir. Photo by Páll Stefánsson.



SO FAR... AWAY

What has surprised you the most about Iceland, so far?

People visiting Iceland for the first time have expectations. They have read about the volcanoes, the wind and where to find the largest puffin colonies. Is the Iceland they visit different to the Iceland they have seen in books and on TV?

We randomly asked four first-time visitors what surprised them the most about Iceland so far.



Gao - China 7,873 KM/4,892 MILES FROM HOME

Being connected with 3G/4G on my phone the entire Ring Road 1 around Iceland. In the middle of nowhere I could check the latest weather forecast, send a snapshot to friends and family in China—amazing.

Julien - France | 2,524 KM/1,568 MILES FROM HOME

The terrain—the endless lava fields, naked mountains, the pebbles on the south coast.



Zuzanna - Poland | 2,903 KM/1,804 MILES FROM HOME

Everything and nothing. Maybe the ever-changing weather. I was not prepared for rain and sunshine in the same hour. I had a problem knowing how to dress while on a one-day hike in the interior. But Iceland has amazing nature. Next time I will come better prepared and dressed for the conditions.

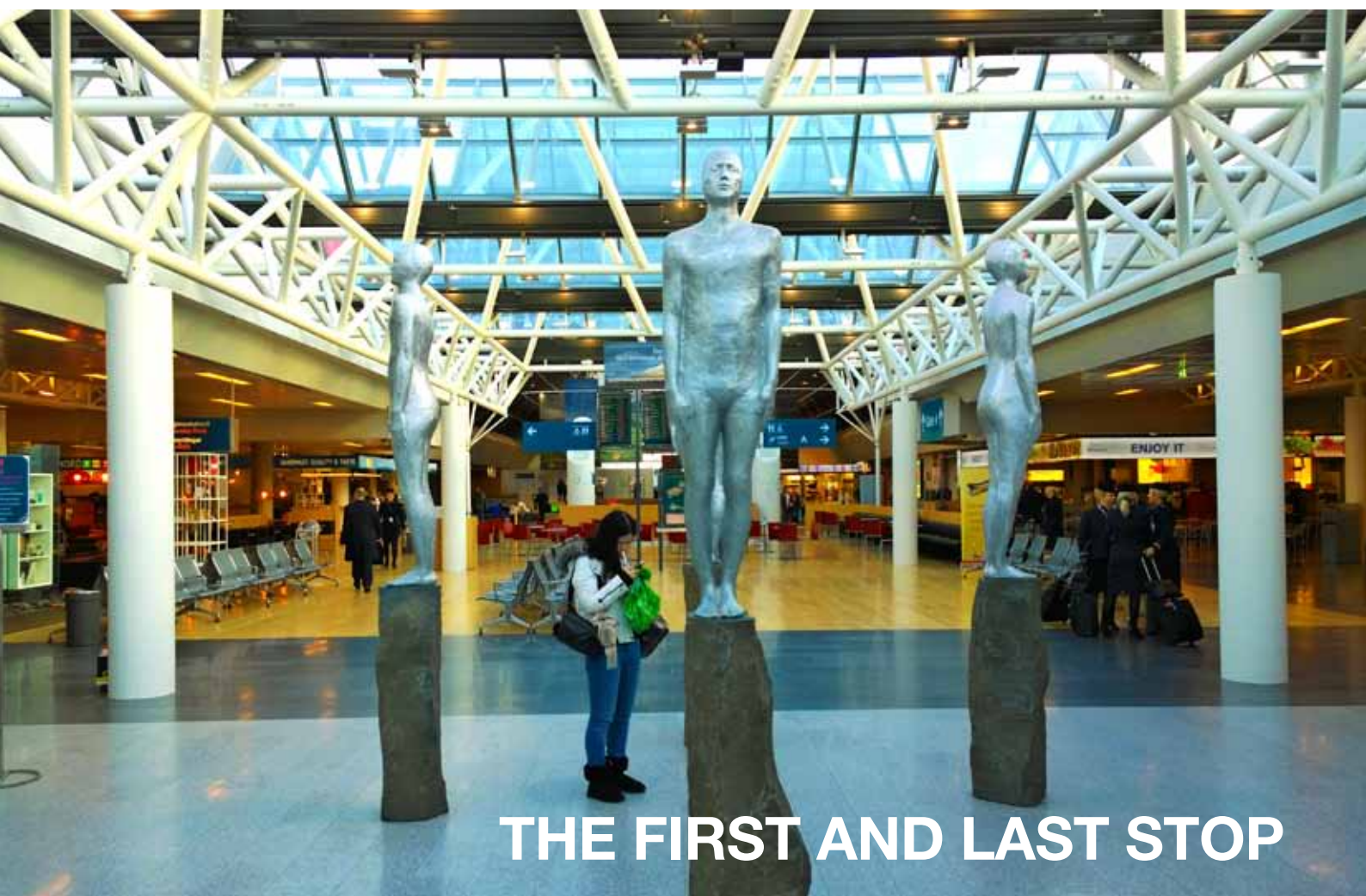


Golan - Israel | 5,224 KM/3,246 MILES FROM HOME

The vegetation and the weather. I was surprised how many big trees are in the capital and how warm it is. I was expecting it to be much colder in the highlands. The temperature never went below 10°C (50°F).



*Words and photos
by Páll Stefánsson.*



THE FIRST AND LAST STOP

Most people enter and leave Iceland through Keflavík International Airport.

It is hard to say what you would notice first when you enter Iceland. Many people mention that the landscape looks like the moon. Little do they know about the many hidden pearls in the lava, with its many trails which lead to lakes, canyons, caves and other adventurous spots. The Blue Lagoon, of course, is well known, and perhaps the most visited place in Iceland. Some people are swimming in the lagoon within an hour of landing at Keflavík International Airport.

But what about the airport itself? Even though we tend to think that one airport is like any other most Icelanders are proud of the Keflavík airport. It connects the country with almost 50 cities in Europe and North America, in addition to the occasional flight to China, Japan and India. The terminal is named after Iceland's most famous explorer, Leifur Eiríksson, who in the year 1000 discovered Vinland, or America as it is now known.

Keflavík airport used to be a military sta-

tion. It was built in WWII and long served as a NATO station. Now it has only a civil function and serves an increasing number of passengers each year as Iceland becomes more popular as a destination. In 2013 the number of arriving passengers exceeded one million for the first time.

The current terminal was opened in 1987 and separated the airport's civil traffic from the military base. It was later extended with the opening of the South Building and the North Building was enlarged in 2007. In recent years there have been talks of enlarging the terminal even further due to the increase in traffic.

If you have the time to stop in duty-free stores you might be pleasantly surprised. Due to the favorable exchange rate many items are quite competitively-priced. The Duty-Free Store was chosen as the 'Best Airport Tax Free Shopping Service Provider in 2013' by the magazine *Business Destina-*

tions. Among the criteria used were product range and prices, not least for clothing and accessories. The product range in DutyFree Fashion was considered good but the prices were found to be among the best in Europe. The Duty-Free Store runs DutyFree Fashion where a very good range of Icelandic design can be found, in addition to world famous brands, such as Burberry, Mulberry, and Hugo Boss.

From 2010, turnover has increased by 50 percent, which is probably among the largest turnover increases of duty-free stores in Europe. This can in large part be traced to increased business from foreign passengers. People from abroad are purchasing more Icelandic products than before and the Duty-Free Store has greatly increased its business with Icelandic suppliers and designers.

The airport is run by Isavia Ltd., a company that oversees most of the flight services in Iceland.

By Benedikt Jóhannesson.
Photo by Páll Stefánsson



ICELAND'S VALUE PROPOSITION FOR INVESTORS

Competitive green energy, advanced technical infrastructure, a strong Research and Development (R&D) tradition, sound business environment with low corporate tax and incentives for both foreign direct investment and R&D projects, all play a part in Iceland's value proposition to foreign investors. Icelanders are looking towards knowledge-based industries, diversification and the green economy as a way forward. Attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is important to Iceland.

The latest international competitiveness reports confirm that Iceland has a solid foundation to build on. The country's highest ranking is for infrastructure and in criteria such as R&D personnel per capita, internet users, future energy supply, education expenditure, green technology solutions, easy access to water, minimal electricity costs and internet bandwidth, Iceland ranks amongst the world's top nations.

Iceland focuses on a favorable environment for businesses in general, including low corporate tax, availability of land, efficient business environment and a new incentives regime, offering a range of benefits from low corporate tax ceilings and exemption from charges to direct training grants.

BRIDGING MARKETS AND OFFERING FREE TRADE

Iceland is ideally located right between two of the world's strongest markets, North America and Europe. The flight time to Boston is five hours; London is three hours away. Regular shipping takes place to both sides of the Atlantic: three days a week to Europe and seven days a week to the United States.

As a member of the European Economic Area (EEA), Iceland is a part of the European internal market with tariff-free access to the European Union. Iceland has recently concluded an extensive free trade agreement with China which will open up new and exciting opportunities for companies located in Iceland.

A well-educated nation with a top-rated education system welcomes industries that demand highly skilled workers. Life sciences, various creative industries, production of computer games, clean-tech companies and high-tech solutions for the food industry and fishing are just examples of the growth in knowledge-based industries in Iceland. People are generally very open-minded towards new technology—it is no surprise that, according to the Global Innovation Index 2013, Iceland ranks third when it comes to employment in the knowledge-intensive services.

PEOPLE, POWER AND LAND

Iceland has vast spaces of land available close to advanced infrastructures and the power grid. Industrial scale pesticide-free greenhouses and fish farms benefit from the proximity to geothermal power plants. The available steam, electricity and chemicals from the geothermal power plants make them ideal for green chemical industries such as the production of Sodium Chlorate, Poly Silicon and Carbon Fibers.

Land is usually leased from local municipalities and rates can be negotiated. The diverse and otherworldly landscape of Iceland, sound infrastructure, rich cultural heritage, the healing powers of geothermal water and advanced health care system have led to rapid growth of the tourism industry with increased emphasis on health and lifestyle-related tourism, conferences and year-round adventures.

COOL LOCATION

Iceland's claim to be a cool location does not only refer to the booming tourism industry, vibrant cultural scene and world-renowned creative industries. In the case of data centers, cool is meant literally, as the temperate climate means year-round, natural and cost-free cooling, which reduces electricity consumption. Add to this an abundance of green energy, an educated and IT-minded workforce and multiple submarine fiber optic cables connecting Iceland to Europe and North-America and you have an ideal and cost-competitive location for data centers.

WHY ICELAND?

Advanced economy and infrastructure, right between two of the world's strongest markets.

Europe's most competitive prices and long term contracts for green energy from vast renewable hydro- and geothermal resources.

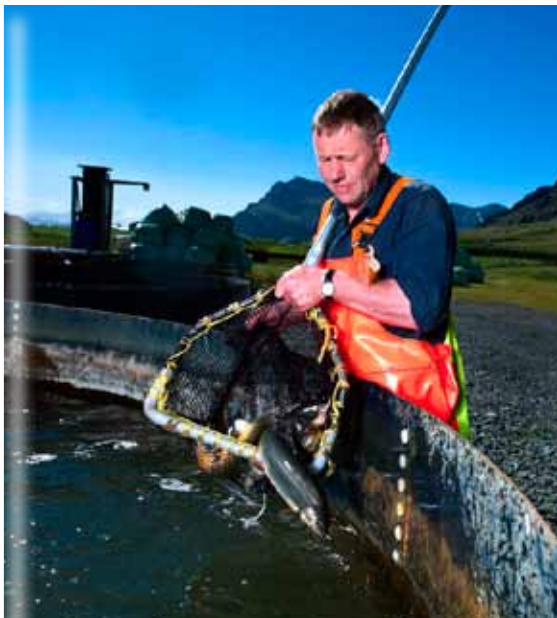
Low corporate tax, an efficient incentives regime for FDI and European legislative framework.

A young nation, educated and multilingual workforce in a highly flexible labor market, willing to adopt new technologies.

A safe, family-friendly environment, spectacular nature and an abundance of low-cost land for development.



ÍSLANDSSTOFA
PROMOTE ICELAND



ICELANDIC MOVIES: DRAMATIC, HUMOR



OF HORSES AND MEN

Together with his actors and some amazing Icelandic horses, director Benedikt Erlingsson has created a masterpiece. *Of Horses and Men* (*Hross í oss*; 2013), the director's film debut, is about what has always been close to Icelanders: horses and nature. However, *Of Horses and Men* is no ordinary horse and nature film, but rather a keyhole peep into Iceland's past.

In the 1980s, life in Skagafjörður, North Iceland, was still quiet, predictable and calm. People on remote farms communicated with each other by light signals and binoculars were an important tool in daily life.

Of Horses and Men is the essence of Iceland. The movie tells of oddities in life and love affairs, and how both are closely connected with nature—be it in the sexual intercourse of stallion and mare or of man and woman. Wherever the story itself seems a little weak, pictures of incredible strength and poetry capture the eye of the beholder. And because they do so with such immensity, the film needs no spoken words. You need not understand the Mongolian sailor caressing the horse on the suspension bridge. And the grandeur of the Swede Johanna with her six hand horses deserves nothing but reverent silence.

Horses are everywhere in this movie. Strong and fast, life-giving, overwhelmingly wild and yet tender, and always at people's side, up to the last breath. In the static nature shots horses are the moving elements. They move people. They move the soul. At the same time they are the stationary element, as if to indicate, "Why are you going mad?" They represent beauty, power, and eternity in this loving story that does not condemn ugliness and weakness.

Of Horses and Men is an ode to the Icelandic horse. It celebrates in a captivating way the horse as the only reliable truth besides human banter and trifle. It straightforwardly makes plain: without the horse you people are nothing in this country.

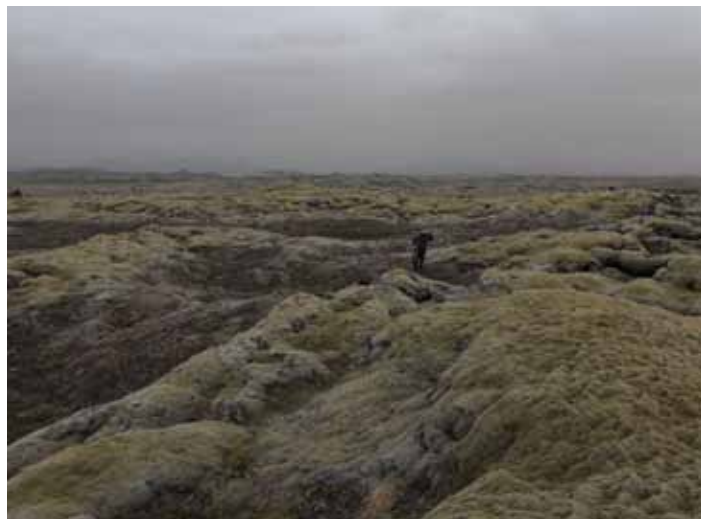
Of Horses and Men is poetry in moving pictures.

The film won the trophy for Best Film at the 2014 Eddas, the Icelandic Film and Television Awards and Benedikt Erlingsson was named Best Director at the 2013 Tokyo International Film Festival and Best New Director at San Sebastián, Spain, in 2013.

By Dagmar Trodler.

Filmmakers in Iceland are constantly coming up with new ideas, finding inspiration in fields as different as the corrupt world of banking, volcanoes and horse culture. Here, we look at three new releases.

OUS AND VOLCANIC



LIFE IN A FISH BOWL

In the years leading up to the economic collapse in Iceland in 2008 the lives of Eik (Hera Hilmarsdóttir), a young, single mother taking desperate measures to make ends meet, Móri (Þorsteinn Bachmann), a drunken middle-aged author with a tragic past, and Sölvi (Þorvaldur Davíð Kristjánsson), a footballer-turned-banker in a corrupt world, become intertwined. Unlikely friendships form, the underdogs show their true colors and the shooting star takes a stumble. This is the essence of young director Baldvin Z's second full-length feature film *Life in a Fish Bowl* (*Vonarstræti*; 2014). Praised for its deep characterization and superb acting, the human aspect of the film is what touches the audience and has made it the highest-earning film in Icelandic movie theaters in 2014, beating international blockbusters such as *The Hobbit* and *Wolf of Wall Street*. The film has been picked for screening at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), one of the biggest film festivals in North America, in September 2014, and will be distributed internationally by German company Films Boutique.

In retrospect, what stands out is how authentic every single sequence of the film seemed. The story was dramatic yet had a realistic feel to it. The acting was never exaggerated and the conversations between characters felt natural. This, the director explains, is the result of nine years of preparations and development work. The screenplay, written by Baldvin Z and Birgir Örn Steingrímsson, started as a compilation of stories, gradually forming a whole. They met with the actors, not for recitals, but rather for sessions of improvisation, so that everyone could get to know the characters in great detail and the actors would feel comfortable in their interpretation. While not directly based on real characters or events, the writers were inspired by true stories. What went down in the banking world in Iceland in the so-called boom years is shocking to say the least, especially as bankers have stated that the film “nailed” the lingo, the atmosphere and the characters, as the director states. Equally shocking is the fact that while most Icelanders were under the impression that the economy was booming, there were still people like Eik, who couldn't afford the rent or groceries on a basic salary.

Life in a Fish Bowl is, given the topic's nature, highly dramatic, yet not without humor. There are feel-good moments as well, and perhaps that is what makes it so great.

The film is currently being screened with subtitles in Háskólabíó cinema in Reykjavík.

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir.

LIVING WITH LAVA

Focusing on the past, present and future, *Living with Lava* is a documentary that will leave viewers in awe of Iceland's beautiful landscapes but fearful of the power and destruction caused by the country's many volcanoes. *Living with Lava* is a film by Theo Maximilian Goble, the lead editor for the reality show *MasterChef*. The film focuses on three major volcanoes: Eldfell, Eyjafjallajökull and Katla. Behind every volcanic eruption are the stories of those affected. The film crew does a superior job documenting the unique viewpoints as told by Icelanders themselves (with their stories being subtitled into English).

Each volcano was interesting for its own reasons, but learning about the after effects of the infamous Eyjafjallajökull on its nearby residents was the most fascinating because of its recent eruption in 2010. The viewers are introduced to Ólafur, a farmer who operates a family farm at the base of Eyjafjallajökull. Ólafur describes what a privilege it is to have a volcano in his backyard, despite the massive cleanup that occurred after the eruption. Ólafur's account is one of the many fascinating and unique stories the film documents.

What sets *Living with Lava* apart from other documentaries is the music used throughout. It invoked many different emotions in me and is perhaps the best use of music I have encountered in a documentary. It is easy to see why the film has won so many awards.

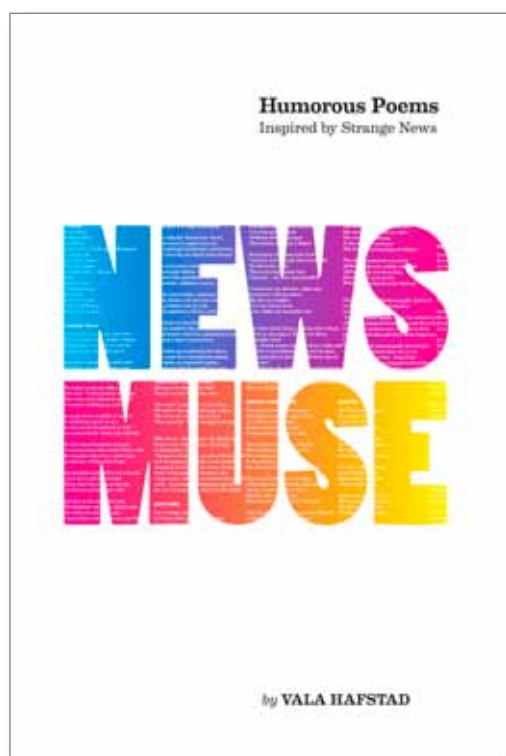
Anyone who has been to Iceland or longs to visit will be in awe of this powerful and informative documentary.

By Laura Nicholson.



ICELANDIC BOOKS: INFORMATIVE, SATIRICAL AND HISTORICAL

*Three very different Iceland-related books that
were recently published in English.*



NEWS MUSE

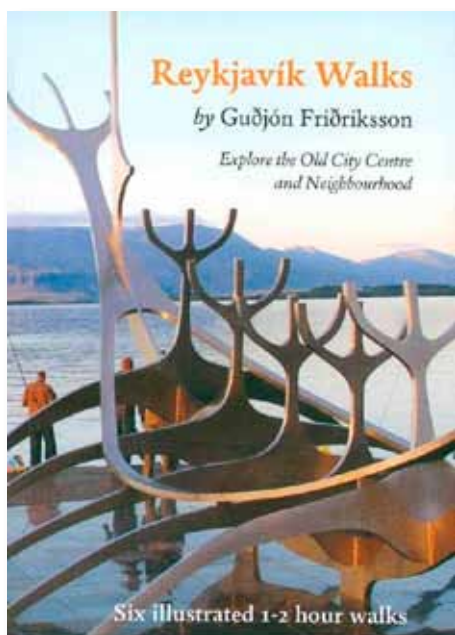
What do you get when you take some of the world's strangest news events and add the wittiness, humor and talent of author Vala Hafstad? The answer is *News Muse: Humorous Poems Inspired by Strange News*, the debut book from native Icelander, Vala.

If you enjoy current events and keeping up with international headlines, then *News Muse* would be a welcome addition to your book collection. Vala writes poems about some of the most outlandish popular news stories, like *Applicants Wanted for a One-Way Ticket to Mars*. She also draws inspiration from stories that weren't as widely publicized, such as *Zoo Seeks Mate for Last Surviving 'Gorgeously Ugly' Fish*.

It's difficult to choose a favorite poem, but *Lost and Found* stands out as most entertaining. In August 2012, *Iceland Review* published an article entitled *Lost Woman Looks for Herself in Iceland's Highlands*, where a foreign tourist was reported missing from her tour bus but happened to be on the bus the entire time (she had simply changed clothes) and even participated in the search for herself. Vala captures the humor and bizarre nature of the story by writing: "And often our mind will not rest/ For we can be truly distressed/ If we cannot find what is lost / A search for oneself can exhaust. / This happened to someone I know/ To Iceland alone, did she go/ She walked off her bus dressed in black/ But wore something red coming back."

Each poem is so thoughtful and creatively written and Vala has a way with words that will leave her readers longing for more. Her sense of humor shines through and it's evident she thought about each word so that every line perfectly rhymed with the one previous. I highly recommend *News Muse* if you are looking for a good laugh or are simply looking to be shocked by strange news stories.

By Laura Nicholson



REYKJAVÍK WALKS

In *Reykjavík Walks*, Icelandic historian Guðjón Friðriksson guides you around the streets of downtown Reykjavík, covering both the well-tread turf of Laugavegur and Austurvöllur, as well as lesser known paths and passageways. Great attention is given to architectural details and the walks take you along some hidden gems of Icelandic design. If you like the idea of a guided walking tour of Reykjavík, but would prefer to do it at your own pace, this might be the book for you.

The introduction, a short and concise summary of Reykjavík's history, which is informative even for natives such as myself, sets the book's historical tone. The six walks are outlined in a simple and easy-to-follow format, with descriptive names such as "The Old City Center" and "Around Laugavegur". A small map with the route marked in colored ink is at the beginning of each chapter for easy navigation. Buildings and places mentioned in the book are illustrated with well-lit, attractive photographs so they can effortlessly be identified as you traverse the city.

Over all, little reference is made to contemporary or cultural events, with the focus predominantly on the architecture and history of the city. The history provided is thorough with a smattering of interesting little stories associated with buildings and about the people who lived there.

However, at certain places in the book I found myself struck by unwarranted grandiose statements. Guðjón refers to Tjörnin, literal translation The Pond, as a lake, which is a bit of a stretch, and any mention of the city's less glamorous aspects is generally avoided. For instance nothing is said of Hlemmur, the bus terminal at the top of Laugavegur, being known as gathering place of the city's less fortunate.

Considerable space is dedicated to the various restaurants, museums, cafés and boutiques along the way. This has the obvious advantage of allowing the reader a glimpse into the contemporary use of many of these historical buildings, but at the same time the book risks becoming dated faster. Datedness, however, is inevitable and the foundation of the book, the history of the architecture, sculptures and structures of Reykjavík provides an excellent basis for a walk around town.

By Emillía S. Ólafsdóttir Kaaber



BURIAL RITES

A teenage Hannah Kent first visited Iceland on a Rotary Exchange. It must have had a profound effect on her, as some years later she has written this curious and enchanting book set in North Iceland in 1829.

Kent tells the story of Agnes Magnúsdóttir, a young woman sentenced to death for her part in the murder of Natan Ketilsson and Pétur Jónsson on Vatnsnes peninsula. Agnes is remanded to a remote farm to be supervised by district officer Jón Jónsson whilst she awaits her fate. This decision causes much consternation with Jón's family and the small community in which they live, but their fears of living with a murderess might just be unfounded. Agnes was the last person to be executed in Iceland.

The characters are well formed and realistic. Agnes in particular is well written, and I suspect that her voice will be in my head for days after finishing this book. This may well be due to the author basing the story and therefore the characters on fact, and the subsequent in-depth and clearly skillful research she has carried out. This is reinforced by factual documents being reproduced throughout the text; for example, the correspondence from Björn Blöndal, District Commissioner.

Burial Rites has received glowing reviews—and a Hollywood film starring Jennifer Lawrence is in the works—from the world over, and rightly so; the story is well told and provides a vivid canvas for the author to paint her descriptions of North Iceland, complete with volcanic landscapes, frequent snow, tumbling turf houses and luminous Northern Lights. She quite clearly had been bitten by the Iceland bug too, one with which I'm all too familiar, and this shines through her prose. I don't think anyone could have written so well about Iceland without falling in love with the country first.

In conclusion, *Burial Rites* is a book well worth reading; Agnes will live in your head, and the chilly landscapes and intriguing story will make you clutch your mug of coffee just a little tighter on a cold winter's day.

By Edward Hancox.



130 ACTIVE VOLCANOES

Facts about Iceland.

There are 130 active volcanoes in Iceland but only a few are super active.

HERE IS A LIST OF THE MOST ACTIVE:

SOUTH ICELAND: Hekla, Katla, Eyjafjallajökull, Eldgjá, Laki, Hengill, Seyðishólar, Öræfajökull.

WEST ICELAND: Snæfellsjökull, Baula, Rauðamelskúla, Grábrók, Eldborg.

NORTH ICELAND: Krafla, Hverfjall.

EAST ICELAND: Snæfell, Breiðdalseldstöðin, Kárahnjúkar.

THE HIGHLANDS: Grímsvötn, Bárðarbunga, Kverkfjöll, Askja, Herðubreið, Hofsjökull.

IN THE OCEAN: Surtsey, Heimaey.

- Last year, 807,100 foreign visitors arrived in Iceland via Keflavik International Airport, more than 90 percent of the total number of visitors to the country.

- Adding to this were 92,400 people who traveled to Iceland by cruise ship, 16,900 who arrived by Norröna, the ferry connecting Iceland to the European continent, and 10,200 who flew to Akureyri or Reykjavik.

- In 2013, visitors from China numbered 17,597, putting them in tenth spot on the list of nationalities visiting Iceland, and the one that is the growing the fastest.

- Number nine on the list is tourists from the Netherlands with 22,820 visitors to Iceland last year. Canadians are in the eighth spot with 23,970 visitors to Iceland, Swedes are in seventh place with 35,491 visitors.

- Danish tourists totaled 43,119, tourists from France are in fifth place with 48,313 and Norwegian visitors are in fourth place with 52,707.

- In the third spot are World Cup winners Germany with 75,814 visitors while tourists from the United States occupy the second spot with 119,712.

- At the very top were our friends from the United Kingdom all 137,108 of them.

Words and photo by Páll Stefánsson



FIFTY SOMETHING

Reykjavíkites' favorite watering holes.

Reykjavík, world famous for its great nightlife, has more than 50 bars for you to try. The exact number is never accurate—bars come and go—but some have been favorite watering holes among locals for as long as a forty-something can remember. The top spots right now, in no special order, are: Ölstofa Kormáks og Skjaldar, Prikið, Boston, Lebowski Bar (pictured) and Kaffi Barinn.

Words and photo by Páll Stefánsson

PROMOTE ICELAND

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