The Reykjavík Grapevine

Check out our Xmas special inside!

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Eat, drink & be merry

Christmas is upon is once again. While a lot of things might seem pretty wrong with the world right now, we feel the only sensible course of action is to just kinda let it all go for a moment, meet up with friends and family, and indulge in some good, old-fashioned Holiday indulgence.

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The Reykjavík Grapevine

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Editorial-in-chief | Haukur S. Magnússon

Healing Hands

In the above photograph, I am accompanied by one of my favourite people in the world, Dr. Haukur S. Magnússon, my paternal grandfather and my namesake (I had to make sure not to get a doctorate degree, so folks would be able to tell us apart). It was taken a couple of Christmases ago, in-between bouts of us eating, drinking and being merry. What a time we had.

Dr. Haukur is 82 years old. He became a doctor in 1961, and spent the brunt of his career working as a General Practitioner, helping thousands of humans overcome illness and injury. A healing hand.

His late wife, my beloved grandmother Erla, worked as a nurse her whole life, helping thousands of humans overcome illness and injury. A healing hand.

And their daughter, my aunt Jónína, currently works as a nurse. Helping thousands of humans overcome illness and injury. A healing hand.

Growing up, I would listen intently as they discussed their work. It fascinated me. It still does. Stories of Dr. Haukur's early days serving as a GP in East Iceland, when he would hike through mountains of snow, dragging his medical kit behind him on a sleigh, responding to medical emergencies in remote villages. My grandmother's tales of purposing a soup ladle to spoon tapeworm out of patients' stomachs. My aunt's tales of Saturday night Emergency Room chaos.

I developed a great respect for our medical professionals as a child, and it has only grown in later years.

My grandparents were of the generation that built up the healthcare system that we Icelanders have often prided ourselves of. They did unselfish, often thankless pioneer work for the benefit of their nation. I imagine they were optimistic as they witnessed various progresses in the field through the years, as we devised ways of curing once-deadly diseases and constructed an impressive healthcare network that spread around the island.

My aunt Jónína has also spent her career as a nurse doing unselfish, often thankless work. The difference, perhaps, lies in the fact that she has been doing that work at a time when it seems like the healthcare system built by my grandparents' generation had entered a period of slow but sure disintegration, as funding has stalled or been cut, as the infrastructure started slowly rotting due to lack of interest from the officials we elected to maintain it.

My aunt, the nurse, has often felt pressed to work ludicrous amounts of overtime, not sleeping for days, because there simply aren't enough nurses to go around. Because the pay isn't attractive, because the working conditions can border on abhorrent. Because reasons.

As journalist Gabríel Benjamín's illuminating feature reveals, Iceland's healthcare system is teetering on the brink of tragedy after years of governmental neglect and austerity measures. While it paints a grim picture of the situation, some of the people he spoke to also provide a glimpse of hope that we may yet turn things around.

This is heady, important stuff. Go read the feature. Assume a position. Demand action.

TRACK OF THE ISSUE

Rökkuró

Blue Skies

Innra

Download the FREE track at **www.grapevine.is**

Reykjavík sextet Rökkurró have come back to Earth since their last album, 'Í annan heim' ("To Another World"). Gone are the hushed vocals and guitars that gave that record its dreamy sheen, replaced now with a more polished and earthy pop sound, as may be heard in this issue's free track, "Blue Skies."

As well as the marked change in style, the band have flipped from the Icelandic language into English, suggesting they may have their eyes set on broader, more worldly horizons in the coming year. As such, they are among the nineteen hand-picked acts that will represent Iceland at Dutch music industry shindig Eurosonic in January, making a running start in 2015.

"This song was fucking hard to make," says Rökkurró bass-man Árni Þór Árnason. "It was one of the first songs we wrote for 'Innra' but we kept going back and changing it. It almost didn't make the album because we couldn't agree on what it should sound like. But just before we finished recording, we stripped it down to the bare essentials, ruffed it up a bit, and ended up with something everybody loved."

'Innra' is out now on 12 Tónar

Comic | Hugleikur Dagsson

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SOUR GRAPES & STUFF

Most Awesome Letter of the Issue!

Leave Biggi Alone!
AKA: A Reinterpretation of Biggi Lögga's The Forbidden Article

In the last couple of days I witnessed how Biggi Lögga degraded from being sort of a mascot of the Icelandic police force, with his "funny" videos and humongous smile, to "racist scum". The same people who regarded him and his videos as "hilarious" and "adorable" are now getting ready to lynch him. All due the article he published last week, in which he says Christians are being frowned upon and immigrants' rights to privacy should be limited. I believe this is simply a misunderstanding.

Don't get me wrong, I'm no fan of Biggis. To begin with, both his trying-so-hard to be funny videos and teeth the size of the track get on my nerves. Secondly, as an atheist, I really do not feel as I am getting any special treatment in comparison to Christians. Maybe by "privilege" he means that I am not in danger of being stoned to death for my outrageous (lack of) beliefs. Lastly, I myself am an immigrant, and I would most definitely not appreciate Biggi Lögga or anyone else to mangle in my private life on that account.

However, I feel as The Forbidden Article was not written with hate towards immigrants in mind. Rather than that, it was Biggi's unsuccessful attempt to criticize Cultural Relativism. It is an idea that all cultures are equal, thus judging something as "right" or "wrong" is unacceptable, as the concept belongs to different culture we do not understand - we should be tolerant to everything other cultures bring. This is idea does seem pretty and nice on first sight; however it does have serious shortcomings. Biggi address it when he writes of "the church of political correctness". He says that everything is good as long as one is not a Christian. What I believe he is trying to say is that if the ideology behind his beliefs can be judged and questioned, than so should the beliefs of others. His statement that increased immigration into the country could be problematic is not entirely false. Yes, immigration brings a lot of benefits to Iceland, this is not in question. However, with immigrants come bad things from their cultures: misanthropy, homophobia, bigotry and yes, racism. People would be shocked to find out just how racist can one group of immigrants be towards another. This does not mean that other cultures are bad, or that the foreigners are bad. But it is important to not deny the existence of these issues. Of course, Iceland is far from perfect and still has a long way to go, however in comparison to many other countries, the situation here is not all that bad.

The anecdote from Biggi's work does not strike me as he hates the immigrants. Rather than that, he seems concerned about them. Notice that he did not mention of what origin the particular foreigner was, as he most likely did not want people to form prejudices against a specific group. What he tries to say in this paragraph is not that foreigners are bad people, but that their cultures may support things that are not acceptable. The man believed his wife to be his property, because that is the way things go in his homeland. Biggi want to show that behavior like this is not acceptable, and using one's cultural background as an excuse should not pass. Tolerance towards other cultures holds great value; however it does not mean that it should not be criticized if there is sound reason to do so. That is why he says "whether the cultures of those who come here are always their private matter ". He does not mean they should never be their private matter. He means that they should be open to criticism, instead of being protected by blanket of "cultural tolerance". This is a really fragile topic, and through his unskilled writing Biggi got himself a patch of a "racist". I may be naive, but I honestly believe spreading hate toward immigrants was not his aim.

In the end, I advise to Biggi to sign up to University and take a couple of writing classes before he ever publishes any article again. And even better, he should stick to what (kind of) works for him, making videos.

kv
Maru

Dear Maru,

thanks so for our thoughtful letter and thorough analysis of Biggi The Cop's article. There are certainly many differing interpretations of what exactly Biggi was calling for in his "forbidden article" (you can read some of them on Grapevine.is) and, frankly, yours seems as good as anyone's. We will likely never know Biggi's true intent—but if he eventually winds up running for office on a platform of populist nationalist rhetoric (currently all the rage in Scandinavia), that might give a hint.

Love,

Your Friends At The Grapevine

Hi!
I am emailing to complain about your staff harassing me on Facebook. I complained about the swearing in an article about heavy metal and now I am getting sworn at by your staff. Can you control them at least get them to act like adults.

Henry Curran

Dear Henry,

thank you for your letter. We are very fuckin' sorry. But those guys are freelancers, and we don't pay them nearly enough to make any goddamn demands about how they choose to troll Facebook.

#gunthrone

Love,

Your Friends At The Grapevine

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No, really! It's a goddamn scorcher is what it is! Whoever sends us **THE MOST AWESOME LETTER** this issue will receive **A FRIGGIN GOURMET FEAST FOR TWO** at **TAPAS BARINN.** Did you hear that? Write in and complain about something (in an admirable way), win a gourmet feast at one of Reykjavík's best? **THIS IS THE DEAL OF THE CENTURY IS WHAT IT IS!**

What's in a 'lobster feast'? Well, one has to assume that it has lobster-a-plenty. Is there more? Probably, but still... Gourmet feast? Wow! **DON'T PANIC** if your letter wasn't picked **AWESOME LETTER.** There's always next month! Now, if you're in the market for free goodies next month, write us some sort of letter. Give us your worst: **letters@grapevine.is**

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ANALYSIS

Which Is Why We Talk About The Weather

Last month's debates, today

Words by *Haukur Már Helgason*
Screenshot from *EarthWindMap*

Late November, a police officer wrote an article, purportedly to enlighten people about immigration. He related how one night, on duty, he arrived at a household where a man "of foreign origin" was keeping his "Icelandic" wife from going out to party. The officer says that he explained to the man that "Icelandic law" does not allow you to hinder other people's movements, whether the people involved are married to you or not. Something of the sort. The man, Birgir said, was surprised. According to the officer, the anecdote should serve as a fable. The lesson: that "the culture of those who come here" is not simply "their private matter."

This clearly makes sense, since the local culture neither has nor could breed husbands oppressive to the point of coming between their spouse and Reykjavík's nightlife. Oppressive households are a foreign invention, inherent to other cultures. If we do not stand our guard against those, Iceland might lose its liberal, egalitarian and tolerant character, so evident in the officer's writing.

The second coming

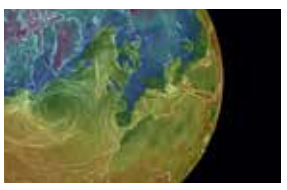
The Grapevine's online coverage of the article produced dozens of comments, as did many other news outlets'. If Biggi had any other intention than to smear a particular group of society, he concealed it well, his Facebook apology for apparently having "hurt people's feelings" notwithstanding.

Meanwhile, former secret agent, journalist, and Morgunblaðið editor Styrmir Gunnarsson reminds us all—in his recently published memoirs from the Cold War—that since the republic's founding in 1944, until 1985, Iceland's highest police commissioners were Nazis or Nazi-sympathizers. This remains treated as some sort of curiosity for historians, at best, rather than a peculiar and perhaps problematic fact about this country. Which again seems both peculiar and, perhaps, problematic. That is not to say that the police officer harbours the same sentiments as his predecessors. To this day, however, the police force certainly does come across, to many, as a right-wing hotspot. So far, former officers who enter politics run, seemingly without exception, for the Independence Party.

This autumn, the Coast Guard famously obtained 250 machine guns from Norway, of which the police force was supposed to receive 150. When this was revealed by newspaper DV, many protested. Soon, the police announced that they would return the guns, which seemed to good to be true. As it goes with such things, the decision turns out to have little to do with the public's opposition, and more with the fact that Norway expected Iceland to pay for the cargo, which was evidently not the Coast Guard's intention. Guns were not on the police budget. Now it seems they will be.

Superintendent Jón Bjartmarz claims that the police force needs and intends to acquire at least 150 MP5s before long. Which means that the rest of us will have to cancel our celebrations and keep explaining that bullets are hard, guns can be fatal, and that, no, the Islamic State is not about to attack.

> Whenever the cat became restless and noisy, she would nudge a pinch of butter into its fur. The cat would then be quietly occupied for the next hours, trying to rid itself of the butter.



Telling butter from mayonnaise

Now, then, however, and yet. Around a decade ago, ex-Prime Minister Davíð Oddsson established the notion of "the butter-pinch method" through an anecdote he relayed in an interview: his grandmother, he said, had a cat. Whenever the cat became restless and noisy, she would nudge a pinch of butter into its fur. The cat would then be quietly occupied for the next hours, trying to rid itself of the butter. The minister explained that he often used analogous tactics in politics, distracting people from real issues by throwing in highly disputable but less important topics, with great success. This subsequently became known as the butter-pinch method. It may serve Davíð well in his current role as Morgunblaðið's Chief Editor.

How to tell butter from mayonnaise, then? What's really happening? While our collective attention has been held by scandalous utterances and guns, not to mention that sweet, sweet Correction, the right wing vanguard seems to be enjoying a correction of its own.

As reported, the State-owned bank Landsbankinn just sold some 30% of the firm Borgun's shares, without any call for offers. The majority of those, around a fifth of the firm's total shares, were sold to a company owned by Finance Minister Bjarni Benediktsson's uncle and first cousin. As Nanna Árnadóttir wrote on Grapevine.is: "According to Kjarninn the sale of these shares in electronic payment solution provider Borgun did not follow any formal sales process and went completely unadvertised. Additionally, as Borgun is an asset of Landsbankinn—of which the government is the majority owner—the sale falls under the jurisdiction of the Finance Minister."

Now, that's a gift that keeps on giving, if there ever was one. Borgun is one of three payment intermediation firms in Iceland. They provide bank clients with credit and debit cards, and companies with the infrastructure to accept those. From now on, every second or third time that you swipe your card to pay for your hard-earned daily bread, you also make a small donation to the Finance Minister's family. They are known as the Engey family. They've been at it for a while.

Historical interlude: 2008 AD

Why did Borgun belong to the State at all? Because of the 2008 bank collapse. Which means, because of the mirage-economy constructed up until the bank collapse. That winter, one way or another, a great share of businesses in Iceland were taken over by the State, starting with Prime Minister Geir Haarde's counter-factual declaration: "This is not nationalization." What he meant was, of course: "I am not a Bolshevik." In the meantime, some of those firms have been quietly re-privatized. Please bear with me through an anecdote:

The shopping mall Smáralind went bankrupt in the crash. This left Landsbankinn, a major creditor, as its owner. Since Landsbankinn had by then been nationalized, the shopping mall was thereby State-owned. A public institute, kinda. In 2012, Landsbankinn sold the majority of its shares to workers' unions' pension funds. The Republic's Centre For Consumer Goods thus changed into The Workers' Centre For Goods And Services, although, of course, it could have been called The People's Shopping Centre the whole time. Only it wasn't. Smáralind still does its best to appear a private enterprise and conceal that it is in fact owned by the people collectively, which is not only less glamorous but could mislead those people into making all sorts of demands. Collectively, people might demand higher wages for the mall's workers and lower prices for themselves. We all know where that would lead us, don't we?

Stop whining, it will trickle down! – LOL!

Ásta Helgadóttir already pointed out that while the police rationalize their need for guns with fantasies about the threat of Islamic State adherents, the Icelandic State's current Treasury prioritization is a real threat, not to mention a potentially fatal one. Doctors started their strike actions on October 27. The State is their employer. State officials have expressed their sympathy for the doctors' demands, but claim that meeting them might lead to a general "wage drift." That is, other workers might make demands as well. Which would be bad because... er. Inflation.

No one likes inflation, so stay poor, please.

Last February, to meet with the Treasury's ongoing austerity measures, Landspítalinn, the university hospital central to the country's health services, laid off all of its cleaning staff. A dozen workers are now supposed to do the same job, on behalf of a contractor, that was previously done by 35 hospital employees. Each worker receives 214,000 ISK a month (ca. € 1350) before taxes. The job: to keep an area of twenty-six thousand square metres hospital-clean. Divide by twelve at your own peril.

Unrealistic it is: Earlier this month, a representative of the union Efling was denied access to the cleaners' meeting with the contractor. The workers went to the media and said they were tired. They said that the hospital's hygiene suffered for there being too few of them. One patient stepped forward and revealed that, in for treatment, she found the hygienic conditions unacceptable, and cleaned her room, and the adjacent bathroom, herself. Another patient has described how, due to lack of space, she has not just spent a month in the hospital's corridors, but also spent a night in one of its bathrooms.

Robbery? You probably mean property

Capitalism seems incapable of surviving on its own on this barren and windy island, so the country's leaders have turned to more primitive forms of robbery. At the same time, they have ceased referring to any of neoliberalism's ideological tropes: lately there has been no mention of freedom, or its counterpart, the Gulag. Leaders haven't been saying much at all, in fact. They're tough guys. They act. The two are frequently seen as opposites: the left wing talks, money walks. The Left doesn't say much either, though. And the unions stay busy running their shopping malls and what have you.

As for the ongoing mega-transaction from the State Treasury to some sixty thousand mortgage accounts, that thing they marketed as The Correction, let's call a spade a shovel: it's bribery. You bribe enough voters and they look away while you gather the rest for yourself and your loved ones. As for those unfortunates who never took out a mortgage and thereby had nothing to correct: when they realize what just happened, they might direct their anger at the slightly more fortunate, if only those were not their own friends and relatives, so... all falls silent.

As if to demonstrate that you really don't hear the bullet that hits you. Now and then, someone backtalks a marginal group. In the distance you think you hear a gunshot. Nah ... it was probably just a firecracker. It's a safe neighbourhood. Having successfully divided and muffled the people, you enjoy another pleasant, not to mention quiet, evening with friends and family. You are the kind of man who loves to share. Why else collect wealth? Why else run a State?

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so what's this...?

Iceland | For Dummies

So What's This I Keep Hearing About Everything Being Terrible in Iceland?

Words by *Kári Tulinius* @Kattullus
Illustration by *Steingrímur Gauti Ingólfsson*

In Mid-November Unnar Steinn Sigtryggsson, an Icelander who goes by the username "askur," made a comment on popular internet community Reddit. He recounted the major news events of the last few weeks in Iceland. However, unlike most bullet point lists of Icelandic news stories, this one went viral.

Has the news in Iceland been unusually full of kittens licking baby turtles?

More like political scandals, strikes, vermin infestations, protests, police behaving badly, and economic mismanagement. To an audience used to hearing stories about how wonderfully Iceland had dealt with the 2008 financial crisis, this was indeed newsworthy.

Hold on a second... vermin infestations?

In recent months, Iceland's biggest hospital has been infected with mould, house mice and pharaoh ants. At the same time the private company hired to clean the hospital has been accused of treating its workers badly and giving them unfeasibly large areas to clean per day. Oh, and doctors have been striking to protest low pay and increased workloads.

I take it pharaoh ants don't wear Tutankhamen headgear and sing "Walk Like an Egyptian."

To save money, the government fired seventeen cleaners working in various ministries, mostly women in their fifties and sixties. Shortly after the dismissal of the cleaners, the government announced that it would buy luxury vehicles to drive ministers around.

That's a terrible waste of money. I would get a zip-line or a jetpack, they're much more fun.

Besides doctors, music teachers went on strike for five weeks. In the 20th century, much effort was made to set up a robust network of music schools, which has lost funding in this century, just when it has paid off with Icelandic musicians attaining wide renown.

That explains why the person next to me is whistling The Bangles' song in 7/8ths beat.

The government announced a "Debt Correction," giving half a billion Euros of public money to Icelanders who had mortgages on their houses or apartments during the post-crash inflationary period. However, the way the government chose to implement their debt relief meant that the wealthiest ten percent of society received twenty-five percent of the total given out.

I'm sure that's just some maths fudging by a political opponent.

One of those making this point was Oddgeir Ágúst Ottesen, an economist and deputy Member of Parliament for the ruling Independence Party. As he put it, the way this debt relief was structured, "the government process in fact means that those with low income pay restitution to those with high income." People who rent or had student loans, I should add, got no debt relief.

I hope the engines on the government ministers' luxury vehicles are powerful enough so they don't have to slow down when driving over poor people.

Speaking of... the Minister of the Interior's personal assistant, Gísli Freyr Valdórsson, plead guilty in court to leaking confidential information about an asylum seeker and smearing him with false allegations presented as police findings. The minister resigned with all the grace of an angry politician, prompting the Prime Minister to conclude that the lesson to be learned was that Icelandic people are too mean to politicians.

Oh, the inhumanity! Will no one think of the poor politicians?

Calling people names is not exactly the most mature thing to do, but it pales in comparison to falsely claiming someone is being investigated for various crimes. The police came out pretty well, investigating this case thoroughly, though the well-respected head of the Reykjavík Police Department resigned, possibly because of ministerial interference. However, the minister herself was not investigated, leaving her presumed guilt or innocence in permanent doubt.

I thought you said police had behaved badly.

The Police Chief's replacement, the former head of the Suðurnes Police District, is implicated in the leak scandal, having sent Gísli Freyr Valdórsson information about the asylum seeker outside proper channels. However, the police came out very badly when an internal report made by the Reykjavík Police Department about the post-crash protests was released following a request for information. It was full of vaguely sourced hearsay about people considered anti-authority by police, as well as their personal details and opinions. When the police tried to remove names from the document before release, it was done so ineptly that they were easily revealed.

Okay, everything's fucked in Iceland. I think I'll go find a video of a baby turtle licking a kitten.

I am sorry to tell you but turtles are unable to stick out their tongues. Now now, no need to cry. At least the landscape is still pretty. Too bad that the most recent government initiative means you will have to pay ten Euros for the privilege of enjoying it, even if you live in the middle of it.

Okay, maybe you should cry.

NEWS IN BRIEF

BY PARKER YAMASAKI

Last month Norway may have jumped the gun with its gift giving—or rather, by asking the Coast Guard to actually pay for those submachine guns. Despite general public opposition to the militarization of the Icelandic police force, those guys still haven't given up; they really seem to lust for firepower and are now campaigning to receive funding to just up and buy a few dozen submachine guns. According to Jón Bjartmarz, Chief Superintendent at the High Commissioner of the Icelandic Police, such tools are necessary in gaining the upper hand against terrorism. Specifically citing the threat that the Islamic State poses by way of internet propaganda, the chief asserted that it would be "absolutely irresponsible" not to prepare for such a possibility.

Speaking of purported gifts from Norway, Icelanders might be conflicted about the submachine guns, but we definitely want their trees. At least a tree. C'moooon, please??? Earlier this year Norwegian authorities reported that they did not have the budget to send Iceland "The Oslo Tree," a Christmas tree traditionally raised in front of Parliament every year for the holidays. We kicked and screamed loud enough to get the attention of the Oslo Business Council, who then "reassessed the situation," and sent the tree after all.

If the tree isn't exciting enough, here's something to pop Dom Perignon's new Iceland-inspired P2 champagne about: on November 21 the (now-former) Minister of the Interior, Hanna Birna Kristjánsdóttir, resigned from her position after receiving significant pressure from the public in the wake of that whole "leak affair." A poll conducted by Vísir revealed a 60/40 divide in popular opinion, the majority calling on her to step down. Her resignation announcement came exactly one year and one day after the leak of the now infamous document.

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Opinion | Politics

The Stupidest Tax In History

Words by *Magnús Sveinn Helgason*
Photo by *Axel Sigurðarson*

According to official estimates, the number of foreign tourists in Iceland will top the one million mark for the first time in history by the end of the year. Which means it will have more than tripled over the course of last decade: in 2003, some 300,000 foreigners visited Iceland.

Trampling hordes

But while the growing number of foreign visitors has helped fuel economic growth, the hordes of visitors pose problems of their own. Virtually every popular tourist destination in Iceland is under serious stress, as irreparable damage is being done by trampling tourists.

The problem is that neither the Icelandic tourism industry nor the authorities have responded in any meaningful way to the unprecedented growth in foreign visitors. As the number of tourists grows, so does the need for decent walking paths, more and better parking spots, and basic public facilities by popular spots—along with instructions and staff to both ensure visitors' safety and ensure that they don't cause damage to fragile natural formations through ignorance or inexperience.

But all of that costs money.

Who should pay?

The left-wing government, which left office in 2013, had proposed a small tax on every night stayed at hotels and hostels, but the plan was opposed by some industry lobbyists, and the incoming right-wing government scuttled the surcharge.

Now, the minister of Industry and Commerce, Ragnheiður Elín Árnadóttir, member of the conservative Independence Party, has revealed how the government plans to solve the problem. On November 28, the cabinet approved her plan to have everyone who wishes to enjoy Icelandic nature purchase a special permit, a "nature pass," which will set you back 1,500 ISK (or €10) for unfettered three-year access to Icelandic nature.

Everyone who wants to travel around the island, enjoying the sights and taking in the natural beauty, is supposed to purchase such a pass. Icelanders, as well as tourists. In essence it is a tax on enjoying natural beauty.

A laughable tax

The response to the proposed "nature pass" has been uniformly negative. Environmentalists, nature lovers and bloggers all denounced the plans, and Icelanders took to social media to declare it the stupidest idea yet to surface from our current government, vowing they would never pay a tax, no matter how small, to travel in their own country or to enjoy its beauty.

As Stefán Ólafsson, professor at the University of Iceland and a prolific blogger, noted, the enforcement would be an administrative nightmare, requiring a small army of "pass inspectors" milling around the countryside, checking people's papers. The plan, he concluded, was simply "laughable."

In his weekly Fréttablaðið newspaper column, novelist Guðmundur Andri Thorsson criticized the passport as a tax on people's feelings and experience of nature, while Left-Green chair Katrín Jakobsdóttir pointed out it essentially eliminated people's right to travel freely in their own country—a right dating back to the Viking commonwealth and the legal code of Grágás.

A plan nobody likes...

The Icelandic Tourist Industry Association has also rejected the idea, pointing out that the pass is inefficient, that its implementation will be both difficult and costly, and that it will no doubt have a significantly negative effect on tourists' experience of Iceland.

Instead, the association encourages the government to adopt the plan proposed by the previous government: a one-Euro fee, levied on every night stayed at a hotel or hostel, would be simpler to administer and would be far less disruptive to visitors.

... because it is truly terrible!

The idea of purchasing a permit to enjoy the beauty of nature and the majesty of the view is so breathtakingly stupid it is difficult to figure out how the Minister of Industry and Innovation came up with it. How would it be implemented?

Obviously, it would require an army of "inspectors," as Stefán Ólafsson points out, but how, in practice, are they going to enforce the law? Will they perform spot-checks on tourists around the country? And how will they determine who is a tourist enjoying the view and who is a local resident just travelling to and from work?

The worst kind of tax imaginable

And how will they deal with suspected violators? Presumably, the low price of the pass will entice foreigners to pay, just to avoid a potential hassle. But we can expect large numbers of locals will refuse to pay, on principle. Will the passport-wardens be deputized, so they can arrest people looking at lava fields without the required permit? And what kind of appeals process can we expect to see? A special panorama-court, where people can try and prove they weren't actually enjoying nature that much, and thus need pay no tax?

There is simply no way the tax can be implemented in a manner which will be both cost-efficient and seen by Icelanders as just and fair. To foreign visitors, its enforcement will most likely appear either arbitrary or annoying.

NEWS IN BRIEF

With that, Hanna Birna less-than-gracefully exits the political scene, at least until 2015. Her former assistant, Gísli Freyr Valdórsson, was asked to exit the political scene as well, although through a different door. On November 12, Gísli was given an eight-month suspended prison sentence, after admitting to leaking the Tony Omos' document. His intention, he has admitted, was, in fact, to influence media coverage.

With all of this political groping, it should probably come as no surprise that Icelanders' trust in media is decreasing, according to a report by RÚV. And you can take their word for it, since RÚV came out on top as the most trustworthy news source in Iceland (good thing we don't count as "media"). Despite their overall win, RÚV reports a decrease in public confidence along with every other media source surveyed, except for newspaper DV. Ironically, DV was recently acquired by the same publishing company that runs websites Pressan and Eyjan, the second-to-last and least-trusted news outlets included in the survey.

The report nicely complements recent outcries from the International Press Institute and Reporters Without Borders (in the same way ugly shoes complement an even uglier dress), which condemned Iceland's actions regarding press freedom. Among matters of concern was Interior Minister assistant Þórey Vilhjálmsdóttir's seeking of the maximum possible libel penalty for two DV journalists who misidentified her in the abovementioned Tony Omos document leak. Furthermore, the Interior Ministry has enacted a new rule requiring journalists to apply for individual permission through the Ministry's social relations manager in order to get access to its staff. But, like we said, this convoluted mingling of press and politics is no news. It is, in a twisted way, just part of the tradition.

Kind of like the Oslo Christmas tree. And as demonstrated by the Oslo tree scare, we don't mess around when it comes to tradition. Especially during the holidays. Which is why—in the tradition of Nordic countries sending each other trees—Iceland has generously gifted a tree of our own to the Faroe Islands. What goes around comes around, they say. So with that, let the P2 flow. We'll see you in the New Year.

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Iceland | WTF?!?

You Shall Not Pass

The controversial "Nature Pass" threatens to become a reality

Words by *John Rogers*
Additional Reporting by *Haukur S. Magnússon*
Photos by *Axel Sigurðarson*

With the annual turnover of overseas visitors set to break the one million mark for the first time this year, Icelandic politicians, companies and citizens have long been considering how best to cope with growing pains connected to the country's tourism explosion.

The problem is simple: despite bringing their plentiful currency, thus giving the national economy a much-needed shot in the arm, the sheer number of holidaymakers necessitates improvements to Iceland's infrastructure. Some tourism hot-spots need basic facilities such as toilets, lest people start free-range pooping en masse; many sites of outstanding natural beauty are lacking signage and pathways to prevent soil erosion from footfall, amongst other general conservation work.

Indeed, development and maintenance projects to the amount of two billion ISK already await funding from the State's Tourism Development Fund, Minister of Industry and Innovation Ragnheiður Elín Árnadóttir told state broadcaster RÚV in an interview last week. Discussing her ministry's plans to raise the necessary funds, Ragnheiður—who is in charge of tourism, amongst other things—revealed some initial details of a proposal the government has already approved and will soon be submitted to Alþingi for a vote.

Checkpoints, fines

After lengthy consideration, Ragnheiður's ministry has decided that the mandatory purchase of a 1,500 ISK "Nature Pass" for anyone who seeks to enjoy Icelandic nature is the way forward. The pass will reportedly allow unfettered access to State and municipal lands for a period of three years (at which point a renewal is necessary), and will be required of both Icelandic citizens and tourists alike. The Minister expressed her hopes that private landowners would also participate in the programme and cease collecting fees on an individual basis, however their participation will be on a strictly voluntary basis.

When asked how the Nature Pass law would be enforced, Ragnheiður explained that it would mostly be through random inspection at certain checkpoints. Those who fail to show a nature pass when prompted will have to pay fines up to 15,000 ISK.

Newspaper DV estimates that an annual yield of 800,000 tourists (which was the case in 2013) would net the State 1.2 billion ISK, which the Minister says will go directly towards the Tourism Development Fund.

In the interview, Ragnheiður stressed that the nature pass's implementation would be kept as effortless and easy as possible, adding that plans were afoot to employ the latest technologies to aid in the process. "For instance, we are in discussion with the tax office about whether we can somehow allow Icelanders to check a box on their tax return," she told RÚV, "thereby purchasing the Nature Pass. It will all be done through the internet, and in as simple a manner as possible." She also noted that citizens' passes would be linked to their National Identity Numbers, so locals will apparently not have to carry them around wherever they go.

Whose land is it?

The Nature Pass idea has met with severe criticism from several corners including, perhaps surprisingly, from those operating in the tourism sector (with the Icelandic Travel Industry Association voicing severe opposition). The questions range from the practical (such as whether a driver pulling over in a layby should be allowed to look at a nearby mountain) to the philosophical (should nature really be considered a theme park-style attraction?) to the legal (don't the people own the land anyway?). Conservationists, artists, environmentally minded citizens and public officials alike are voicing concerns, begging the question of whether the government undertook proper consultation about the proposal.

"That's a question for the minister to answer really," says Left-Green head, former Minister of Education and current MP Katrín Jakobsdóttir, "but I gather that stakeholders were assembled during the formation of the plan. However, they don't seem to have had much influence, which is why we're seeing opposition from the tourism sector, as well as environmental and nature preservation organisations and outdoors associations."

"The Icelandic Travel Industry Association have said they'd prefer a tax on accommodation instead," she continues, referring to the ITIA's idea of a €1-per-night nature tax on hotel rooms. "Honestly, it's difficult to see why the government prefers to develop their own special way of collecting funds for tourism infrastructure, instead of raising the accommodation tax. The idea of inspectors undermines Iceland as a place where one can connect with nature without the intervention of other human beings."

> "The idea of inspectors undermines Iceland as a place where one can connect with nature without the intervention of other human beings."

Disneyland?

This fundamental principle of freedom of movement, and the right to remain undisturbed in Iceland's countryside without the unwelcome attention of pass inspectors, lies at the heart of much of the criticism. Even those who support charging visitors for infrastructure and upkeep harbour objections to the nature pass model, such as Guðmundur Ingi Guðbrandsson of national environmental GMO Landvernd.

"We support charging tourists a moderate fee to support nature conservation in tourist locations," says Guðmundur. "We do not, however, support the nature pass as it has been introduced by the minister. We believe that it violates the ancient right of people to visit nature, and that it could potentially damage people's experience of Iceland because of the surveillance required to enforce the law. There are much less intrusive means that could be employed, such as an increase to the existing accommodation tax, and via the tax system in general."

It's a sentiment echoed by lauded Icelandic author (and noted environmentalist) Andri Snær Magnason. Taken together, the three's matching opinions suggest a common-sense consensus about the proposal amongst people from various parts of Icelandic culture.

"While I think it's a good idea to finance the protection of Icelandic nature," says Andri, "it could be done in a number of other ways. There is something fundamentally wrong and Orwellian in the concept of the nature pass, like admitting your total alienation—that nature is an amusement like Disneyland—leading to the claustrophobic and horrible idea of somebody being excluded from nature. The idea that this country is not mine, but has been turned into a commodity—and how this government is at the same time threatening so many pristine areas with stupid development schemes. The government is expecting to raise 10 million dollars from the pass, when they just gave a new factory that amount in tax relief!"

Commodification

With such passionate responses coming from such a wide range of citizens, it seems the Nature Pass proposal has become a lightning rod issue that gets to the heart of how Icelanders feel about the relationships between citizens, the state, and the land itself.

"Perhaps the most fundamental question here is about the commodification of natural phenomena that underlies this proposal," concludes Katrín. "Do we really want natural phenomena such as Geysir, Gullfoss and Dettifoss to be counted as commodities like any others? I don't think we do."

At the time of writing, the ministry had not responded to our invitation to comment.

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Eimverk's Flóki Young Malt is available in the Keflavík Airport duty free store and at select bars. Distribution in the Vínbúð state liquor stores will commence in early 2015. Eimverk's gin, Vor, is already available at both places.

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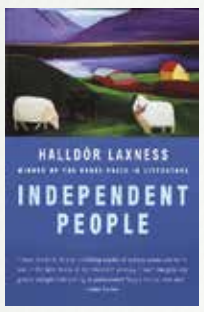

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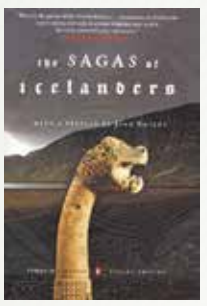

2 **Sagas Of The Icelanders**
Ýmsir höfundar

3 **Njals Saga - Wordsworth**
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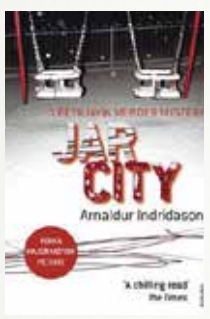
4 **Die schönsten isländischen Sagas**
Rolf Heller



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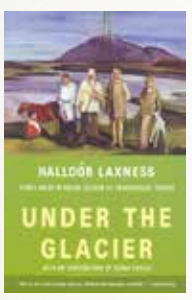

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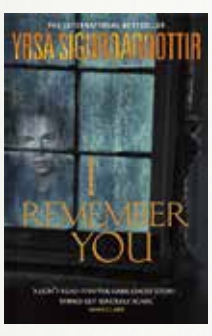

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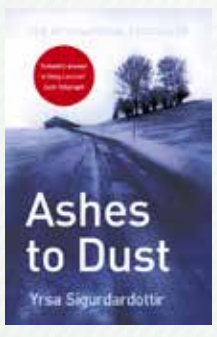

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A Taste Of Things To Come

Icelandic whisky. It exists, we tried it—and we liked it

Words by *Gabríel Benjamin*
Photos by *Matthew Eisman*

The small and unassuming Eimverk distillery can be found in an industrial park in Garðabær. Inside, numerous vats, barrels, boxes, filters and pieces of distillery equipment flood the warehouse floor space, and there is a notably sour (but not pungent) smell in the air.

The family-run distillery has already received critical acclaim for their gin, Vor, which got a Double Gold Award at the 2014 San Francisco World Spirits Competition. That's impressive, but we're not here to praise their gin, we're here to taste their whisky, which is the first of its kind to be made in Iceland.

Water of life

Eimverk CEO Haraldur Þorkelsson, tells us how the Icelandic climate has only twice in recorded history allowed for decent amounts of barley to grow—during settlement times, and now, due to global warming. The early settlers were more interested in making mead and ale, and after barley production died down, schnapps, landi (a kind of moonshine) and potato vodka became the drinks of choice for Icelanders. But now, with barley production growing, the equation has changed.

Eimverk gets their grain straight from the farm, and the only pesticide it is exposed to is Icelandic winter. With its low starch and sugar content, about 50% more of the grain is used to make their product than with traditional whisky.

The second ingredient, water, is a commodity that Iceland has an abundance of, and one that experts say doesn't need to be treated before being used to distil. And the yeast is easily imported.

Being whisky enthusiasts, Haraldur and his brother Egill wanted to see if they could make their own whisky, just for the fun of it. After they had experimented with more than 160 different recipes, learning the ropes along the way through ardently watching YouTube clips, they found one in 2009 that they thought was worth pursuing. "At no point did we decide we were going to become distillers—everything just happened organically," Haraldur says.

Pioneers

The Flóki product Eimverk has already released is technically not whisky, but a young malt—it's only kept in a cask for one year, so it's rougher around the edges. Despite this, Haraldur says Flóki provides a taste of what's to come when their single malt is released in 2015.

> An informal tasting panel confirmed my suspicions—some complained about a strong ethanol taste, whereas others found it to be a pleasant drink on the whole.

The whisky's name is a reference to Hrafna-Flóki, the fabled Norwegian pioneer who made the first documented attempt to settle in Iceland. In the same way, Haraldur and his family are embarking on a deliberate journey into the world of whiskies, hoping to carve a home for themselves there and pioneer the field in Iceland.

Judgement day

A bottle of Flóki in tow, I waited until after the distillery tour to pass judgement on the young malt. Despite being intrigued by the project, my expectations were rather low for the final product. However, I wound I up being pleasantly surprised.

Initially, I could smell sugary vanilla, with hints of salt and anise. The amber-coloured drink was clear, and hazarding a sip, I immediately felt a sharp alcoholic taste—it wasn't overwhelming, and it was then followed by numerous subtle undertones from the barley-rich drink. There was a clear charred oak taste, and a lingering burning sensation. It puzzlingly reminded me of both Islay whiskies and bourbon at the same time.

It wouldn't be fair to compare it to other established whiskies, as Flóki just isn't there yet, but the qualities that limit the spirit's appeal are the very ones that dissipate once the whisky has been allowed to mature in the cask. Once I added a few drops of water, the drink became much more enjoyable.

An informal tasting panel echoed my findings—some complained about a strong ethanol taste, whereas others found that it to be a pleasant drink on the whole. People were also generally positive to see each bottle had been labelled by hand with its number, cask and year.

I feel confident in recommending Flóki to whisky enthusiasts. It most certainly won't be for everyone, but it is a bold venture, and one that I celebrate

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All You Need Is Love. And Chocolate

Starting as a late-night experiment, Om Nom is an Icelandic success story

Words by *John Rogers*
Photo by *Hörður Sveinsson*

Imagine an abandoned gas station office. A few things might spring to mind. An empty room with peeling walls, seen only by kids who've snuck in to smoke a joint. A dark, dusty old shack you could set a horror movie in. Of the various mental images the phrase "abandoned gas station office" might conjure, "small chocolate factory" surely isn't one.

But, reality is often stranger than fiction, and out on the Seltjarnarnes peninsula, a small chocolate factory inside an abandoned gas station office is exactly what you'll find. Behind a pair of now-automated pink petrol pumps, the windows of a wind-whipped former mini-mart are brightly lit; the door bears a simple, distinctive logo that's becoming very familiar to Iceland's chocolate lovers. The logo spells out the words Om Nom. Indeed.

Right place, right time

At the gas station office-cum-chocolate factory, we're met by the boundlessly enthusiastic Kjartan Gíslason—the man in charge of Om Nom's chocolate-making process—dressed in a white chef's outfit and apron. Behind him, bars of chocolate are being hand-wrapped and stacked in the hundreds; through a large window, we can observe the inner room, where a collection of apparatuses does the various tasks necessary to create all that chocolate.

How did this operation end up in a petrol station office? "We heard a pastry chef that ran a small business here was moving out and eager to sell," smiles Kjartan, "so it was just a case of being at the right place at the right time. We constantly help tourists with the pumps, and give them directions to Geysir and Gullfoss."

Cacao, cacao

We pass a colourful display showing the nine varieties that form Om Nom's current range. The air is thick with the delicious smell of cacao beans. "Our beans are sourced through an agent," explains Kjartan, guiding us through the glass door and between the brightly coloured, noisy machines. "He works directly with farmers in Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, Belize and the Dominican Republic—all organic and fair trade certified."

He reaches into a sack of beans at the back of the packed room, letting them run through his fingers. "After the bean is harvested, it's fermented, and then dried at the plantation," he continues. "We then carefully roast our beans in different ways according to what chocolate we are making. For instance, milk chocolate tends to get a heavier roast, while our dark has a custom light roast to retain all the characteristics that really set our chocolate apart."

Kjartan hands us some of the rough brown roasted shells, and shows us how to crack them open. Inside is the bitter, crumbly, dark brown bean that lies at the start of the chocolate-making process. "These are called nibs, the inner core of the bean, that is really chocolate in its purest form," says Kjartan. "After the process of winnowing, or removing and blowing away the shells, we grind these nibs into a fine paste, before adding sugar, and any extra ingredients, such as milk powder for milk chocolate. For example, our biggest seller is the lakkrís and sea salt flavour—we use a raw liquorice root powder that really gives it pungent aftertaste, and sea salt from Saltverk in the Westfjörds."

Further down the rabbit hole

After the grinding, Kjartan demonstrates how the chocolate is churned and tempered, set into moulds, the excess scraped off and any extras such as crushed nuts added, before being placed in large refrigerators to solidify. The whole process from bean to bar takes around five working days.

It's a fascinating whirlwind tour of the chocolate-making process. "Being a chef I have a just healthy amount of curiosity about how things are made," Kjartan says. "I felt compelled to master it. It was just one of those ideas that gained more momentum the further we went down the rabbit hole. I was roasting beans in my oven every day for six months, and hand-grinding. My place smelled like brownies all the time, and my neighbours thought I was obsessed with night-baking."

> "We are really passionate about our work. Everybody here feels very fortunate working with such a great ingredient, and it's the most rewarding thing I have done in my life."

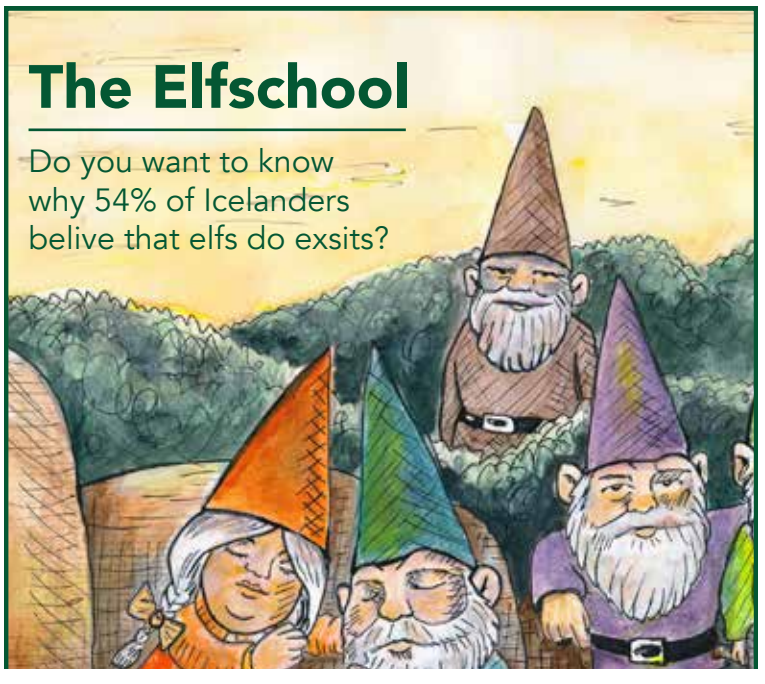
But his experiments led to some heartening success. "My first real batch was made with beans that came from Venezuela," Kjartan says. "It was a dark 70% recipe and it really was the best chocolate I'd ever tasted. It gave me the confidence boost to carry on—it was a great moment, and a feeling of achievement. At that time I didn't have the machinery that we use now, especially the winnower, so all the beans had to be de-shelled by hand, which was a bittersweet experience. I watched the 'Mad Men' series in its entirety, whilst de-shelling nibs until my fingers were blistered. But it was worth it."

A calling, its reward

Seeing the reaction of the lucky few who got to try his early batches, it became apparent that Kjartan was onto something. Drawn to both the flavour and the business potential, the Om Nom team started to form. "Me and my childhood friend Óskar Þórðarsson started talking about it, which led to us experimenting with different types of beans and roasting," Kjartan recalls. "We asked André Úlfur Visage to do illustrations for the packaging. His great work really brought the product to life, and inspired us to keep investing time and effort until we were happy with our chocolate. During this time, we also brought in a fellow culinary team member to help the development, pastry chef and baker Karl Viggó Vigfússon."

It's clear to see that Kjartan has found his calling in the Om Nom operation. He discusses every detail of the beans, the process, his subtly differing batches, added flavours and future experiments with a fervent passion. As the tour winds up, we get to taste each recipe, and each flavour is spine-tinglingly good. "The Madagascar bean has this really wonderful red berry taste, and a nice finish of citrus fruit acidity," Kjartan says, smiling at the delight on our faces. "It really is one of our favourite beans, so fruity and jammy. The Papua New Guinea beans have a strong contrast with the Madagascar. The main reason we use it is the intense smokiness of the beans—the natives in Papa New Guinea have a tradition of smoking the beans in order to accelerate the drying process. So it also carries hints of oak, leather, pipe tobacco and whiskey. It kind of reminds me of going on a horseback ride in Iceland."

With overseas demand growing, two new festive flavours coming out for the Christmas holidays, and some exciting expansions to their current range in the works, it seems like Om Nom is a company that will continue to flourish in the coming year. "Here at Om Nom we don't really feel like we are making a luxury product, but rather a fine chocolate that's as good as it gets," Kjartan says, as we say goodbye. "We are really passionate about our work. Everybody here feels very fortunate working with such a great ingredient, and its the most rewarding thing I have done in my life."



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Squeezing Blood From A Turnip

Iceland's universal healthcare at risk

Words by *Gabríel Benjamin*
Photos by *Hörður Sveinsson & provided by The National University Hospital of Iceland.*

In a small and private ceremony in a chapel in Fossvogur, around 30 friends and family members are present to pay their respects to 50-year-old Rósa Mikaelsdóttir, a single mother of three who passed away on November 17. Rósa had struggled with mental disorders for most of her life—in particular severe anxiety and depression—and, following the 2008 banking crisis, had a hard time making ends meet on her disability allowance.

After the ceremony, I speak with her family. They tell me that Rósa barely managed to keep a roof over her head in recent years, and that she often couldn't afford to seek proper medical treatment. These difficulties, they tell me, were caused by structural changes to the healthcare system, which increased the cost of medication and outpatient appointments.

The results of Rósa's autopsy were inconclusive, they tell me. Although they remain hopeful that further testing will reveal her cause of death, they may have to wait a while.

At present, the Icelandic healthcare system is arguably going through its most tumultuous period yet. The nation's first doctors' strike is in full effect. Medical staff are overworked and exhausted following prolonged austerity measures. Some hospital buildings are infested with mould. And so on.

The question is: how did we get here? And, perhaps more importantly, have we reached the point of no return?

Iceland's Healthcare System: *How Does It Work?*

Iceland maintains a universal healthcare system, under which all legal residents are covered by the Icelandic social insurance system. All hospital admissions are paid for by this system, as is the majority of the cost of outpatient appointments. There is a token fee to see General Practicioners (GPs) and specialists, with fees for the latter considerably higher, particularly after the economic collapse of 2008.

Iceland's primary healthcare is split up into hospitals, health institutions and healthcare clinics. There are two hospitals, Landspítalinn, the National University Hospital of Iceland (hereafter referred to as LSH), which is located in Reykjavík and serves as a general and specialised university hospital; and Sjúkrahúsið á Akureyri, or Akureyri Hospital, a generalised and specialised teaching hospital located in Akureyri. There are furthermore twelve major health institutions along with numerous healthcare clinics spread out all over the country.

Historian Jón Ólafur Ísberg says that Iceland's medical system as a whole has mostly remained the same since the 1970s, when the neighbourhood healthcare clinics were founded. They provided people with primary health care, where individuals could seek medical help with or without an appointment. "Before that, GPs would visit infirm people in their own homes," he says.

Unlike other northern European countries, Jón says, Iceland has never made a comprehensive medical plan, leaving progress to technological advances and the whims of medical professionals. "It's the specialists who want bigger hospitals, newer equipment and fancier gadgets," he says, "and that's what gets prioritised."

In another difference from other welfare societies, patients in Iceland don't need referrals to see a specialist: they can go directly to them. "If you have a headache, you don't have to first see to your GP," Jón says, "you can go straight to a neurosurgeon, which is both unnecessary and costly for society as a whole."

The statistics show that there's been a drastic increase in specialist visits in recent years—they went from 373,878 in 2003 to 493,678 in 2009 and then 658,855 in 2012—which is ostensibly more costly for the State, and a troubling development.

Down To The Bone

The Icelandic healthcare system, post-austerity

Following the economic collapse of 2008, the Icelandic State's debts skyrocketed, reaching 126% of the country's GDP in 2011. At the same time, State revenue sources ground to a halt, and property devalued. The consumer price index shows price levels on consumer goods increased by a whopping 18.6% from 2008 to 2009, and strict capital controls were put in place to stop funds from funnelling out of the country. In a desperate attempt to avoid national bankruptcy, the State underwent hefty austerity measures, and called in the IMF.

Although these facts are readily available, a myth persists to this day that Iceland simply let its banks fail, jailed those responsible for the collapse and took a moral stance that the rest of Europe should aspire to. Take for instance a Guardian interview with healthcare specialist Dr. David Stuckler, where he claims that "recessions can hurt, but austerity kills," before going on to praise the Icelandic State for taking the necessary steps to protect its people. He cites research showing that more than five million US citizens had lost access to healthcare, and 10,000 British families had been pushed into homelessness following housing benefit cuts, whereas Iceland suffered "no noticeable impact on suicide rates or other health problems."

David's estimation is, unfortunately, overly optimistic. In fact, Iceland's already strained healthcare system underwent several bloody budget cuts in the aftermath of the 2008 collapse. In the years preceding the crash, the healthcare system, and LSH in particular, had suffered numerous cost-cutting procedures, leaving it with little fat to trim when the State implemented its emergency procedures.

Emergency measures

Looking simply at the amount of ISK on LSH's budget shows that half a billion extra ISK went towards the hospital's budget in 2009, compared to 2007. However, due to the severely deflated ISK, this actually amounted to a hefty reduction in funds, going from the equivalent of $520 million in 2007 to the equivalent of $274 million in 2009.

The emergency measures included lowering or freezing hospital staff wages, delaying repairs and maintenance, and cutting the equivalent of 400-500 full-time positions at LSH. Ögmundur Jónason, of the Left-Green party, served as Minister of Health in the aftermath of the collapse, and oversaw the aforementioned austerity measures. Ögmundur tells me that these measures were meant as a short-term fix, and that the budget was supposed to be drastically improved once the economy stabilised.

"People realised at the time that the State had very little funds to work with," he says, "and that we were doing the best we could with what we had. We had no choice but to downsize." In an effort to shield the welfare system, Ögmundur says the government tried to focus on cutting other programmes, such as infrastructure investments by 85%, and road administration by 50%.

Ögmundur says he regrets that his government wasn't able to do more, and is convinced that the healthcare sector shouldered too much of the burden. He also expresses anger towards the current government, which he says is not doing enough to revitalise the vulnerable aspects of Icelandic welfare society while toying with ideas of further privatisation.

No privatisation

Taking over from Ögmundur, Kristján Þór Júlíusson assumed the position of Minister of Healthcare on behalf of the Independence Party in 2013. Kristján tells me that by the time he took office, the healthcare sector had undergone cuts to the amount of 30 billion ISK.

When asked to assess his predecessor's work, Kristján declined to comment, stating that he is not interested in finding fault with those who came before him. "It's easy to sit on a high horse and criticise the decisions of others," he tells me, "and things could always have been prioritised differently." He also insists that the Icelandic healthcare system will not be privatised on his watch, although he says he's open to private enterprises operating in service of the public sector.

Catching up

Kristján notes that nations who operate a similar healthcare system to Iceland, spend on average 1.8-4% of their healthcare budget on medical equipment, whereas only 0.6% of LSH's budget was used for that purpose in 2013. To stem the tide, Kristján Þór's ministry has laid out a four-year budget of medical equipment maintenance amounting to 5.5 billion ISK for LSH and 800 million for Akureyri Hospital. "We envision that we can catch up to where we should be after four years," he says.

His ministry also runs a project called Betri heilbrigðisþjónusta 2013-2017 ("A Better Healthcare Service 2013-2017"), which has the aim of streamlining the healthcare sector, for instance by directing patients more efficiently between hospitals, healthcare clinics and independent healthcare operators.

Following loud protests inside and outside of Alþingi in response to the government's 2015 budget proposal, the second draft of the bill included an additional billion ISK for LSH's budget, 250 million to healthcare clinics and 150 million for the Icelandic Health Insurance institute to further subsidise prescription drugs. If passed in its proposed form, it will mark the greatest amount of ISK allocated to the hospital, ever, which could in turn reinforce some of the healthcare system's infrastructure.

Prescribing Trouble

Prescription drugs used to be either completely, partially or not at all covered by the insurance system, sometimes arbitrarily. On May 4, 2013, a new system was implemented, which was meant to be simpler and more just than the old one. The new arrangement entails three payment steps, where patients must progress from paying the full price of medication, to 15% and then 7.5%. Once the total costs reach a certain cap, patients can request a medical exemption licence that sees their medication fully subsidized. The system resets every year, making patients go through the three steps again.

Medical professionals have noted that the system is not without fault—Dr. Ólafur Baldursson, PhD, Chief Medical Executive of LSH, notes that "the system is not working the way it was meant to, and there has been very negative feedback from patients," as the chronically ill, who previously did not have to pay for prescriptions, now find themselves burdened with a hefty annual fee.

Ólafur G. Skúlason, chair of the Icelandic Nurses' Association, says that the increased cost of care for patients in recent years is an unacceptable development in a welfare society. "Why people with cancer have to pay such exorbitant fees for their treatment is beyond me," he says. "We should be able to find ways for patients to get the care they need without having to worry about their families' livelihood."

Ólafur says he also worries about how costly seeking medical help has become for fringe groups, such as those suffering from mental illness, people on benefits, pensioners, and the homeless—he feels society needs to do more to address their situation and ensure they can lead decent lives. "We need to do more to resemble the other Nordic welfare models, securing the funds needed to run a powerful and modern healthcare system."

Retired 82-year-old GP Dr. Haukur S. Magnússon echoes Ólafur's sentiments that a fundamental change in how patients receive care has occurred in Iceland. "I had to buy medicine the other day, and it cost me 17,000 ISK," he says. "I can pay that amount out of pocket, but I'm not sure everyone else can."

Haukur became a doctor in 1961 and worked full time until 2003, after which he's continued working shifts in clinics out in the countryside and at the Grund nursery home. Over the course of his career, Haukur saw leaps and bounds in medical science, with more precise x-ray machines becoming available, the introduction of endoscopy, angioplasty, keyhole surgery, CAT scans and MRIs, and numerous medicines that made short work of diseases that had previously required major surgery.

Much like the managing director of the Primary Health Care of the Capital Area, Oddur Steinarsson, Haukur worries that there are currently far too few GPs in Iceland. Oddur estimates that an additional 70-80 more doctors are required nationwide to meet primary care requirements. In the meanwhile, Haukur notes that patients often seek expensive treatment from specialists for problems that a GP could easily tend to. "Just the other week, a grandchild of mine went to a dermatologist who performed a three minute examination for which he charged 7,000 ISK."

May Day Mayday

The Doctor's Union suffers a medical emergency

Following a round of unsuccessful negotiations, doctors in Iceland commenced their first ever strike in late October. In the wake of the banking crisis, so as to share the burden, doctors not only accepted a 5% wage cut, but also ceased seeking pay raises with as much fervour as before. As a result, their wages now lag far behind other public sector professions and the consumer price index. Compensation in the Icelandic healthcare sector is no longer competitive with those in our neighbouring countries, both in terms of salaries and holiday allowances.

Now that the economy is purportedly in better shape, doctors are asking that their wages reflect the six years of unpaid academic study that their profession requires, and the amount of responsibility that the job entails. At present, doctors who specialize abroad also face a hefty wage cut upon returning to the island—experts have expressed serious concern that Iceland will soon face a shortage of medical specialists if their salaries don't start reflecting what comparable positions in neighbouring countries yield.

The Icelandic Medical Association's motion to strike received near unanimous member support, with 96% voting to engage in strike actions in an early October ballot. Since no agreement has been reached, plans are afoot to engage in further and harsher strike actions in 2015.

Primum non nocere

The strike sees departments scaling down their efforts (albeit with good notice), making research, surgeries and appointments grind down to a halt. However, those who need immediate medical attention do receive it, and there is a clear emphasis on not risking patients' safety, as was apparent in the case of Sebastian Andrzej Golab. Vísir reports that Sebastian was stabbed through the heart on November 23, mid-strike, and suffered cardiac arrest upon arrival at the hospital. Following an emergency surgery, he has fortunately made a miraculous recovery.

All manner of non-essential operations and procedures, however, are being delayed. This leaves an estimated 540 people awaiting minor surgery; with a further 100 people awaiting specialised surgeries such as cornea transplants and coronary angioplasty; 800 individual tests, such as blood tests, X-rays and CAT scans; and an estimated 2,041 outpatient appointments.

Minister of Finance Bjarni Benediktsson has said that the doctors' demands are unreasonable and will, if met, result in a slippery slope, where other professions will ask for similarly unattainable raises. While Minister of Health Kristján Þór is not on the negotiating team, he has expressed sympathy for the doctors' cause. "Their wages have fallen behind in a very competitive market," he says, "but I believe the strike will only be solved if both parties reach a compromise."

Remarking on the strike, Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson echoed the position of Business Iceland (a service and lobby group for Icelandic businesses), calling for a national reconciliation on pay raises. Polls by Capacent-Gallup and MMR show that the generally populist PM has positioned himself on the wrong side of popular opinion in this regard, as both indicate that an overwhelming majority of the nation supports the doctors' demands (finding majorities of 80% and 70%, respectively).

The voice on the ground

Dr. Íris Ösp Vésteinsdóttir, chair of the Icelandic Association Of Junior Doctors, says she was shocked when the strike went forward in October. "I had difficulties falling asleep the night before the strike commenced, because I was convinced I'd hear them announce on the news that a compromise had been reached," she says. "But, the negotiators didn't so much as call us with a new token offer."

Íris says that the problem started in 2008, when doctors were asked to refrain from seeking pay raises, so as to keep the system going. Ever since, the base salary has remained low, but doctors have had the possibility of raising their wages by working overtime shifts on evenings and weekends. The younger generation of doctors, however, is not particularly interested in employing such measures to attain a fair salary, Íris remarks.

The hospitals continue running as usual during the strike, says Íris, with critical patients receiving the care they need. But, everything happens at a slower pace, with longer waiting periods.

A case in point would be that of 24-year-old football player Mist Edvardsdóttir. RÚV reports that Mist, who has stage three lymphoma, caught a serious infection while undergoing immunosuppressive treatment, but had to wait a full fifteen hours to be treated.

Íris fears what might happen if the strike isn't soon resolved. "Since the economic crisis started, healthcare professionals have been driven hard for a long time, and now they are tired and want something in return." If the healthcare system continues deteriorating as it has been, Íris believes Iceland will become less appealing to move back to for young people who have studied abroad, as well as educated medical professionals.

Continues on P.20

Continues from P.19

With 35% of Icelandic specialists slated to retire in the next ten years, and 20% in the next five, Íris foresees an imminent shortage. Already, Dr. Ólöf Birna Margrétardóttir, MD, and Dr. Jón Örvar Kristinsson, a gastroenterologist, have publicly handed in their resignation letters, and there are fears that more will soon follow if an agreement is not reached by the end of the year. "It stings even more when both the Prime Minister and Minister of Health have said they are worried about the situation, but the negotiators refuse to budge," she says. "With Skype, Facetime and other modern technologies, living apart from your ones family and loved ones is less difficult than ever before, making the prospect of working in another country seem viable to many."

The appeal of Iceland

Úlfur Thorodssen, a medical student in his final year, does not imagine he'll return to the country after becoming a specialist with the situation the way it is right now. He will have to study overseas, which he estimates takes around five years, after which his international earning potential will outweigh anything Iceland has to offer. "After living somewhere for five years, you've made a life for yourself, and have higher wages than here, so why should anyone return home?" he asks.

Were the situation different, wages higher and more funds put towards the healthcare system as a whole, Úlfur says he would strongly consider moving back. "I know it won't be as good as in other countries, but if the wages and holiday allowance were better, it would change the equation."

For others, like Dr. Guðmundur Karl Snæbjörnsson, there is a compromise to be made between living at home and earning good wages. In the aftermath of the economic collapse, Guðmundur started an agency called Hvítir sloppar ("White Robes"), which solicits jobs in Sweden for Icelanders interested in working there for periods of time. He says that some take unpaid leave from their posts in Iceland to supplant their wages, whereas others will spend every other fortnight working in Sweden, returning to Iceland to rest and meet their families in between stints, thus earning enough to support themselves and their families.

"We recently advertised 300 available positions in Sweden, so there's no shortage of work to be found," he says, adding that his company employs junior doctors and specialists alike. He refuses, however, to discuss how many people are involved in the venture.

Guðmundur has full confidence in the current health minister, and has personally taken part in shaping the health policies of the Independence and Progressive parties (currently in government), but says there has been a long-standing lack of interest from parliament in dealing with medical matters. "Healthcare professionals, the ones that know the most about their work, have no say in how the healthcare system is run. This results in bad bureaucratic decisions that negatively affect the system."

Despite the times being rough at the moment, some—like Dr. Inga Sif Ólafsdóttir, PhD—have returned to Iceland with their families in tow. Inga Sif spent ten and a half years abroad, specialising in internal and medicine respiratory medicine, as well as receiving a PhD from the University of Uppsala, Sweden. During that time, she and her husband, an ophthalmic surgeon, had bought a house in Uppsala, where they enjoyed a good life with their three children. She says that they eventually decided to return home to Iceland because there was something calling them back. "Good memories, family and nature all factored heavily into our decision," she says, "but we weren't quite expecting what we encountered."

> "Since the economic crisis started, healthcare professionals have been driven hard for a long time, and now they are tired and want something in return."

Upon their return, the family's wages shrank by more than half. In Iceland, Inga Sif receives only a small portion of the holiday allowance that doctors in Sweden are allotted.

What surprised Inga Sif more than the low wages, however, was how few healthcare professionals there were around, and at what pace they had to work. "You quite often come home feeling disappointed, because you don't have time to complete as many tasks as you would like to," she says, "and there is significant risk of people burning out." Inga Sif is afraid that if the system doesn't become more flexible, doctors will stop returning to Iceland from international studies, and that it will create a downward spiral that will be difficult to reverse.

Inga Sif calls for a certain attitudinal change in society, for politicians to look at the big picture, and realise that doctors are a vital segment of the healthcare system—if all the segments don't work together, we can't maintain the system we have grown accustomed to.

Enter The Director

Páll Matthíasson runs this ship...

Throughout the whole debacle, one man has consistently remained focused on the big picture: LSH director Dr. Páll Matthíasson, PhD. Educated as a psychiatrist, Páll served as a senior physician before becoming the Chief Psychiatry Executive at LSH in 2009—and director at the end of 2013. Despite the tremendous pressure he faces with the ongoing strike, Páll still finds time to sit down with me in his office to discuss LSH and the future of medicine in Iceland.

"Off the cliff"

Up until the second draft of the government's budget was announced, Páll was looking at having to employ hefty cost-saving exercises, which he likens to having to put on a T-shirt that's a size too small. "Either you tear it by trying to do too much at once, or you have to downsize so you fit into it."

This problem has been affecting the director's work since the 2008 collapse. His predecessor, Björn Zoëga, retired in protest a year ago, when the state yet again failed to raise the hospital's budget. At the time, he remarked: "if the budget is not changed, it will be very difficult to run the hospital in a safe way. I will not partake in driving the hospital off the cliff."

Páll celebrates the newly allocated funds earmarked for medical equipment renewal, the plans for a new state-of-the-art hospital (more on that later), and the extra one billion ISK that will make its way to LSH's operational budget. He says that it's as if those in charge have finally woken up from a bad dream and realised how dire the situation had become. "We were able to cut costs efficiently for about two years, but we knew we'd need more funds," he says. "It's a bit like holding your breath. You can do it for half a minute, but not five, so if we had gotten this money in 2012, we'd have a lot less work to catch up on."

A quick billion

The current strike presents to him a two-fold challenge; on the one hand, the longer it persists, the more of the operational budget will be eaten up by procedures that the strike places on hold, and on the other it is demoralising for staff, and may spur hospital employees to seek gainful employment elsewhere. He stresses that people have to be paid well enough to enjoy their work.

At present, Páll has the task of allocating that one billion ISK, which he says is a good start, though more funds are needed. "Just replacing the old backup power generators at the Fossvogur branch will cost up to 200 million ISK," he says, "and our computer systems are in dire need of upgrades. We suffered a crash not long ago that resulted in the entire network being down for two hours. That will also cost around 200 million ISK."

His work requires him to look even further than that, though, and getting the long-promised state-of-the-art hospital built is one of his top priorities. The building is slated for completion in 2020, and Páll deems it to be paramount to patient safety. He says that the facilities at their Fossvogur branch haven't been properly cared for in decades, and as a result black mould has festered, among other things. Overcrowding is also an issue, with up to six people at a time sharing a room and toilet facilities.

"Building the new hospital also allows us to centralise many of our services, such as our A&E departments, which will cuts costs considerably," he says. At present, the hospital operates two operational emergency departments along with numerous specialised care departments spread over a large area, both of which present risk factors for patients. "We move 9,000 patients between departments and buildings annually," he says. "Just the act of moving a critically ill patient between floors presents a risk—ferrying them across town is both costly and hazardous, and will lengthen their recovery time by about a day."

Páll estimates that operating out of the new hospital will save around 2.63 billion ISK per year, once it's completed.

Every little bit helps

Páll admits that the hospital staff has managed to work wonders with very little money, but that for any meaningful change to happen, more funds need to be funnelled into the healthcare sector. Iceland's health expenditure went from being 10.05% of its GDP in 2003, down to 8.81% in 2013, which is a development that Páll wants to reverse. Only two other Western countries have cut their healthcare expenditures proportionally more than Iceland: Greece and Ireland.

In comparison to the other Nordic nations, Iceland spends a lot less on its healthcare system. A 2013 OECD report shows that Norway spends 9.3% of its GDP on health expenditures, Sweden 9.5%, and Denmark 10.9%—these countries also out-earn Iceland's $54,000 GDP per capita, with $100,000, $58,000 and $59,000 respectively. "Each percentage of our GDP is worth 18 billion ISK," Páll says, "so if we were to match Germany's 11.3%, that would be an addition of 40 billion ISK or so."

The McKinsey & Company consultancy group compared the cost of procedures at LSH and Karolinska University Hospital in Stockholm, Sweden, which is a facility three times as big as its Icelandic counterpart. Carrying out a single unit of procedure, such as curing pneumonia, was found to cost 50% less in Iceland than in Sweden. This efficiency is to be celebrated in Páll's opinion, but the hospital needs to be run in a sustainable manner where people feel good about their work and don't risk burning out. "If you routinely have to call in one or two people to cover a shift, you'll cut costs by just creating more positions and giving your staff a bit of breathing room."

Until the funds increase and the strike is resolved, he'll keep doing what he does, and try to make LSH the best hospital it can be with the resources at hand.

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The Best Of What We Saw At Iceland Airwaves 2014

Some observations from our team

MUSIC REVIEW

Words
Haukur S. Magnússon

Photos
Matt Eisman, mostly

Iceland Airwaves 2014 came and went, and oh what a blast it was (it was. It's crazy. You should come next year). We very much like the Iceland Airwaves festival. Indeed, every year since 2005, we've operated a gargantuan team dedicated to reviewing EVERY SHOW by EVERY BAND on the official festival schedule. Through the years, this has proved a fun and often rough process that has resulted in some great writing, several nice quotes for a band's press kit, a few broken hearts, several heated phone calls and more than one death threat (including that time in the late '00s when a local electronic musician proclaimed very seriously that he would burn our office to the ground). It will also, as time progresses, surely provide vital insight for tomorrow's pop scholars.

Anyway, rather than repeat ourselves for the tenth year in a row, we decided to try something different this year. "Something different" in this case meant assembling a small team of music enthusiasts (and one photographer), equipping them with press passes and letting them loose on the festival grounds, to do as they pleased, so long as they would turn in at least one piece per day—interview, review, thinkpiece, whatever. Then, we also did fun things like build a portrait studio in our office and feed pizza to drunken garage rockers.

This worked out fairly well—a lot of good stuff came out of it actually. You can read all those wonderful articles and look at a bunch of great pictures on www.grapevine.is/culture/music/airwaves. In the meantime, read our team members' thoughts on the best/most memorable stuff they experienced at this year's Airwaves.

See you at IA2K15!

Soup

Parker Yamasaki

It was a cup of soup. A free cup of scalding oil bubbles, salt, carrots, meat, onions, and more salt. The soup reached me on Sunday evening at Bravó, at the Grapevine team's final Airwaves meeting. By that point, I had been physically assaulted by the festival. I was running off of a maximum six hours of sleep and a Bounty bar. The cold from outside had crept into my core and taken residence in my body like a parasite. I was a host to exhaustion; this was bedrock. Simply existing was too grand a task for me, and the thought of dancing, thinking, interacting nearly brought me to tears. And then the miraculous hand of Haukur reached over my shoulder and floated the oily styrofoam cup down to the table. It was relief itself—mediocre-tasting, extremely salty, so hot that I could hardly use my mouth the next day.

But it was nourishment. It was replenishing my substance and collapsing the ice cavern inside of me. What was truly profound about this cup of soup is that it revived in me the will to be. Listening, dancing, engaging with the night no longer seemed like a malicious attack on my sanity. I welcomed it, I was excited, even. With a renewed vitality I charged to Húrra where Ghostigital were performing their final Airwaves set. And there I found my second favourite sight of the festival, which I have already written a total fangirl review of.

Purify

Saskia Vallendar

The best thing I saw was **Caribou** on Saturday night at Hafnarhús. Caribou's purified beats and textured electronica with Dan Snaith's lullaby vocals singing "I can't do without you" led the crowd into exciting new worlds of musical finesse. The diverse variety of songs, some with a techno beat, others with a more electronica focus, gave us an insight into the many wonders of music by Mr. Snaith and his band. The build-up from the first song to the last added up through dynamic shifts and created a warm and loose atmosphere leaving the audience ecstatic! I loved every bit of it and wish it had never ended!

"Caribou was the best concert this year... actually it made it to my Top Five concerts of the past seven Airwaves," my Icelandic friend concluded on Sunday night after the final Airwaves concert.

I agree, they were amazing!

Industry

Atli Bollason

Polish sonic assailants **BNNT** left the longest-lasting impression at Airwaves 2014. Their performance was both engaging and uncompromising and it shook me up. Some would argue that it had more to do with performance art than music. That might be true. But then, my interests have simply shifted over the years.

Maybe I feel like something is lacking in the standard concert model. Maybe I'm not that interested anymore in seeing kids performing music with their fingers crossed, hoping a snippet will end up in an Adidas or H&M ad so their "name will get out there" and their YouTube views stack up and their page-like numbers rise. Maybe it has something to do with the "state of the industry." Maybe it has something to do with "industry." Because my runner-up also played with the format: **The Knife** put on a memorable show that was extremely successful in doing away with celebrity and rather celebrating unity. Naysayers who dread the apparent miming should consider seriously how much performance there is generally in electronic shows. I'm not sure cueing scenes in Ableton Live necessarily counts as performing, whereas dancing cheerfully around with a dozen people in pastel onesies and pretending to play huge drums definitely does.

But don't be fooled; rest assured that both BNNT and The Knife performed music that was very very very cool.

Emotion

Gabríel Benjamin

There were plenty of great shows at this year's Airwaves that deserve special mention, including **Agent Fresco** and **Mammút's** dramatic sets, and **Brain Police**

and **Jaako Eino Kalevi's** energetic performances, but they weren't the best. It is very tempting to nominate **Future Islands** or **The Flaming Lips** as the best—after all, they were two of the headlining acts and had a deeply emotional impact on me, with the former absolutely gutting me, and the latter being such a grand blues-buster that my face still hurts from smiling.

It would be easy to pick them, but the "BEST THING I SAW" was clearly **Girl Band**. No, they aren't the Irish Spice Girls, they are a four-part smack-in-the-face noise post-punk outfit that excel at subverting your expectations and rocking the fuck out! They are the real deal and you should go see them play, both because they're really good, and also because there's not much to watch or listen to online, as these bloody wankers still haven't released anything more than a single 7"...

Moments

Chris D'Alessandro

This is a query that I find daunting, frustrating, and unanswerable and I don't think I'll answer it with the typical expected explanation of "**Flaming Lips** put on the best fucking show holy fucking dog dicks, Fuck yeah Iceland!"

Nah, I think I'll go a different route on this one, but it's no less genuine as I feel I could never narrow a festival spanning five blurry nights of dazed and confused magic into one favourite moment. It's never about just one occasion, or specifically one performance, it's a beautifully decorated cornucopia of good times with good people, with good music, with good vibes and a whole lot of liver punching with alcohol consumption.

Some things are lost and forgotten in the hippocampus, which is a major component in the brain responsible for creating new memories, both long-term and short-term, as well as spacial navigation, hence the swaying of drunkards to and fro as if the gravities of the world are tugging at them from every which angle. I may not remember everything exactly as it happened, but looking back through my photos I'm reminded of one particular beauty I saw at the **Girl Band/Spray Paint** show on Friday. Here it is in all of its glory:
Behold, in all its free-flowing beauty! As a stereotypical hockey-loving Canadian, the best thing I saw at Iceland Airwaves 2014 was definitely this dude's hockey hair. Everyone, meet Kaarl Cårlsberg, he was drafted to the NHL in 2014 for having perfect hockey hair. His flow is impetuous and his defense is impregnable, his stick-handling with the biscuit (puck) is sub-par and his wrist shot is shit, but that doesn't matter when your hair looks this good...

anyway players are often too completely distracted by his valiant flow to strip the puck off this rookie.

Why was this my favorite Airwaves moment, you may ask in bewilderment? Because man, like Neil Young once said, Rock and roll is about micro moments, and if you don't appreciate this micro moment, than you don't appreciate rock and roll… You hoser.

PS—His name isn't really Kaarl and he doesn't identify with hockey in any way, but he was a good sport about us snapping a photo of him, if you see him around give this dude a high five! fuckin' right bud.

Selfie

Valgerður Þóroddsdóttir

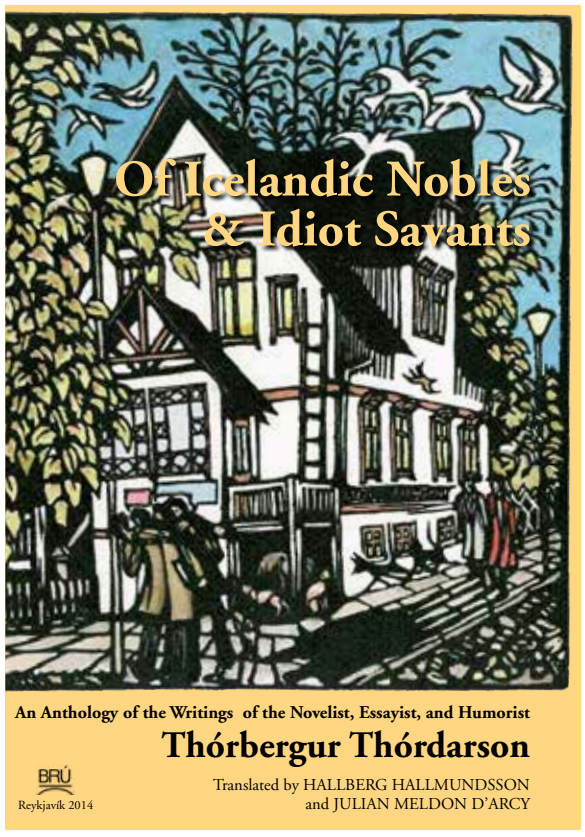
The best thing I saw at Airwaves 2014 was when two blonde, teenaged Icelandic girls came up to 19-year-old Danish-Palestinian poet **Yahya Hassan** at a bar in downtown Reykjavík and asked if they could take a selfie with him. They said, "Excuse me, I know this is weird but we love your poetry." I have never seen anyone act like that around a poet before in my life. Long live the revolution.

Vintage

John Rogers

Well, this was a "vintage Airwaves" in my opinion, although I seem to say the same thing every year. The headliners didn't disappoint, although the programming of **Future Islands** against **The Knife** did. Having chosen Future Islands, I was duly blown away by their odd, intense, emotional, theatrical pop music.

The only thing that hit quite the same peaks for me personally was **Ghostigital**—a king of improv-electronic-punk band that whip up a storm of energy, and seem indefatigably creative. From the new Icelandic crop, **M-Band's** tenor vocals and atmospheric soundscapes seemed to shine particularly brightly.



Of Icelandic Nobles & Idiot Savants

An Anthology of the Writings of the Novelist, Essayist, and Humorist

Thórbergur Thórdarson

Translated by
Hallberg Hallmundsson and Julian Meldon D'Arcy

The funniest chapters from the writings of Mr. Thórdarson, along with the most daring, as for example his letter to a Nazi from the year 1933.

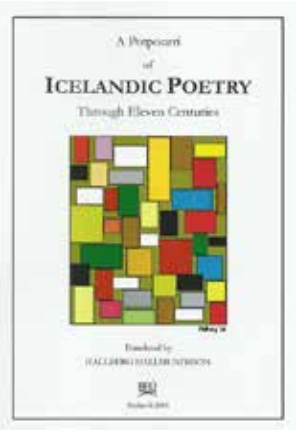
The Poetry of Egill Skallagrímsson, Hallgrímur Pétursson, Jónas Hallgrímsson, Stephan G. Stephansson, Einar Benediksson, Davíð Stefánsson, Tómas Guðmundsson, Jón Dan, Kristján frá Djúpalæk, Jón úr Vör, Einar Bragi, Ragnar Ingi Aðalsteinsson, Sigurður Pálsson, Steinunn Sigurðardóttir, Ísak Harðarson, Jónas Þorbjarnarson and many more.

Of Icelandic Nobles is 217 pages and Potpourri is 243 pages

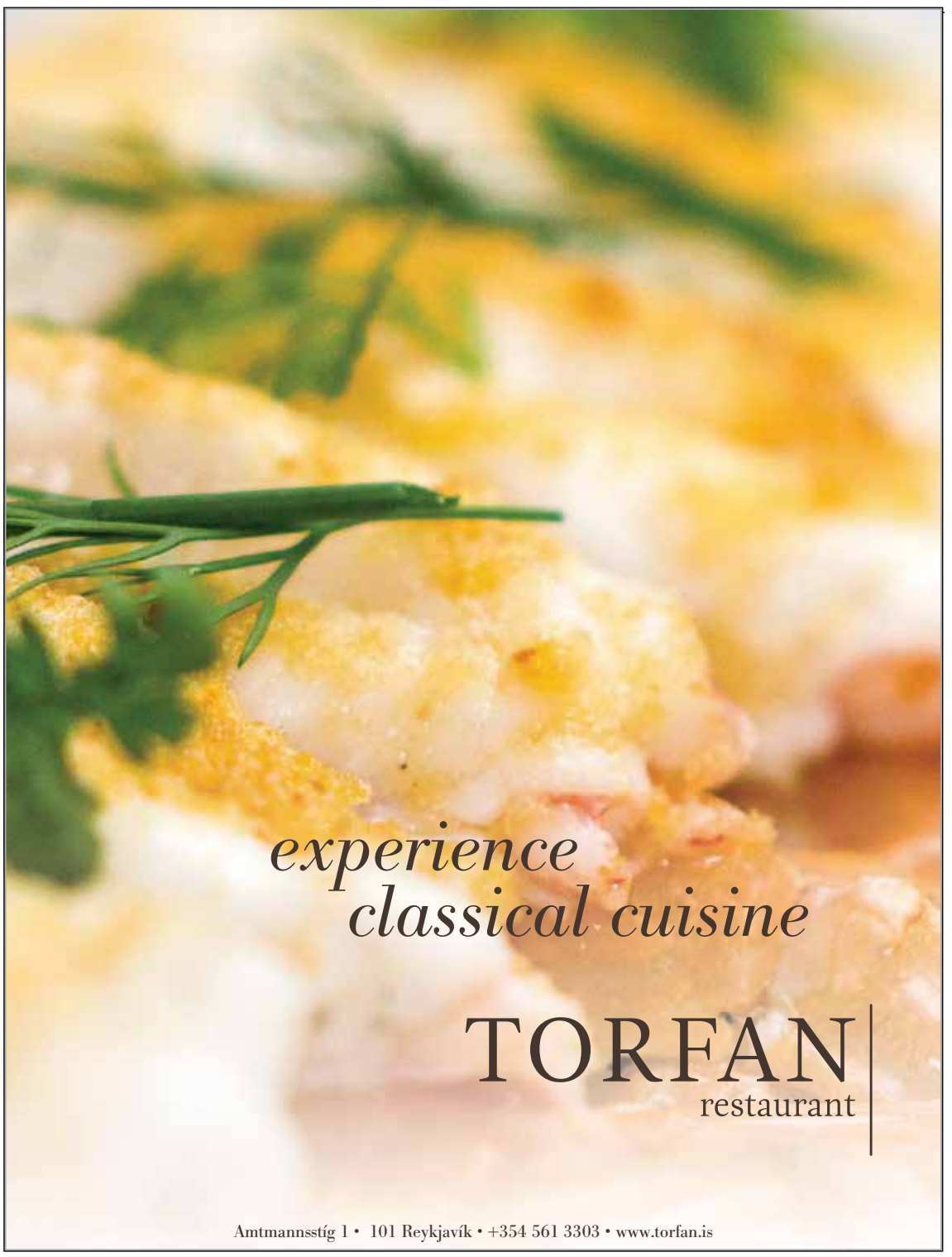
Also published by BRÚ:

A Potpourri of Icelandic Poetry
Through Eleven Hundred Years

Translations and biographies by
Hallberg Hallmundsson



Distributed by Forlagið – JPV. The books are available in all of the bigger bookshops



Album Reviews

HATER VS. LOVER

Skálmöld: Með Vættum

Napalm Records (2014)

www.skalmold.is

With 'Með vættum', Skálmöld continue to set a bad example for aspiring metal musicians, emphasizing that cliché trumps hard work and talent every time.

– For someone whose life revolves around metal, trying to get through an entire Skálmöld album in one sitting is like subjecting yourself to Chinese water torture. Throughout the whole, endless run-time, the only thing I could think was, "What did those poor instruments ever do to you guys?" When the choruses kicked in, I was left wondering if Einar Bárðarson—or whoever is behind this marketing ploy—had not fully understood the results his "define: metal" Google search.

Basically, the utter dreck coming out of my speakers sounds like the whole album was mixed through a filter of Easy Cheese, and the few Taco Riffs which that cheese was sprayed on top of were of the Taco Bell kind.

The consensus within the local metal scene about this band and its music—this album included—is that somewhere along the way something went terribly awry, and what we are now stuck with is being represented internationally by an entity that doesn't come close to defining what the scene—and the talent, passion and hard work that goes into keeping such a high standard of quality—is about. It's like the local metel scene has been hijacked, kind of like parliament was hijacked by a slack-jawed horde of utter buffoons that no one will admit to having voted for.

Such is the high price of the lowest common denominator.

☿ - BOGI BJARNASON

+ A Skálmöld fan since the very beginning, I was feeling quite giddy when I first laid my ears on their new album, 'Með vættum'. Granted, there was a hint of worry in my fragile little heart, since it's not super uncommon that third albums are completely crappy and useless.

Not this one though.

This one is completely awesome, in almost every way.

I've always been fond of bassist/lyricist Snæbjörn's storytelling prowess. The Skálmöld M.O. of making all the songs part of an epic story told throughout the album just makes listening to the whole thing that much more satisfying.

And then, there is the music.

Most of the songs are very good. Those that aren't—they're awesome.

The new songs are less "catchy" than the songs that make up Skálmöld's two prior LPs. This shouldn't come as a surprise, though: the band declared beforehand that they wanted to make a very heavy metal album,. And that's what they did.

'Með vættum' is a powerful album, the often-long tracks chock-full of great riffs and wonderful solos. And so much screaming. Skálmöld still play Viking metal, make no mistake. This time around, though, there's a lot more metal, and a bit less Viking.

I really do like the fact that they play a lot more with the voice of guitarist Baldur this time around. Listening to that guy's screams literally makes my throat hurt. Keyboardist Gunnar Ben also jumps in more this time around to recite poems. As ever, though, it is Björgvin's growly voice that carries all the brunt of the songs, and he does a stellar job as always.

Those three voices contradict and support each other in a weird, yet satisfying way. Somehow it all works out great.

Those who forked out for a physical version of 'Með vættum' will also enjoy the awesome artwork of Ásgeir Jón, who also did the artwork for the band's sophomore effort, 'Börn Loka'. He truly brings the world of Skálmöld to life with his enthralling depictions of dragons and giants and war and death.

Skálmöld is a band that loves doing what they do: playing together and delivering great music and fantasies in the process. Here's hoping they keep at it for a long, long time.

☿ - SNORRI ÖRN RAFNSSON

Asonat "Connection"

(2014)

www.n5md.com/artist/Asonat

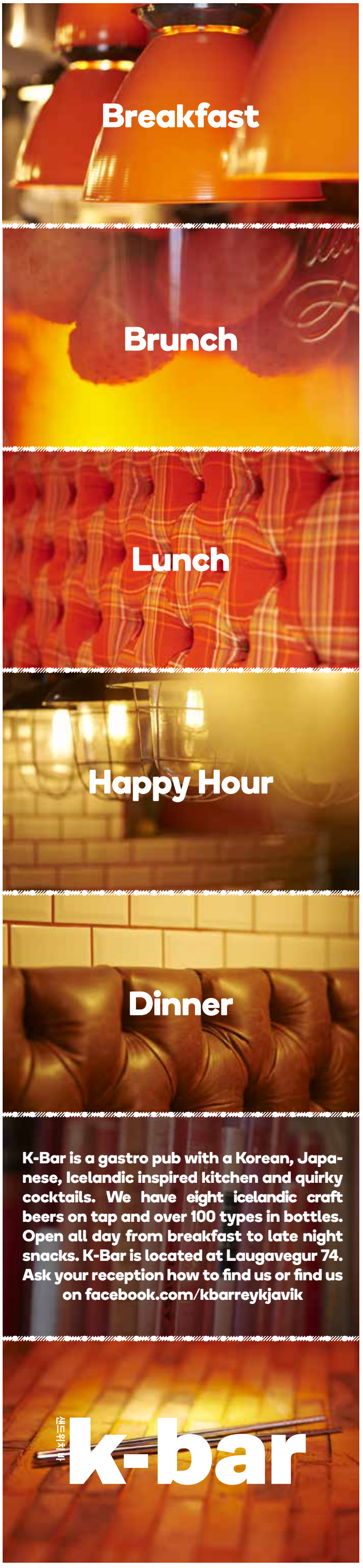
A synth-filled romance

+ Asonat's recently released 'Connection' takes the best moments of their debut recording, 'Love in Times of Repetition'—wistful lyrical lines, glitchy beats, and lush, warm synths—and builds upon those even further for a standout second LP. Each track on the album has song-like vocals and is song-length, with nary an extended mix to be heard. The duo of Jónas Þór Guðmundsson and Fannar Ásgrímsson have smartly added singer Olèna Simon to their ensemble, and her quiet, sometimes Björk-like melodic inflections offer a vaporous romance. The group all takes turns at singing, sometimes joining voices at the unison, and sometimes breaking away into subtle harmonies.

Each track on 'Connection' showcases Asonat's palette, different facets of the same persona. Album opener "Quiet Storm" sets the tone for hushed, yearning vocals and lush background textures. It sways gently in a three-beat pattern, much less common than the traditional four-on-the-floor pulse in electronic music. "Hearts in Trouble" is in French, which still feels completely at home amidst other English-language tracks. "Rather Interesting" conjures a little shoegaze, Iceland's version of the Cocteau Twins or Boards of Canada. "Before It Was" revels in off-kilter overlap and swapping of metres, pitting a three-beat melody against a basic four-beat percussion.

Despite the album being somewhat reserved and downtempo, 'Connection' is far from boring. Melodic lines, bass lines, and the vocals all contrast smartly in rhythm and range. The chorus of "Everything Illuminated" repeats simply "single firefly/everything illuminated," but the track is sweet and concise. "One Step at a Time" is a dancier track that feature sharper synths, ripe for remix. "This is the End" is one of the few less-inspiring songs on the album, more saturated with static. But perhaps it's the least exciting because one knows the album is nearing its completion; we're breaking our connection to this listening experience and we know the end is near. But there's a solution to that—you can just begin all over again.

☿ - NATHAN HALL



More Icelandic Christmas Songs That Don't Suck!

Straumur | Straumur radio show airs Mondays on X977 at 23:00 | www.straum.is

Words
Davíð Roach & Óli Dóri

Photo
Skari

Like we noted in last year's Straumur Xmas Special, the holidays can be hard on the ears for folks who have a modicum of taste for decent music. It's a well-known fact that most Icelandic Christmas songs suck pretty hard, but of course there are always some exceptions. You can add the following to last year's selection.

Skakkamanage

"Costa Del Jól"

This lost pearl of a Christmas song was released by indie band Skakkamanage (led by Svavar Pétur, the man behind Prins Póló) just before Christmas of 2005 and is named after one of Iceland most popular holiday destination, Costa Del Sol. It's an unconventional beast that features an excellent, upbeat acoustic guitar melody. The lyrics serve as a Christmas greeting and an apology to friends and family, from a guy who has decided to spend the holidays in Costa Del Sol.

Björk

"Jólasveinar ganga um gólf"

The one and only Björk takes on a classic Icelandic Christmas lullaby, the oldest written documentation of which is from the early 19th century. The lyrics are about those famous Yule Lads who, according to this ditty, like to walk back and forth across the floor with canes in hand, while their mother sweeps said floor and spanks them with a rod. What an odd family.

Ragnar Bjarnason

"Er líða fer að jólum"

This is a true classic Icelandic Christmas song as performed by legendary crooner Ragnar Bjarnason. Ragnar premiered his version at state TV RÚV's first and only New Year's Eve Special in 1980. That Christmas, Icelandic actors were on strike, so it was the first time in the history of Icelandic television that there was no Áramótaskaup comedy revue on offer (more on that in the Grapevine's Encyclopaedia of Icelandic Christmas). Instead, RÚV got local legend Hemmi Gunn to host a special that placed the focused on music and interviews. The song was written by Gunnar Þórðarson, with lyrics from Ómar Ragnarsson, and captures the spirit of Iceland in December perfectly. The darkness, the cold, the light and the music.

Sigur Rós

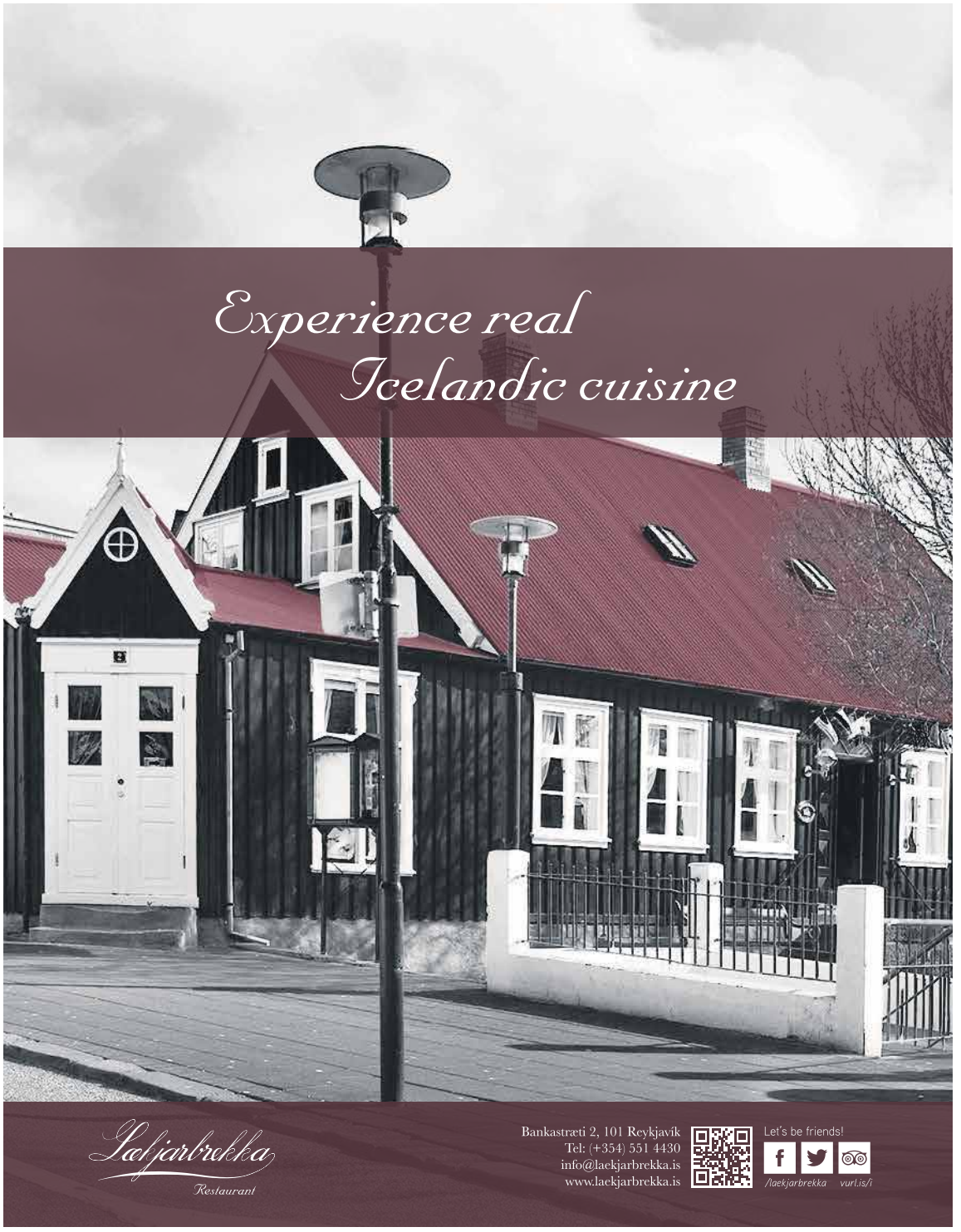
"Ég fæ jólagjöf"

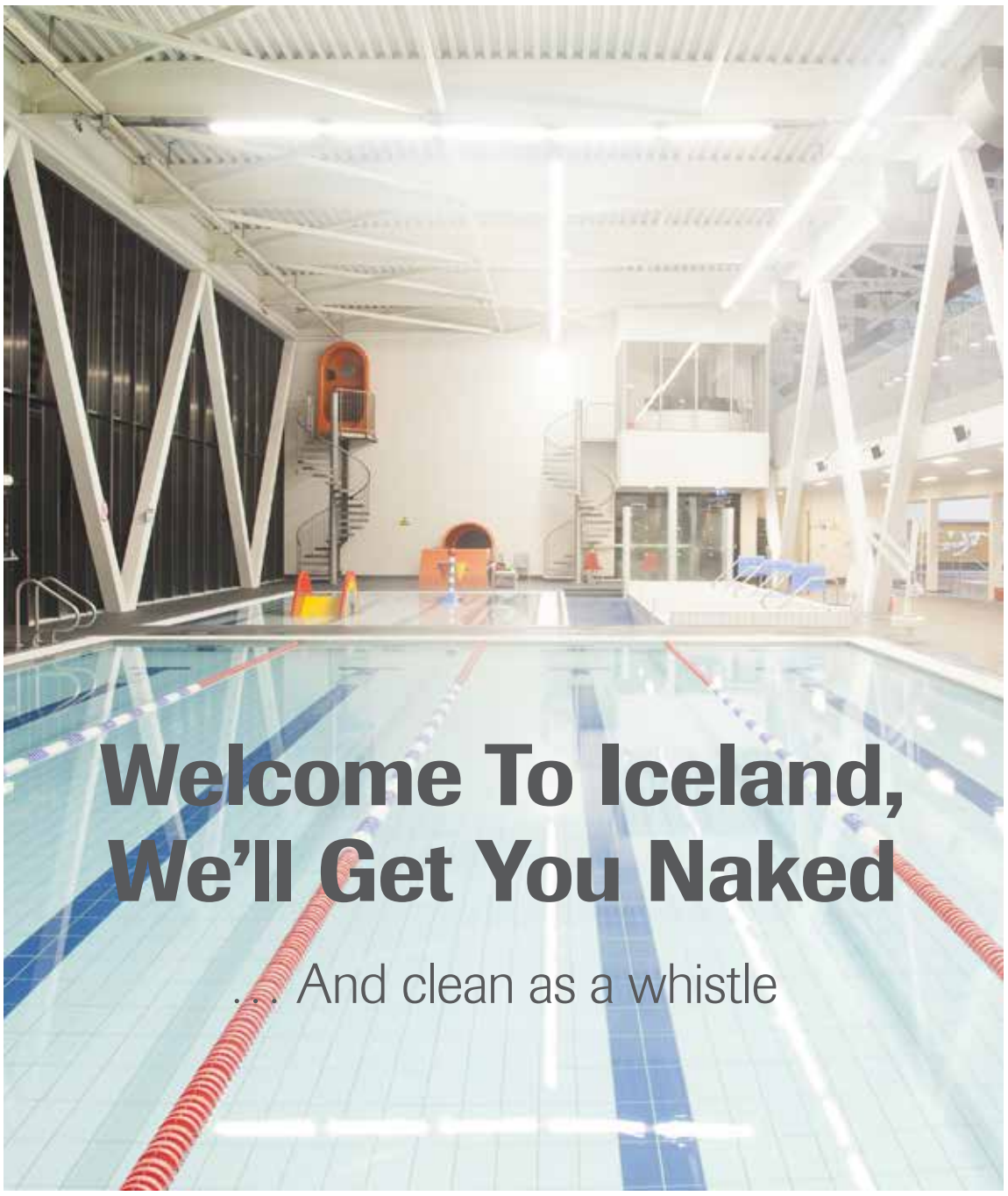
Sigur Rós performed this Icelandic Christmas standard at Gaukur á Stöng in Reykjavík before Christmas of 1999. The song "Ég fæ jólagjöf" ("I'll get a Christmas gift") is an Icelandic take on "Feliz Navidad," and was originally performed by child star Katla María in 1980. Sigur Rós make the song their own with a haunting delivery, slowing it down so much that it's really hard to recognize if you don't know the lyrics.

Gang Related

"Jesú jólasveinn"

Reykjavík indie rockers Gang Related released this song before Christmas of 2011. The lyrics relay a tale about a guy who is telling Jesus—whom he refers to as Jesus Santa Claus—how much he loathes everything about the holidays and how surprised he is that he's the only one. Making full use of their lo-fi 60s pop sound and armed with a grandiose melody and a hilarious lyrics, Gang Related deliver a Christmas song that definitely does not suck.





Welcome To Iceland, We'll Get You Naked

... And clean as a whistle

Words
Gabrielle Motola

Photo
Anna Domnick

"Do we have to shower naked at this one or can we get in it dirty, like pigs?" asks my mother, on our way to swim at the London Fields Lido swimming pool. My mother is a native New Yorker born on the island of Manhattan. I am American by birth but British by naturalisation (I've lived in the UK for nearly half my life). We have just returned to London from a week in Reykjavík, making that my eighth week this year. We swam nearly every day, and the first time I felt compelled to explain ahead of time that you must shower, naked, with soap, before you're allowed anywhere near an Icelandic swimming pool. My mother, unsurprisingly, looked a little worried.

What is the deterrent to showering naked before getting into a pool—to being naked in the company of others, for that matter? Of the same sex? The only times the Americans or British are ever really naked in front of other people for an extended period of time is during sex or at the doctor's, and neither is always absolutely comfortable. For Americans there is a built-in cultural self-consciousness that borders on shame. Like our language, we get it from the British. Icelandic friends have recounted their bemusement at an episode of 'Friends' where Joey walks out into the living room naked and everyone violently recoils, shouting for him to go put some clothes on. This doesn't translate to Icelandic.

Icelandic friends have recounted their bemusement at an episode of 'Friends' where Joey walks out into the living room naked and everyone violently recoils, shouting for him to go put some clothes on. This doesn't translate to Icelandic.

In the Icelandic locker rooms, and I can only speak for the women's, one can usually recognise the Americans (and the British for that matter) by the towels they wear to walk to the showers. As if our modesty, protected until the showers, will be preserved in them. I can understand, though. My first time in an Icelandic swimming pool I was acutely aware of my shyness. Feeling uncomfortable but being adaptive, I pretended to be invisible and got on with it, without a towel. However by this time around, being a regular swimmer in Iceland, I am over the nudity. I confirmed this over the summer when I ran into a woman I met at Kiki bar in the showers. She had texted me at 5 o'clock one morning, but I never texted her back. That's potentially embarrassing enough with clothes on. However, we had a full discourse about what happened and why, all as she was shampooing her hair and washing her breasts.

For everyone who frequents the pool, the London Lido has a grand total of five outdoor showers with inadequately timed pushbutton-operated "on" cycles, as well as three indoor showers in the women's changing room. I suspect there are the same amount in the men's. That's eleven showers for an entire facility the size of the Laugardalslaug outdoor pool. The day we went, the five outdoor showers were out of service due to maintenance. "When you think about it, people are not clean when they go into pools. I go under [the pool showers back in America] with a little trickle of water to get wet so they don't tell me to shower, and I don't use soap," my mom remarked. "It's healthy that people are made to wash their assholes and their genitals and under their arms. (Also their feet and heads.) It shows a societal value. It shows that society values cleanliness." On sunny days at the Lido the water is clouded with sunscreen, sweat, and whatever else.

There are so many advantages to Icelandic pools and I've not even started on the geothermal angle. Take adequate time to observe, reflect and compare the American and British pool systems with the Icelandic ones. Cleanliness aside, the lack of "modesty" cubicles means that we see each other's bodies. Real bodies. Not airbrushed bodies. Ones of all shapes and sizes with folds, zits and cellulite, varicose veins, beautiful and bizarre, you name it. The first time I was in an Icelandic locker room, I exclaimed to myself, "oh, so that's what other women look like." What a relief.

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South Iceland

How to get to Seljavallalaug: Take road 1 South, turn onto road 242 at Raufarfell, keep going until you see Seljavellir.

Southern Hot Spring Fling

Bathing our way across the south of Iceland

Words Melissa Coci

Photos Art Biknick

Imagine this: you've discovered a secret well of hot water, in a mystical setting. You carefully tend to it and make it into a pool for you and your loved ones to enjoy. As time passes, you find your pool is being overrun with strangers—these strangers can be loud and messy, and there was that one time they all stood around and laughed at your pale, naked torso.

AIR ICELAND
FLUGFÉLAG ÍSLANDS

EXPLORING ICELAND,
THE FAROE ISLANDS OR GREENLAND
IT´S EASY WITH AIR ICELAND

Distance from Reykjavík
Seljavallalaug: **130km**

It was with some trepidation that our crew set out to bathe in as many natural geothermal pools in South Iceland as we could manage in three days. It's now common knowledge that some locals have become disgruntled at their secret hot spots becoming not-so-secret. And that is fair enough. The 2010 publication of Jón G. Snæland and Þóra Sigurbjörnsdóttir's guidebook 'Thermal Pools in Iceland'—which details the location of most if not all of Iceland's hidden hot pots—was indeed met with some frustration by locals, protective of their "secret pools."

Somewhat sheepishly armed with our very own copy of the forbidden tome, we set off determined to enjoy these thermal springs in a respectful, "non-touristy" manner.

Opnur

Opnur thermal spring is located on private property, just past Hveragerði. As we jumped a low barbed wire fence and waded our way through a muddy bank, the sight of steaming water over a sun drenched pool felt like some kind of mirage. Though the spring would be considered "tepid," and the floor and walls were algae-rific, the experience was wonderful. Trekking back to the car, my friend and I found ourselves stuck knee-deep in a mud bank. The mud was freezing and felt more like quicksand. I lost a shoe in the ordeal, and as I scrambled through an electric fence (to the zap of multiple shocks), I envisioned the owners of the local farmhouse laughing at me as they watched from their windows. As I sat in shivering, muddy pain back in the car, I realised my 'Thermal Pools in Iceland' book had been left somewhere in the mud. Cue Alanis Morissette.

Seljavallalaug

This pool is much frequented by tourists in summer, and overtly represented on tourist Instagrams and in various unimaginative music videos by uninspired bands. The walk from the car to the pool is just long enough to make you feel adventurous. The scenery is breathtaking, as the pool is in a valley between Lambafellsheiði (to the west) and to the east, the mountain Raufarfell. Ignoring the used nappies in the change room, I gleefully eased myself into the somewhat tepid water. However, hot streams of water run down the rocks on the side of the pool, which are lovely to relax on and warm up your rig.

Oh, and nobody likes your trash. Pick that shit up and take it with you. Don't be the kind of asshole you claim to have come to Iceland to escape.

Hrunalaug

Near the town of Flúðir, this pool is on private property. In fact, a friend used to live on that very property and reminisced to us about the times he spent there—wooing the ladies, enjoying a beverage in the water and relaxing with friends. When tourists started frequenting the pool, it marked the onset of frantic 4am calls to help with bogged cars, presumptuous travellers using the private hot tub near their house and even some "intimate moments" interrupted by, uh, arrivals of taxis full of swimming hopefuls. However, you can see why this pool became so popular. It is hot, picturesque and easy to find. Enjoy it, but bear in mind the vegetation surrounding the pool is becoming increasingly fragile.

Kúalaug

This "cow-pool" lies past Geysir in the Haukadalur valley. Previous to bathing in Kúalaug, we spent close to three hours trying to find neighbouring Marteinslaug. It resulted in foraging through a surprisingly dense forest of bare trees and having to cross a brown river by building a small bridge from fallen branches. Therefore, actually finding Kúalaug was the source of much joy. The water was blissfully warm, the bottom of the pool wasn't too slimy and best of all—like in all our other dips—we had the whole pool to ourselves.

Winter is the best.

But, It's Winter!

Armed with GPS coordinates, a go-with-the flow attitude, a bit of bravado against the cold and respect for the environment around you, thermal spring hopping in winter is an excellent way to beat the dark day blues. As they say "Take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints."

Opnur:
GPS: N63 58.875, -W21 10.591

Seljavallalaug
GPS: N63 34.013, -W19 36.379

Hrunalaug
GPS: N64 08.034, -W20 15.428

Kualaug
GPS: N64 19.605, -W20 16.924

Englandshverir
GPS: N64 29.465, -W21 10.645

Hvalfjarðarlaug
GPS: N64 22.428, - W21 33.832

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Sjón, Happy Nihilist

The author at the edge of conversation, at the end of the world

Words Parker Yamasaki

Photos Hörður Sveinsson

"When 'all the lights have gone out' we will be left with our stories. At least we can keep doing that when we make our way to the end," Sjón says near the edge of our conversation. And then he jumps: "You can say that I am the happy nihilist." When we speak, Sjón is fresh off the plane from Denmark, where his most recent book, 'Mánasteinn—drengurinn sem aldrei var til' ("Moonstone—The Boy Who Never Was"), has just been released in Danish. His novels have been published in over twenty countries; he has been translated into over thirty languages, and is up to the neck in literary awards. Sjón has plenty to be happy about.

He also has plenty of reasons to be nihilistic. Minutes into our conversation, Sjón has already reached the assertion that "we are possibly facing our own extinction soon, the human kind is possibly not going to be here much longer." We face a looming environmental meltdown. We are creating and confronting technologies that could contribute to our own demise. Social unrest pops like fireworks across the globe and politics carries on, glassy-eyed, watching them burst. These are problems so immense that they are nearly impossible to see from up close. Like one of those images made out of lots of tiny images. Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of the journalist, the author, the social critic to respond. Relying on the repetition of history and mimicking the enduring tales of the past, Sjón has found a way to keep his distance while remaining relevant.

Return, return

The best view of the past is from the present. This is common knowledge. Sjón has realised what fewer have: that perhaps the best view of the present is from the past. "It is always really difficult to understand what is going on in your own time," Sjón admits, which is partly why 'Mánasteinn' is set in 1918. "It is set in the days of the Spanish flu, the Katla eruption, when Iceland became a sovereign country from Denmark," he explains. "All of this happened in 1918. But it is really a chain of events that mirror ourselves today: we have the fear of epidemics, we have the endless discussion in Iceland about what it is to be an independent country, and the main character in the book is a gay sixteen-year-old kid who is obsessed with cinema."

To this end, his historical settings provide more than just a rich plot. They are a tool for examination. "None of us have been there [the past], so we all have a chance to read ourselves into these stories. Through tales from the past we are able to reflect on where we are now." Sjón provides the reader a platform in the past from which we may observe our present.

Paradigm shift

Naturally, Sjón's historical interests play a part in his process. Though he describes himself as a "cultural omnivore," he does admit a penchant for periods of conflict. "I am drawn towards moments in history when we are faced with paradigm shifts. When two times come together when the old and the new face off in a way, when there are huge changes with what is possible, and what is acceptable," he explains.

"I am drawn towards moments in history when we are faced with paradigm shifts. When two times come together when the old and the new face off in a way, when there are huge changes with what is possible, and what is acceptable."

It is understandable, then, why Sjón would be so excited about our own great moment in history." We are torn," he says. "On the one hand we have created technology which demands we use our potentials more fully, and on the other hand we have used technologies to devise our own demise." The theme of the extinction of the human race lurks throughout our conversation like a hunter stalking his prey. Albeit less quietly, like an unseasoned hunter, crashing through the woods raucously, swinging a machete and screaming. But the idea is no less intense than it is real. Which is precisely why Sjón turns to the fantastic. Specifically, to the myths.

"Myths are always about the 'big' realities we are facing. All the 'big' questions can be found in mythology," he says. They are yet another tool that Sjón wields in the face of the "here and now," another platform to stand on and observe things in their entirety. He elaborates: "The myths allow us to think about these things on the scale they really are. They place man in the universe, they bring us down to scale. For an author, the myths are really an amazing tool to work with."

Man of myth

To say Sjón is working with the myths might be a bit misleading. "I don't use the myths, the myths use me," he tells me, "they are using me to be re-told." Then the myths breach personification and become nearly possessive: "Myths exist within all of us. We are somehow all born with a sense of a pantheon, which reflects both the enormous scale of the world and also common fundamentals of human society. The myths are within us, they just want to be heard."

Many of us may be familiar with mythological story-lines, even specific characters, without realising it. We speak about the various manifestations of the myths in contemporary times. Sjón references the latest Avengers film, noting its clear parallel to Ragnarök, a series of apocalyptic future events that appear in the Eddas. "It was really Loki [a super-villain who by no sheer coincidence shares a name with a Nordic god in the original myth] who was bringing the end of the world," he notes, "and the question presented to us: what can we do about it?"

"I think the myths always look for the maximum audience," Sjón decides after contemplating the modern myths and gods for a bit. Sjón is here to provide that audience.

In an age that values rapid change, Sjón has chosen one of the most enduring acts of human expression: the act of storytelling. His historical content holds a mirror to the present. His use of myth allows us to grapple with what we see. In this way, his stories are histories—tales that have been told and will be re-told in dizzying circularity. Amidst our ever-changing realities, one may find some comfort in this rare consistency. Even "when 'all the lights have gone out' we will be left with our stories. At least we can keep doing that when we make our way to the end," Sjón says near the edge of our conversation. And then he jumps…

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Go Read A Book!

Some of our favourite local writers recommend some of their favourite local books (that are available in English) for your benefit!

Compiled
Gabríel Benjamin

Photo
Natsha Nandabhiwat

Hallgrímur Helgason

Award winning author, painter, poet and social critic. Best known for the generation-defining '101 Reykjavík'.

'Butterflies In November'
Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir
This was just released in the States. A charming tale, a rainy road trip.

'Moonstone'
Sjón
Atmospheric and gay!

Steinar Bragi

Widely considered one of Iceland's foremost contemporary authors. His latest novel, 'Kata', is currently making waves in Iceland. Seek out the English translation of 'Women'.

'Blue Fox'
Sjón
A great writer, beautifully translated by Cribb.

'Reply to a Letter from Helga'
Bergsveinn Birgisson
A rather clumsy title in English, but a great novel on love and bestiality. I recommend it even though it's published by Amazon Crossing, but please, let this be the last coin you put into the black void of BEZOS.

'The Ship'
Stefán Máni
An epic book on evil and seafaring, at times so male that it veers into gay erotica, beautifully.

'Children In Reindeer Woods'
Kristín Ómarsdóttir
Lyrical in the best sense of the word, playful, profound and humorous. Do it.

'The Creator'
Guðrún Eva Mínervudóttir.
A gripping meditation on dolls and what it means to play with them and make babies with them.

Jónína Leósdóttir

Celebrated author and playwright. Her most recent book, 'Við Jóhanna' ("Jóhanna And I"), details her relationship with her wife (and former Icelandic PM) Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, and will reportedly be available in English sooner rather than later.

I think there should be a law that says everyone must get a book for Christmas. It doesn't have to be a hard-back, brand new or expensive. There are plenty of good, older books to choose from.

'Independent People'
Halldór K. Laxness
Books by our Nobel laureate are an absolute must for anyone who wants to acquaint themselves with Icelandic literature—and this novel is a great starting point.

'The Little Book of the Icelanders'
Alda Sigmundsdóttir.
A humorous look at Icelandic society and all our strange quirks—like babies sleeping outside in winter—in fifty miniature essays.

Any crime thriller by
Yrsa Sigurðardóttir
or Arnaldur Indriðason
Both Yrsa and Arnaldur are excellent crime writers and, for those unfamiliar with their works, just close your eyes, reach out and buy the first one you touch.

'Flowers on the Roof'
Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir
and Brian Pilkington
A perfect gift for young children, a fun story and fantastic pictures.

'Does anyone actually eat this?'
Nanna Rögnvaldardóttir
A hilarious account of traditional Icelandic food, like sheep's heads and rams' testicles, by our best-known food writer. But no recipes, you'll be glad to hear.

Sjón

One of Iceland's most successful and respected contemporary authors. Seek out 'Moonstone' (as recommended by his peers on this very page), also, go to the previous spread to read our interview with him.

'Silence of the Grave'
Arnaldur Indriðason
This is Arnaldur's masterpiece of the Erlendur cycle of novels. The author's own sense of justice, bordering on rage against the exploiters of the weak in society, is wonderfully channelled through his life-weary but diligent detective. While this novel about domestic violence depicts contemporary Reykjavík in a sure way, it is Arnaldur's evocation of the city in the 40s, during the Brits' friendly occupation, that shines and should bring out envy in all of his self-respecting (or is it self-doubting?) colleagues.

'The Fish Can Sing'
Halldór Laxness
A funny, intelligent and moving novel about an orphan raised by two old people in Brekkukot, a fisherman's cot at the south-west end of Tjörnin in Reykjavík. Young Álfgrímur—for that is the orphan's name, bestowed upon him by his mother as the only thing she gives him before leaving him for good—is discovered to have a voice so lucid that he can reach "the pure note" needed to lament the dead and console the living at funerals, where he practices his art. His counterpart is Garðar Hólm, an Icelandic singer whose fame abroad is endlessly recounted in the newspapers of Reykjavík, where no one has ever heard him sing. But living among the misfits and outcasts that are also sheltered in Brekkukot provides a lesson that he takes with him when he also leaves Reykjavík to sing for the big world.

'Gaga'
Ólafur Gunnarsson
A brilliant novella about a meek man who immerses himself in Edgar Rice Burroughs's pioneering sci-fi novels about John Carter's adventures on the planet Mars. He reads them to the point of waking up in the Martian capital. The city is cleverly disguised as Reykjavík by its freakish inhabitants. And things start going wrong, horribly wrong. This slender book with its nod to the great Quixote is one of my favourite Reykjavík novels.

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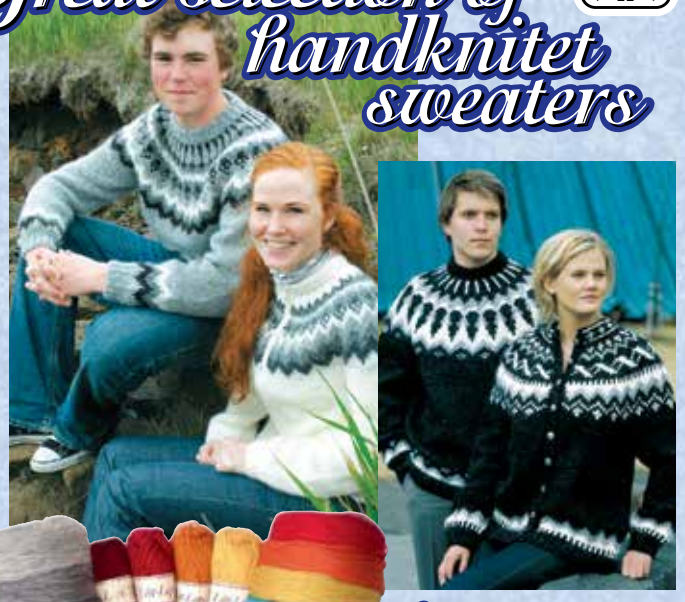
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L E M Ú R I N N

The Sinister Christmas Clan Of Iceland

Words
Helgi Hrafn Guðmundsson & Vera Illugadóttir

Illustrations
K-Fai Steele

In Iceland, there is no Santa Claus. Instead, there are thirteen "jólasveinar," which can be translated to "Yule Lads." They live in mountains and hike to town, one by one, for the thirteen days leading up to Christmas Eve. Their mother is Grýla, a troll known for eating babies and beating up her husband. In previous centuries, the Yule Lads were a bunch of scraggly, merry—sometimes thieving—pranksters that would get up to all sorts of shenanigans on their visits to civilization. In recent decades, the lads have mostly abandoned their mischievous ways—today's youth mostly knows them as a group of friendly country bumpkins who like to dress like skinny Santa Claus impersonators. Indeed, Icelandic children put a shoe on their windowsill every night leading up to Christmas Eve, and receive little gifts from the Yule Lads.

It would seem that capitalism and globalisation have transformed the Yule Lads into yet another vehicle for consumerism. Something like that. In the old days, however, they were fearful, a bunch of villains who terrorised children and people in the countryside around Christmas.

Each one has a name that reveals their true and naughty nature, for example Candle-Stealer, Spoon-Licker, Door-Slammer and of course Window-Peeper. They typically travel with their ruthless Yule Cat, which delights in eating children who have not received new clothing for Christmas.

The idea that there are thirteen Yule Lads is a modern one. In fact, the clan used to be much bigger clan. To wit, around 80 names of Yule brothers and sisters can be found in folk tales and poems dating back centuries. These forgotten Christmas villains had sinister and strange names like Faldafeykir ("Skirt-Sweeper"), Bjálfinn sjálfur ("The Fool Himself"), Svartiljótur ("Ugly Black") and Litlipungur ("Small-Testicles").

Weird and quite disturbing stories about the Yule Lads of old can be found in old manuscripts and books. We translated one of these stories. It is quite strange.

The Girl With The Cursing Habit

There once was a farmer who lived close to the sea. Out for a walk one day, he sees a sealskin boat land on the shore. The boat's crew disembarks, and the farmer sees that they are Yule Lads, plump and fat. They carry their boat ashore to the mountain and secure it. Then they start exchanging words. The fattest of them brags, saying he expects a comfortable stay as usual.

The farmer thinks that it would be a good idea to trick him, and see if he will be as arrogant next year. He goes home, making no mention of this.

The farmer's housemaid was very foul-mouthed and cursed a lot, and the farmer knew that the fat Yule Lad was nourished by her cursing. He spoke with the housemaid and promised to give her some green cloth to make a skirt, if she refrained from cursing through the Christmas fast. The maid said she would try to not curse.

"We are really passionate about our work. Everybody here feels very fortunate working with such a great ingredient, and it's the most rewarding thing I have done in my life."

As Christmas gets nearer, the maid has not sworn once, and the farmer made sure that no one else swore, either. However, one day close to Christmas, the maid goes into the outhouse and finds one of the cows so unruly that she has no control over it. She forgets her promise and yells: "Why is the damn cow acting this way?" Immediately after uttering the curse word, she hears a faint but joyous laughter—and immediately regrets cursing.

On the thirteenth night of Christmas, the farmer goes out to the beach where the Yule Lads docked. He sees the lads gathering together, each in a different condition. Some are fat and happy, others gaunt and sad, and yet others somewhere in between—all depending on how their stay at the local farms went. The farmer's lad is the gauntest and saddest of them all.

The other lads inquire of him why he is so gaunt. He answers that it is because the farmer and his household did not curse. The other Yule lads thought this a shame, and then they disappeared out to sea.

Source: Sigfús Sigfússon/Helga Einarsdóttir, 'Íslenskar þjóðsögur og sazgnir, III bindi'. Translated by Lemúrinn.

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P.12

"We support charging tourists a moderate fee to support nature conservation in tourist locations. We do not, however, support the nature pass as it has been introduced by the minister. We believe that it violates the ancient right of people to visit nature, and that it could potentially damage people's experience of Iceland because of the surveillance required to enforce the law.

People are NOT into that whole "nature pass" idea, it seems.

P.20

"We were able to cut costs efficiently for about two years, but we knew we'd need more funds. It's a bit like holding your breath. You can do it for half a minute, but not five."

National University Hospital director Páll Matthíasson, on continued attempts to steer the institution unscathed through an economic collapse and subsequent austerity measures. You should take time read Gabríel Benjamin's illuminating feature on Iceland's ongoing healthcare crisis—right now.

P.22

"It was a cup of soup. A free cup of scalding oil bubbles, salt, carrots, meat, onions, and more salt."

We reminisce about the best things we witnessed at Iceland Airwaves 2014

P.30

"I am drawn towards moments in history when we are faced with paradigm shifts. When two times come together when the old and the new face off in a way, when there are huge changes with what is possible, and what is acceptable."

We got to speak with one of our favourite contemporary authors, Sjón. He is very smart.

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Eating, Drinking and Shopping + Map

Issue 18 – 2014

www.grapevine.is

Your essential guide to life, travel and entertainment in Iceland

21
December

Jingle... Bells...

Winter Solstice, the darkest and grittiest time of the year, is around the corner, so why don't you treat yourself to some black metal?

see inside for details

Photo by Alísa Kalyanova

MUSIC

CONCERTS & NIGHTLIFE

Nov 7 - Dec 4

How to use the listings: Venues are listed alphabetically by day. Events listed are all live performances, with troubadours and DJs specifically highlighted. For complete listings and detailed information on venues visit listings.grapevine.is. Send us your listings to: ***listings@grapevine.is.***

Friday December 5

Bar Ananas
22:00 DJ KGB
Café Rosenberg
20:00 Borgardætur Christmas Concert
Dillon
21:00 Adam Evalds / Astromike Gordon
Dubliner
21:00 Troubadours Ingvar & Gisli
English Pub
21:00 Troubadours Ingunn & Biggi / Ingi Valur & Tryggvi
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 Foxtrain Safari
Gaukurinn
22:00 The Electric Space Orchestra / BOB / Sushi Submarine
Húrra
22:00 DJ Ívar Pétur
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Alfons X
KEX Hostel
20:30 KEXJazz
The National And University Library of Iceland
20:30 Gissur Páll Gissurarson & Árni Heiðar Karlsson Christmas Concert
Mengi
21:00 Artist Áki Ásgeirs & composer Halldór Úlfarsson
Paloma
21:00 Dj Kári & Basem / DJ dauði & Elsa
Prikið
22:00 DJ Sunna Ben / Gunni Ewok
Salurinn
20:30 Stefán Hilmarsson Christmas Concert

Saturday December 6

Bar Ananas
22:00 DJ Margeir
Bæjarbíó
16:00 Pollapönk
Café Rosenberg
22:00 Borgardætur's Christmas Concert
Dillon
21:00 Svartidauði
Dolly
21:00 Affair: DJ Lovísa / Lovekatz / Anna Rakel / Sura / De La Rosa / Sigrún Skafta / Sunna Ben / Vibrant K / Anna Brá / Karó Antonsen / Júlía Ruslanovna
Dubliner
21:00 Troubadours Andri & Gisli
English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Arnar & Ingunn / Alexander & Guðmann
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 SimSimma / DJ Andrea
Gaukurinn
21:00 Brain Police
Hallgrímskirkja
17.00 Hallgrímskirkja's Motet Choir Christmas Concert
Hafnarborg
09:30 Choir Christmas Songs
Harpa
20:00 Sigga Beinteins Christmas Concert
Húrra
21:00 DJ Reagan & Gorbachov
Kaffibarinn
23:00 DJ KGB

18 December

The Lady Amoeba Is Here
AmabAdamA Album Release Concert

Gamla Bío

Ingólfsstræti 2a (E4) | 21:00 | 2,500 ISK

AmabaAdamA are an Icelandic reggae collective featuring a singing trio, guitar, bass, drums, trumpet, percussion and keyboards, and they just released their very first album. Known for their felicitous live performances, they will put an angle in your dangle and a kick in your step. They've been riding high off the success of their songs "Hossa Hossa" and "Gaia," both of which have been topping charts and bringing all the boys to the yard. **TD**

Photo by Rúnar Sigurður Sigurjónsson

20 December

Brighter Days In Winter
FM Belfast

Húrra

Tryggvagata 22 (C3) | 22:00 | 2,000 ISK

FM Belfast have just returned from touring ALL OVER THE PLACE, just in time for one last "Happy Winter" show in 2014 before the "New Year" kicks in. "Believe" us, you HAVE TO BE THERE! Expect to dance like there's no tomorrow, and sweat like you're on a "Tropical" "Holiday," but be there early and get "In Line," because us true fans? "We Are Faster Than You"—and the show will sell out in no time. But, no, seriously, you should go. It'll be heaps of fun. **GB**

Photo by Matthew Eisman

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MUSIC

CONCERTS & NIGHTLIFE

KEX Hostel
13:00 **C**ozy Sunday with Writers Elsa Nielsen & Sigrún Eldjárn, Music by Sigríður Eyrún & Karl Olgeirsson, gingerbread decoration
Laugardalshöll
20:00 Slash, Myles Kennedy & The Conspirators / Dimma
Loft Hostel
21:00 Gummi Hebb
Mengi
21:00 Páll Ívan Pálsson: 'We'll See'
Paloma
22:00 **F**ALK Presents: Hacker Farm / AMFJ / DJ Steindór Grétar & Harry Knuckles / Ladyboy Records DJ Set / Basement Pilsner 2.25%
Prikið
22:00 DJ Árni Kocoon
Salurinn
20:30 Stefán Hilmarsson Christmas Concert

Sunday December 7

Dubliner
21:00 Troubadour Ellert
English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Danni
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 DJ Hólm
Hannesarholt
11:30 Dúó Stemma
17:00 Ástvaldur Zenki
Harpa
17:00 The Reykjavík Chamber Orchestra's Annual Christmas Concert
20:00 Kristján Jóhannsson – Christmas Concert
Húrra
20:00 Lowercase Nights: Experimental Music
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Krystal Carma
Langholtskirkja
16:00 Christmas Carols
20:00 Christmas Carols
Paloma
22:00 DJ Jólavinir Formannsins
Salurinn
20:00 Borgardætur Christmas Concert

Monday December 8

Café Rosenberg
20:00 Christmas Concert: Unnur Sara, Rebekka & Silja
Dubliner
21:00 Troubadour Roland
English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Ingi Valur
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 DJ SpEgill
Húrra
21:00 Monday Jazz
Kaffibarinn
22:00 DJ Mr. Silla

Tuesday December 9

Café Rosenberg
20:00 Bergmál Christmas music
Dubliner
21:00 Troubadour Roland
English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Tryggvi
Harpa
20:00 The Pastry Boys' Christmas Concert
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Terrordisco
KEX Hostel
20:30 KEXJazz
Prikið
22:00 DJ Jólaball Berndsen

Wednesday December 10

Café Rosenberg
21:00 Borgardætur's Christmas Concert
Dubliner
21:00 Troubadour Ellert
English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Roland
Húrra
21:00 Teitur Magnússon Album Release Show / DJ Óli Dóri
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Kocoon
Lebowski Bar
21:00 PAN FROM EXTREME CHILL
Mengi
21:00 Skúli Sverrisson & Anthony Burr
Prikið
22:00 Extreme Chill Night: DJ Pan
Salurinn
12:15 Lunchtime Concert: Sigrún Hjálmtýsdóttir & Anna Guðný Guðmundsdóttir

Thursday December 11

Bar Ananas
22:00 DJ Atli Bolla
Café Rosenberg
21:00 Borgardætur's Christmas Concert

Heathens and Metalheads Of The World, Unite
The Anti-Christian Festival

Gaukurinn

Tryggvagata 22 (D3) | 17:30 | TBA

Started as a sort of answer to Iceland's Christianity festival of 2000 (celebrating 1,000 years of Christianity!), the **anti-Christian festival** (Andkristnihátíð) has been a yearly mainstay of the Icelandic heathen and metal scene. The unholy bash usually features some of the loudest and greatest metal bands around, and this year is no different, with the likes of **Svartidauði**, **Sinmara**, **Misþyrming** and **Abominor** performing. Corpsepaint, pentagram pendants and upside-down crosses are entirely optional, but complaining about the volume is grounds for summary execution. **TD**

Photo by Guðný Lára Thorarensen

Dillon
21:00 Open Mic Night
English Pub
21:00 Troubadours Hjálmar & Dagur
Gaukurinn
21:00 Pink Street Boys / Lord Pusswhip / Godchilla / Kvöl
Háskólabíó
21:00 Baggalútur Christmas Concert
Húrra
22:00 Árstíðir / DJ Logi Pedro & Pétur
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Pilsner
Mengi
21:00 Ásdís Sif Gunnarsdóttir
Salurinn
20:30 Stefán Hilmarsson Christmas Concert

Friday December 12

Bar Ananas
21:00 Styrmir Dansson
Café Rosenberg
21:00 Alma Rut & Band Christmas Concert
Dillon
21:00 Jesus Fucking Christ / AMFJ / Laser Life
Dubliner
21:00 Troubadours Ingvar & Gisli
Dolly
21:00 DJ Ívar Pétur / B2B / Hermigervill
English Pub
21:00 Troubadours Andri / Ingi Valur & Tryggvi
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 SimSimma / Lily of the Valley
Gaukurinn
22:00 SIGN / Endless Dark
Háskólabíó
17:00 Baggalútur Christmas Concert
Húrra
20:00 Berndsen Album Release Show / DJ Disco Owes Me
Mengi
17:00 Ólöf & Guðrún Eva Album Realease Concert
Kaffibarinn
22:00 DJ Kanilsnældur + Julía Ruslanovna / Vibrant K
KEX Hostel
12:15 KEXJazz: Andrea Gylfadóttir & Eðvarð Lárusson
Paloma
22:00 DJ KGB / Silla
Prikið
22:00 DJ Egill Spegill / Jay-O
Salurinn
20:30 Stefán Hilmarsson Christmas Concert

Saturday December 13

Bar Ananas
22:00 DJ Sexí Tæm
Café Rosenberg
21:00 Brother Grass
Dillon
21:00 Electric Elephant
Dolly
21:00 DJ IntroBeats
Dubliner
21:00 Troubadours Andri / Tjokko
English Pub
21:00 Troubadours Hjálmar & Dagur / Steini & Eiki
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 SimSimma
Gaukurinn
21:00 Hugh Cornwell
Hafnarhús (Reykjavík Art Museum)
17:00 Christmas Music Festival: Organist Björn Steinar Sólbergsson Performs
19:00 Winter Concert At The Art Museum: Clap Tone (DE) / Wildkats (SCOT) / Sísý Hallgrímskirkja
Harpa
14:00 The Iceland Symphony Orchestra's Christmas Concert
16:00 The Iceland Symphony Orchestra's Christmas Concert
17:00 Fóstbræður Choir Christmas Concert
Húrra
21:00 Kött Grá Pjé / DJ Styrmir Dansson
Kaffibarinn
23:00 DJ Kári
Laugardalshöll
16:00 Björgvin's Christmas Guests
21:00 Björgvin's Christmas Guests
Loft Hostel
21:00 Wago
Mengi
21:00 Una Sveinbjarnardóttir Album Release Party
Paloma
22:00 Rvk Soundsystem
Prikið
22:00 DJ Suspect B / Logi Pedro

Sunday December 14

Dubliner
21:00 Troubadour Roland
English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Danni
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 Dj Hólm
Hallgrímskirkja
17:00 Christmas Music Festival: Organist Björn Steinar Sólbergsson Performs
20:00 Reykjavík Men's Choir
Harpa
14:00 Iceland Symphony Orchestra Christmas Concert
16:00 Iceland Symphony Orchestra Christmas Concert
Háskólabíó
17:00 Baggalútur Christmas Concert
21:00 Baggalútur Christmas Concert
Húrra
21:00 Lowercase Nights: Experimental Music
Kaffibarinn
22:00 DJ Kristinn Pálsson
Paloma
22:00 DJ Jólavinir Formannsins

Monday December 15

Café Rosenberg
21:00 Bing Crossby Tribute Concert
Dubliner
21:00 Troubadour Ellert

MUSIC

CONCERTS & NIGHTLIFE

English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Tryggvi
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 DJ Pabbi
Harpa
20:00 Ragnheiður Gröndal: 30 Year Birthday Concert
Húrra
21:00 Monday Night Jazz
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Pabbi

Tuesday December 16

Café Rosenberg
21:00 Borgardætur's Christmas Concert
English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Ingi Valur
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 DJ Yoda
Gamla Bíó
20:00 X977's Christmas Concert: Agent Fresco / Art Is Dead / Dimma / Jónas Sig / Kaleo / Kiriyama Family / Morðingjarnir / Strigaskór 42 / Valdimar / The Vintage Caravan / Þröstur Upp á Heiðar / Úlfur Úlfur
Húrra
21:00 DJ Myth / Lazybones
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Óli Dóri
KEX Hostel
20:30 KEXJazz
Prikið
22:00 STINNSON CLASSICS

Wednesday December 17

Café Rosenberg
21:00 Borgardætur's Christmas Concert
English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Arnar
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 Electric Elephant
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Alfons X
Prikið
22:00 DJ Housekell
Stúdentakjallarinn
19:30 DJ Milla

Thursday December 18

Bar Ananas
22:00 DJ Styrmir Dansson
Café Rosenberg
21:00 Borgardætur's Christmas Concert
Dillon
21:00 Christmas Blues
English Pub
21:00 Troubadours Magnús & Ívar
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 SimSimma
Gaukurinn
21:00 Rolling Stones Tribute Band
Harpa
19:30 The London Philharmonic Orchestra
Húrra
21:00 Hits & Tits Christmas Karaoke
Kaffibarinn
22:00 DJ Kári
Mengi
21:00 Úlfur Hansson

Paloma
22:00 DJ Robot Disco / Basement Einar Sonic
Rúbín
21:00 Dóri's Friends Christmas Jazz Concert

Friday December 19

Bar Ananas
22:00 Dj Logi Pedro
Dillon
21:00 Auðn
Dubliner
20:00 Troubadour Roland / Ingvar
Dolly
21:00 DJ Yamaho / Sura / B2B / Sunna Ben
English Pub
21:00 Troubadours Ellert / Hjálmar & Dagur
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 DJ SpeEgill
Fríkirkjan
22:30 Something Beautiful: Ragnheiður Gröndal, Kristjana Stefáns & Svavar Knútur
Gaukurinn
21:00 Ojba Rasta
Harpa
19:30 The London Philharmonic Orchestra
Háskólabíó
17:00 Baggalútur Christmas Concert
Húrra
21:00 DJ KGB
Iðnó
22:00 Prins Póló / Dr. Gunni / DJ flugvél & geimskip
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ BENNI B-RUFF
KEX Hostel
12:15 KEXJazz: Andrés Þór Gunnlaugsson & Eyjólfur Þorleifsson
20:00 Megas & Sauðrekarnir perform Jólarímur
Mengi
21:00 Mengi One Year Birthday Party
Paloma
22:00 Dj Katla
Stúdentakjallarinn
16:30 DJ Steindór Grétar
Iðnó
22:00 Prins Póló / Dj. flugvél & geimskip / Dr. Gunni

Saturday December 20

Bar Ananas
22:00 Dj KBG
Dillon
21:00 Vök / Art Is Dead
Dolly
21:00 DJ Tommy White / B2B / Lewis Copeland / Benni B-Ruff
English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Arnar & Ingunn / Steini & Eiki
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 Una Stef
Húrra
22:00 FM Belfast / DJ Óli Dóri
Kaffibarinn
23:00 DJ Katla
Loft Hostel
21:00 Koddafar
Mengi
21:00 Erna Ómars & Valdimar Jóhannsson
Paloma
22:00 Dj Myth & Lazy Bones / Ghostdigital DJ Set
Prikið
21:00 DJ Foxtrain Safari / Logi Pedro
KEX Hostel
20:30 Christmas KEXJazz
21:00 Brim

Sunday December 21

Dubliner
21:00 Troubadour Ellert
English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Danni
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 Dj Hólm
Gaukurinn
13:00 Anti-Christian Festival 2014: Svartidauði / Sinmara / Misþyrming / Abominor / Mannvirki
Háskólabíó
17:00 Baggalútur Christmas Concert
Húrra
21:00 DJ Mr. Silla
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Símon fknhndsm
Mengi
12:00 Guðrún Ólafsdóttir
21:00 Högni Egilsson
Paloma
22:00 DJ Jólavinir Formannsins

Monday December 22

Dubliner
21:00 Troubadour Roland
English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Ingi Valur
Húrra
21:00 Christmas Bingo / DJ Sunna Ben
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Intro Beats
KEX Hostel
20:30 Christmas KEXJazz

Tuesday December 23

Dolly
21:00 DJ Sexítæm: George Michael Theme Night
English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Tryggvi
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 1860
Fríkirkjan
16:00 Árstíðir
21:00 Árstíðir
Húrra
21:00 DJ Pabbi
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Terrordisco
Prikið
22:00 DJ KGB

Friday December 26

Bar Ananas
22:00 Dj Atli Bolla
Dillon
21:00 Toneron
Dolly
21:00 DJ Annar í Diskó: Party Zone Disco Night
English Pub
21:00 Troubadours Ellert / Alexander & Guðmann
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 DJ Hólm
Húrra
22:00 Húrra Christmas Party: Brim / DJ Simon FKNHNDSM
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ B.G. Baarregaard / Sexy Lazer
Paloma
22:00 DJ Exos / IT IS MAGIC
Prikið
22:00 DJ Sakana / Moonshine
Gaukurinn
21:00 Elements

MUSIC

CONCERTS & NIGHTLIFE

Saturday December 27

Bar Ananas
22:00 DJ Styrmir Dansson
Dillon
21:00 The Roulette
Dolly
21:00 DJ BORG LTD
English Pub
21:00 Troubadours Alexander & Guðmann / Steini & Eiki
Harpa
20:00 The Icelandic Opera: Ragnheiður
Húrra
21:00 East Of My Youth / Lily the Kid / DJ Katla
Kaffibarinn
23:00 DJ Símon & Haukur fknhndsm
KEX Hostel
21:00 Rökkurró
Mengi
21:00 Hildur Guðnadóttir
Paloma
21:00 DJ KSF / KGB

Sunday December 28

English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Danni
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 DJ Hólm
Harpa
20:00 The Icelandic Opera: Ragnheiður
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Krystal Carma
KEX Hostel
20:30 KEXJazz

Monday December 29

English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Tryggvi
Frederiksen Ale House
21:00 DJ SpeEgill
Húrra
20:00 FESTIVUS Seinfeld Quiz hosted by Sin Fang / DJ Sin Fang
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Ívar Pétur
Mengi
15:00 Jóhanna V. Þórhallsdóttir & Arnhildur Valgarðsdóttir / 3 Klassískar

Tuesday December 30

English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Ingi Valur
Húrra
21:00 Moses Hightower / Ladyboy Records DJ Night
Kaffibarinn
21:00 DJ Alfons X
KEX Hostel
20:30 KEXJazz

Wednesday December 31

English Pub
21:00 Troubadour Arnar
Húrra
23:00 New Years Eve Party With DJ KGB

Thursday January 1

Harpa
17:00 Phantoms of the opera: Kristján Jóhannsson, Gissur Páll Gissurarson & Garðar Thór Cortes

Friday January 2

Harpa
17:00 Phantoms of the opera: Kristján Jóhannsson, Gissur Páll Gissurarson & Garðar Thór Cortes
19:30 Piano Recital: Philipp Richardsen
20:00 Phantoms of the opera: Kristján Jóhannsson, Gissur Páll Gissurarson & Garðar Thór Cortes
Mengi
21:00 Barry And His Guitar

Saturday January 3

Gaukurinn
22:00 DJ KGB / B2B / Katla
Mengi
21:00 TEGGER

Sunday January 4

Hafnarborg
20:00 Phonemes – Synthesis Of 16 Strings

Monday January 5

Harpa
20:00 Musicians Of Tomorrow: Valdís Gregory, soprano

Thursday January 8

Dolly
21:00 DJ Housekell: '90s House Theme Night
Harpa

Snakes On A Japanese Plane
Just Another Snake Cult / kimono

Húrra

Tryggvagata 22 (C3) | 20:00 | 2,000 ISK

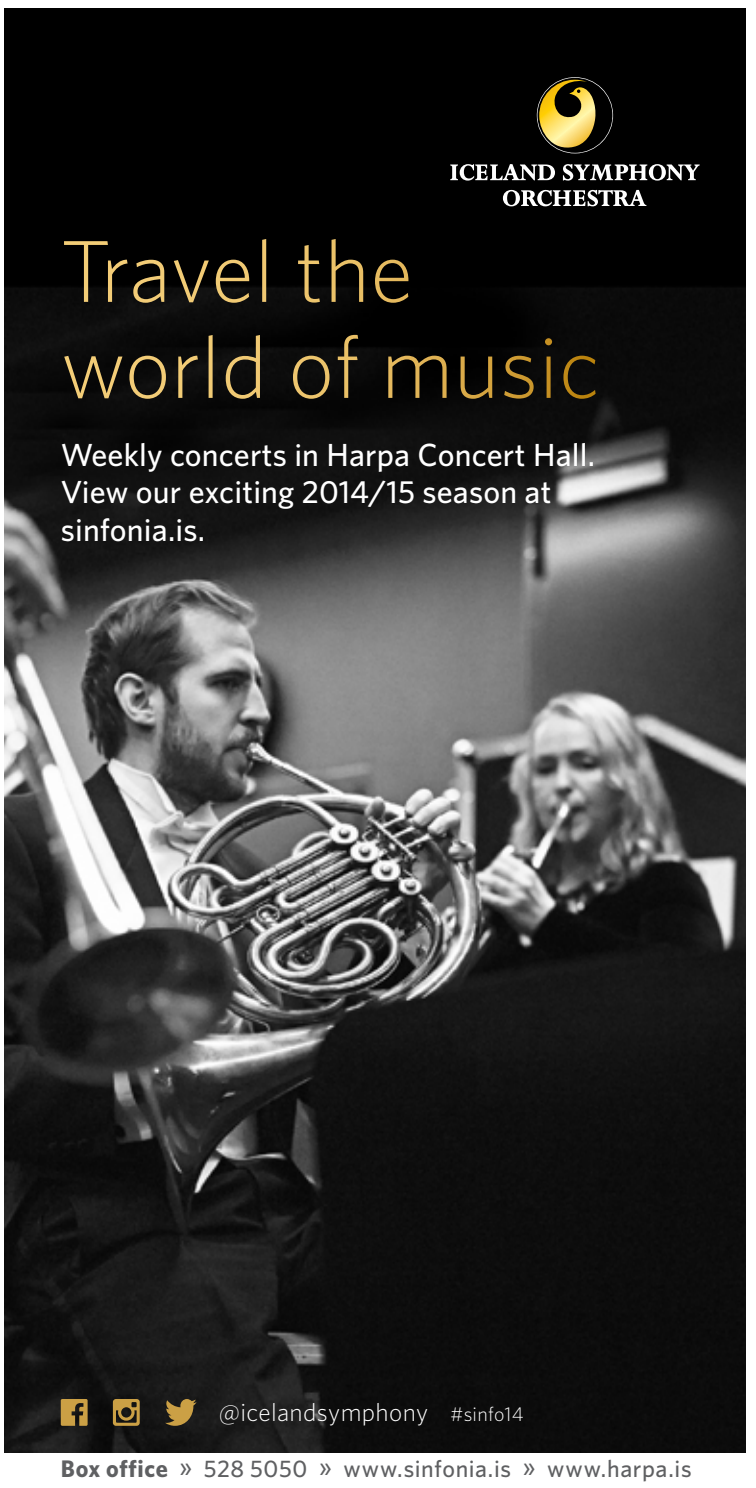
Local indie pop outfit **Just Another Snake Cult** were formed in 2010 by one Þórir Bogason. Þórir writes and records the music by himself, but gets all sorts of interesting folks to perform with him on stage, making for some pretty great shows. The Snake Cult's music is dreamy and lucidly upbeat, firmly implanted in the alt. rock tradition. Þórir likes to describes the live performances as "an intense mood and a dynamic journey," but the only way you have to verify this is heading down and checking 'em out for yourself as they open for local post-punk overlords **kimono**, who are equally (if not more) worth catching. What a fun night you have in store! **TD**

Be Bothered
Teitur Magnússon album release

Húrra

Tryggvagata 22 (C3) | 21:00 | 1,500 ISK

Teitur Magnusson of **Ojba Rasta** fame just released his solo album 'Tuttugu og sjö' ("27"), which features the great first single "Nenni" ("To Be Bothered"). The project as a whole is a departure from his band's signature reggae sound, but features similarly sunny vibrations. On his first solo outing, Teitur has cadged from world music, journeying with psychedelic essences (possibly assisted by psychedelic substances) through a sitar-accompanied realm where anything is possible—even bothering to love, drink, dream and be merry. **TD** *Photo by Hörður Sveinsson*



www.reykjavikcitymuseum.is

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Árbær Open Air Musem

The Settlement Exhibition

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Reykjavík City Museum

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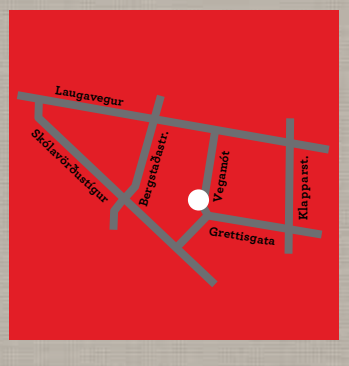

VEGAMÓT

Vegamótastíg | 101 Reykjavík | tel. 511 3040 | www.vegamot.is

ART

OPENINGS AND ONGOING

A Dash Of Icelandic Comedy
How To Become Icelandic In 60 Minutes

Harpa

Austurbakki 2 (D4) | Dec 13, 27, 28, 29, 30 | 19:00 | 4,200 ISK

If you're up for a good laugh and fun, this one-man comedy show might be your cup of tea. It's a short introduction to Iceland's history, the sagas, and offers a first hand account on Icelandic behaviour and manners (if there is such a thing in the first place). It deals with the struggles and attitude of the average Icelander, all the while mocking a plethora of other nationalities. In just a few lessons, you'll learn how to pass off as an Icelander, or at least start your journey of Icelandichood, and there's a certificate in it for those that like those sorts of things. No worries, though, the show is 100% in English. **ER**

Dec 5 - Jan 8

How to use the listings: Venues are listed alphabetically by day. For complete listings and detailed information on venues visit listings.grapevine.is. Send us your listings to: ***listings@grapevine.is***

Opening

ART67

'Litaspil / Playing With Colours' by Gréta Erlendsdóttir

Gréta Erlendsdóttir is the guest artist of ART67 this month. Her work is often characterised by abstract oil paintings that play with colours, with the human form visible in one way or another in her pieces. She is often inspired by nature and the bold colours of her surroundings.

Opens December 6
Runs until December 31

City Libarary, Spöng

'Washed Up' by Gunnhildur Þórðardóttir

Gunnhildur's 2d and 3d works consists of numerous items that have been discarded and washed up on the shore, or extra materials that she puts to good use. The works are, in a way, transformed from junk and litter into pieces of art. Sustainability is the name of the game in this exhibit, and its title is a reference to a poem Gunnhildur wrote about sustainability and our consumer-fuelled society.

Opens December 6
Runs until April 12

Ekkisens

The Royal Drawing Exhibition

Eight young aspiring male Icelandic artists will be exhibiting a diverse selection of drawings. The artists are all self-proclaimed geniuses who secretly consider themselves better than the next and use this exhibition as a battleground to measure their skills in true pissing contest-fashion.

Opens December 5
Runs until December 11

Gallery Verkstæði

Artist Helgi Þorgils Friðjónsson has an exhibition from his early years (1977-1980) that were at the time described by reviewers as being "the last paintings made in Iceland" due to how bad they were. Undaunted, or perhaps encouraged by such words, Helgi has brought those very same works back and is putting them on display.

Opens December 11
Runs until January 11

Harbinger

'Snjókoma' by Guðbjörg Káradóttir & Ólöf Jakóbína Ernudóttir

This ceramic-designer duo has made a collection of 1,000 porcelain pieces. The exhibit is named 'Snjókoma,' which means "Snowfall," which is apt as the thousand pieces all hang from the ceiling of the venue.

Opens December 6
Runs until December 23

Hitt Húsið

Christmas Design Market

Young designers will exhibit and sell their design and home-made goods. The market will be open from 17-22, with free coffee and gingerbread available to visitors.

Open December 11

Loft Hostel

Iceland Academy Of Art Christmas Market

Students from the Iceland Academy Of Art display their wares from 13:00 to 16:00, just in time for the big seasonal gift splurge.

Open December 6 and 13

Candle Workshop

A free candle workshop is on from 19:00.

Open December 10

Swap Til You Drop

This STYD is Christmas themed, so bring your used clothes and swap them for something you or your friends can use, from 16:00 to 20:00.

Open December 17

Christmas Decoration & Card Making

Learn from the pros how to make festive decorations and cards, from 20:00.

Open December 18

Mokka Kaffi

'Grjótaþorpið' by Gylfi Gíslason

Following the re-release of a book from 1980 about Grjótaþorpið, a small neighbourhood in the heart of 101 Reykjavík, an art exhibit with works from the late Gylfi Gíslason will be on display at Mokka Kaffi. In addition to writing said book about Grjótaþorpið, Gylfi was a multi-talented artist who had numerous exhibits, and taught drawing classes.

Opens December 5
Runs until January 9

The National Museum

Christmas Exhibition

The museum offers special christmas exhibitions as well as a christmas family activity game. The Icelandic Yule Lads visit the Museum at 11:00 every day from December 12 until Christmas Eve. On December 13 Dr. Terry Gunnell will have an illustrated presentation in English on Icelandic Christmas traditions in the past and present.

Opens December 12
Runs until December 24

The National Gallery

'New Works' by Jón Óskar

Jón Óskar is one of Iceland's better known artists who has displayed with numerous exhibitions in museums and galleries around the world. In his photographs, drawings, and prints, he explores the conflict between the surface of the picture plane and the subjects he portrays, whether they are portraits, historical themes, or personal references.

Runs until February 8

SÍM

Kanill

This group exhibit of 80 participants includes art of all kinds of mediums, with each piece capped at a 15,000 ISK price tag. There is no curation, artists hang up their own pieces in whatever fashion they fancy, giving the whole exhibit a salon-vibe.

Opens December 4
Runs until December 22

Reykjavík Museum Of Photography

'Flat 5' by María Kristín Steinsson

María's exhibit features a series of 15 long exposure photographs that that capture the entire duration of a performed activity unfolding in front of the camera. Through repetitive, mundane tasks carried out within the boundaries of her home, she attempts to reveal how traces of our existence appear as time passes by. As a result the photographs contains both time and movement condensed within a still image.

Opens December 11
Runs until February 3

Ongoing

Árbær Open Air Museum

A guided tour in English through this open air museum, which consists of twenty buildings happens daily at 13:00. Admission 1,300 ISK.

On permanent view

Anarkía

Meinvill In Anarkía

'Meinvill' is a mysterious word, known from the icelandic version of the beloved christmas carol "Silent Night." Thus, the title brings to mind thoughts of christmas

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ICELAND

Along with the permanent exhibition that features Iceland's history from settlement to present day the museum offers a variety of exhibitions during the year, e.g. on Icelandic silver and photography.

ÞJÓÐMINJASAFN ÍSLANDS
National Museum of Iceland

www.thjodminjasafn.is
Suðurgata 41 / 101 Reykjavík

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FIVE WEEKS

The Grapevine picks the events, places and what to experience in the next five weeks

13 Dec — Music

Clap Happy

Christmas Concert

Hafnarhús | Tryggvgata, (D3) | 4,900 ISK

This winter party extravaganza features a night chock-full of crazy dance acts at the wonderful Hafnarhús, which is usually only reserved for art events (save for Airwaves). The night is headlined by German house artist **Claptone**, whose songs "Cream," "Wrong" and "No Eyes" have gained him a rather large following of late, and by the Scottish electronica/disco duo **Wildkats**, who have been making quite a name for themselves in the dance world. The Icelanders of **Sísý Ey**, **KSF** and **Ghozt** play as supporting acts. **TD**

December 27

She's Got Eyes Just Like A Waterfall. After climbing the top of the Icelandic charts with their song "Pedro," **Lily the Kid** got a lot of love at Airwaves. Now, the brother and sister duo are well worth a gander at **Húrra**. The siblings play a dreamy electronic pop that will shake your soul. Channeling her inner Jackie Chan, lead singer Lilja is also known for her exuberant live performances. Expect plenty of chopping and flailing as she busts out some yellow-belt freestyling.

December 6

BETTER CALL SAUL! Legendary guitar player Saul Hudson, aka **Slash**, is making his way to this neck of the woods, and will undoubtedly put on one hell of a show at **Laugardalshöll**. Known for his part in **Guns N' Roses**, **Slash's Snakepit** and **Velvet Revolver**, Slash has since embarked on solo projects, and will perform new and old material with **Myles Kennedy & The Conspirators**. **Dimma** warms up for them. The gig starts at 20:00, but expect Slash to be outrageously late. Admission from **9,990 ISK**.

23 Dec — Food & Drink

If You Can't Meet Them, Eat Them

BSÍ Skate Buffet

BSÍ | Vatnsmýrarvegur 10, 101 | 2,000 ISK

Those of you that have always wanted to try "traditional Icelandic food" but were afraid to: here's your opportunity. Salted fish, smoked lamb and rice pudding, herring, rye bread and fish stew are some of the traditional delicacies you'll find on this on this fancy buffet. BSÍ is not only known for chauffeuring people to the airport and back, but also for serving svið (singed sheep heads) to weary travellers. Go on, give it a try. **ER**

12–24 December — Christmas

YULE LADS! COMING!

Coming down your chimney

Both for the naughty and nice

The first of Iceland's thirteen Yule Lads is coming to town on December 12, so you best start behaving! Originally, these fellows were trickster spirits with wicked parents, but they have since jumped on the Coca-Cola train and reformed. If you behave, expect a treat that your mum picked up from Tiger—if you've been naughty, expect a raw potato. **GB**

A Viking museum that gives a compelling view into Icelandic history

GRANDAGARÐUR 2, 101 REYKJAVÍK
TEL.: 511 1517
WWW.SAGAMUSEUM.IS

A

MAP

Places We Like

Eating

1 Tapas Barinn

Vesturgata 3b

For those with a bit of time on their hands, the evening is well spent at Tapas Barinn, where you can indulge yourself feasting on course after delicious course of miniature dishes served in true Spanish style. There is also a lounge for those who want to hang out and sip a fine glass of red.

2 Forréttabarinn

Nýlendugata 14

Forréttabarinn literally means "the bar of starters." It is situated close to the harbour in an abandoned warehouse of some sort. The decor is rugged, yet stylish: spacious with high ceilings and big windows. Similar to the tapas approach to dining, the restaurant serves small simple courses with few, but well chosen, ingredients.

3 Hraðlestin

Hverfisgata 64a

The faster and more affordable cousin to one of the top restaurants in the country, Austurindíafélagið, flavour is never compromised by promptness að Hraðlestin. Their short selection of authentic Indian cuisine is cooked with the finest ingredients, the spices are masterfully blended and the experience is wholly satisfying.

4 Kopar

Geirsgata 3

This restaurant offers a terrific setting with truly tempting menu with a diverse and imaginative selection of land and sea-based ingredients. Expect to have to book well in advance, though, as the place is too packed for walk-ins to be reliably possible.

5 Snaps

Óðinstorg, Þórsgata 1

This recent addition to Reykjavík dining has quickly become a popular spot for folks with a fine palate and a modest budget, offering a small menu of courses made from local produce with a carefully selected wine list. It's also a cool hangout for artists and musicians. Make sure to get there early - they take reservations until 18:30 but after that it's a free-for-all!

Drinking

6 Húrra

Tryggvagata 22

The walls may be dark and adorned with gloomy paintings, and the lighting minimal, but when the bands step onto the stage the place really comes into its own. Armed with a great sound system, the place delivers a great experience for music fans throughout Reykjavík. Oh, and they serve Einstök Pale Ale and White Ale in beer mugs!

7 Mengi

Óðinsgata 2

Mengi ("Set") was born as a place to host intimate shows where the artist gets to perform in front of small crowds. Hosting anything from art performances, lectures and workshops to music gigs, Mengi snugly seats 50 people. Admission is generally 2,000 ISK, but guests are free to bring their own drinks.

8 Loftið

Austurstræti 9

Loftið offers some of the best cocktails to be had in the city. On a typical weekend you will find this place filled with older Icelandic yuppies or older yuppie foreigners swallowing old and expensive alcohol dressed like the prosperity period of 2006 never ended. This vibe is achieved with a super strict entry policy and a dress code that makes very few exceptions. If you have the money, this is the place to go!

9 Þingholt Bar

Center Hotel, Þingholtstræti 5

Located in Center Hotel Þingholt, this bar is tucked away just outside of the mayhem that is Laugavegur on a weekend night. For a quieter evening, check out their daily happy hour between 17–19, lounge in their chic and modern environment with one of the many beers and cocktails on offer.

Useful Numbers

Emergency number: **112**
Medical help: **1770**
Dental emergency: **575 0505**
Information: **118**
Taxi: Hreyfill-Bæjarleiðir: **588 5522**
BSR: **561 0000**

Tax-Free Refund

Iceland Refund, Aðalstræti 2, tel: 564 6400

Tourist Information

Arctic Adventures, Laugavegur 11, tel: 562 7000
City Centre, Aðalstræti 2, tel: 590 1550
Iceland Excursions – Grayline Iceland, Hafnarstræti 20, tel: 540 1313
The Icelandic Travel Market, Bankastræti 2, tel: 522 4979
Trip, Laugavegur 54, tel: 433 8747

Pharmacies

Lyf og heilsa, Egilsgata 3, tel: 563 1020
Lyfja, Laugavegur 16, tel: 552 4045 and Lágmúla 5, tel: 533 2300

Coach Terminal

BSÍ, Vatnsmýrarvegur 10, tel: 562 1011, www.bsi.is

Domestic Airlines

Air Iceland, Reykjavíkurflugvöllur, tel: 570 3030, www.flugfelag.is
Eagle Air, Hótel Loftleiðir, tel: 562 4200

Public Transport

The only public transport available in Reykjavík is the bus. Most buses run every 20–30 minutes (the wait may be longer on weekends) and the price per fare is 350 ISK for adults and children. Multiple day passes are available for purchase at select locations. Complete route map available at: www.bus.is. Tel: 540 2700. Buses run from 07:00–24:00 on weekdays and 10:00–24:00 on weekends. Main terminals are: Hlemmur and Lækjartorg.

Opening Hours

Bars and clubs: According to regulations, bars can stay open until 01:00 on weekdays and 04:30 on weekends.

Shops: Mon–Fri 10:00–18:00, Sat 10:00–16:00, Sun closed. The shopping centres Kringlan and Smáralind as well as most supermarkets and tourist shops have longer opening hours.
Swimming pools: Weekdays 06:30–22:00 and weekends 09:00–17:00, although each pool varies plus or minus a few hours.
Banks in the centre are open Mon–Fri 09:00–16:00.

Post Offices

Post offices are located around the city. The downtown post office is at Pósthússtræti 3–5, open Mon–Fri 09:00–18:00. Stamps are also sold at bookstores, gas stations, tourist shops and some grocery stores.

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D

New In Town

13 Bar Ananas

Klappastígur 38

Bar Ananas, named after that pizza topping that only decent people enjoy on their pizza (pineapple), is Reykjavík's only beach bar, and it is truly a breath of fresh air for the otherwise dreary downtown scene. No sir, this is no dive bar, but a club, with an indoor smoking lounge, stairs, a spacious bar, a tiny dance floor, and a solid line of DJs that all aim to make you bust a move. It's run by the same people as Boston, but it has a distinctly younger crowd in its mid to late 20s.

Trip

We create memories

Trip is an independent booking office and tourist information on Laugavegur 54. There you can find good prices and a great selection all kinds of tours. Trip is an family business with personal service.

Laugavegur 54 - www.trip.is -+354 433 8747 - trip@trip.is

J

I

Shopping

10 KronKron

Laugavegur 63b

If it's cutting-edge, international big name designers you are in the market for, then this store will be to you like Willy Wonka's factory was to Charlie. Fully stocked in the choicest young names in fashion and some one-of-a-kind local designs too—the shoes are not to be missed!

11 Mýrin

Hafnarbúðir, Geirsgata 9

Dealing in only the highest quality and aesthetically modern of local Icelandic design, this new branch of the Mýrin store in the Kringlan mall is a fine new addition to downtown shopping. A perfect place to find that one of a kind gift for your loved one, or yourself!

12 Icewear

Þingholtsstræti 2-4

Whether you are after something functional or aesthetically pleasing, Icewear offers a full collection of both clothing for the outdoor enthusiast such as sophisticated high-tech jackets, and locally made Icelandic wool sweaters and other apparel.

Public Phones

There aren't many public payphones in the city centre. The tourist information centre at Aðalstræti 2, City Hall, Kolaportið, entrance at Landsbankinn and in Lækjargata. Prepaid international phone cards are recommended for int'l callers.

Internet Access

Most cafés offer free wireless internet access. Computers with internet connections are available to use at:

Ráðhúskaffi City Hall, Tjarnargata 11

Ground Zero, Frakkastígur 8, near Laugavegur 45,

The Reykjavík City Library, Tryggvagata 15

The National and University Library, Arngrímsgata 3

Tourist Information Centre, Aðalstræti 2

Icelandic Travel Market, Bankastræti 2

Reykjavík Backpackers, Laugavegur 28

Swimming Pools

There are several swimming pools in Reykjavík. The one in 101 Reykjavík, Sundhöll Reykjavíkur, is an indoor one, located at Barónsstígur. It features a nice sunbathing area and some outdoor hot tubs. Opening hours: Mon-Thu from 06:30–22:00, Fri from 06:30–20:00, Sat from 08:00–16:00 and Sun from 10:00–18:00.

Public Toilets

Public toilets in the centre can be found inside the green-poster covered towers located, for example, at Hlemmur, Ingólfstortorg, by Hallgrímskirkja, by Reykjavík Art Museum, Lækjargata and by Eymundsson on Skólavörðustígur. Toilets can also be found inside the Reykjavík City Hall and the Reykjavík Library.

Venue Finder

Music & Entertainment

Austur
Austurstræti 7 | **C3**

B5
Bankastræti 5 | **D4**

Bar 11
Hverfisgötu 18 | **E5**

Bíó Paradís
Hverfisgata 54 | **E5**

Bjarni Fel
Austurstræti 20 | **E4**

Boston
Laugavegur 28b | **E5**

Brikk
Hafnarstræti 18 | **C4**

Bunk
Laugavegur 28 | **E5**

Café Rósenberg
Klapparstígur 25 | **E5**

Coocoo's Nest
Grandagarður 23 | **B2**

Den Danske Kro
Ingólfsstræti 3 | **E4**

Dillon
Laugavegur 30 | **E5**

Dolly
Hafnarstræti 4 | **D3**

Dubliner
Hafnarstræti 1-3 | **D3**

English Pub
Austurstræti 12 | **D3**

Frederiksen Ale House
Hafnarstræti 5 | **D3**

Gaukurinn
Tryggvagata 22 | **D3**

Hressó
Austurstræti 20 | **D3**

Húrra
Tryggvagata 22 | **C3**

Kaffibarinn
Bergstaðastræti 1 | **E4**

Kaldi Bar / Café
Laugavegur 20b | **E5**

Kigali
Ingólfsstræti 8 | **E4**

Kofinn
Laugavegur 2 | **E5**

Lavabarinn
Lækjargata 6 | **E4**

Loft Hostel
Bankastræti 7 | **E4**

Paloma
Naustin 1-3 | **D3**

Prikið
Bankastræti 12 | **E4**

Reykjavík Roasters
Kárastígur 1 | **F5**

Stofan Café
Vesturgata 3 | **D3**

Thorvaldsen
Austurstræti 8 | **D3**

Ölsmiðjan
Lækjargata 10 | **E4**

Ölstofan
Vegamótastígur 4 | **E5**

Museums & Galleries

ART67
Laugavegur 67 | **F7**
Mon-Fri 12-18 / Sat 12-16

Ásgrimur Jónsson Museum
Bergstaðastræti 74 | **G4**
Mon-Fri through Sept. 1

The Einar Jónsson Museum
Eiriksgata | **G6**
Tue–Sun 14–17
www.skulptur.is

Hafnarborg
Strandgata 34, Hafnarfjörður
www.hafnarborg.is

Hannesarholt
Grundarstígur 10 | **F4**
www.hannesarholt.is

Hitt Húsið
Gallery Tukt
Pósthússtræti 3-5 | **E3**
www.hitthusid.is

Hverfisgallerí
Hverfisgata 4 | **D4**
www.hverfisgalleri.is

i8 Gallery
Tryggvagata 16 | **D3**
Tue–Fri 11–17 / Sat 13–17 and by appointment. www.i8.is

The Icelandic Phallological Museum
Laugavegur 116 | **F8**
www.phallus.is

Kirsuberjatréð
Vesturgata 4 | **C2**
www.kirs.is

Kling & Bang
Hverfisgata 42 | **E5**
Thurs–Sun from 14–18
www.this.is/klingogbang

Knitting Iceland
Laugavegur 25 | **E5**
www.knittingiceland.is

Kunstschlager
Rauðarárstígur 1 | **G8**
Mon-Sat from 15-18
www.kunstschlager.com

Living Art Museum
Skúlagata 28 | **E7**
Tue-Sun 12-17
www.nylo.is

Mengi
Óðinsgata 2 | **F5**

Mokka Kaffi
Skólavörðustígur 3A | **F5**
www.mokka.is

The National Gallery of Iceland
Fríkirkjuvegur 7 | **F3**
Tue–Sun 11–17
www.listasafn.is

The National Museum
Suðurgata 41 | **F2**
Open daily 10–17
www.natmus.is

The Nordic House
Sturlugata 5
Tue–Sun 12–17
www.nordice.is

Reykjavík Art Gallery
Skúlagata 30 | **F7**
Tue-Sun 14–18
www.artmuseum.is

Reykjavík Art Museum - Hafnarhús
Tryggvagata 17 | **D3**
Open 10-17
Thursday 10-20

Kjarvalsstaðir
Flókagata 24
Open 10-17

Ásmundarsafn
Sigtún
Open 10-17
www.listasafnreykjavikur.is

Reykjavík City Library
Tryggvagata 15 | **D3**
www.borgarbokasafn.is

Reykjavík City Museum - Árbæjarsafn
Kistuhylur 4
Daily tours at 13

The Settlement Exhibition
Aðalstræti 17 | **D3**
Open daily 10–17

Reykjavík Maritime Museum
Grandagarður 8 | **B2**
Open daily 10-17

Reykjavík Museum of Photography
Tryggvagata 15 | **D3**
Mon-Thur 12–19 / Fri 12-18 / Sat–Sun 13–17

Viðey Island
Ferry from Skarfabakki Harbour, Sat-Sun only
www.videy.com

Saga Museum
Grandagarður 2 | **B2**
www.sagamuseum.is

Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum
Laugarnestangi 70
www.lso.is

SÍM
Hafnarstræti 16 | **D3**
Mon–Fri 10-16
www.sim.is

Spark Design Space
Klapparstígur 33 | **E5**
M-Fri 12-18, Sat 12-16
www.sparkdesign-space.com

Tveir Hrafnar
Baldursgata 12 | **G4**
Thu-Fri 12-17, Sat 13-16
www.tveirhrafnar.is

Wind & Weather Gallery
Hverfisgata 37 | **E5**
www.windandweather.is

ÞOKA
Laugavegur 25 | **E5**
www.thoka.is

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H

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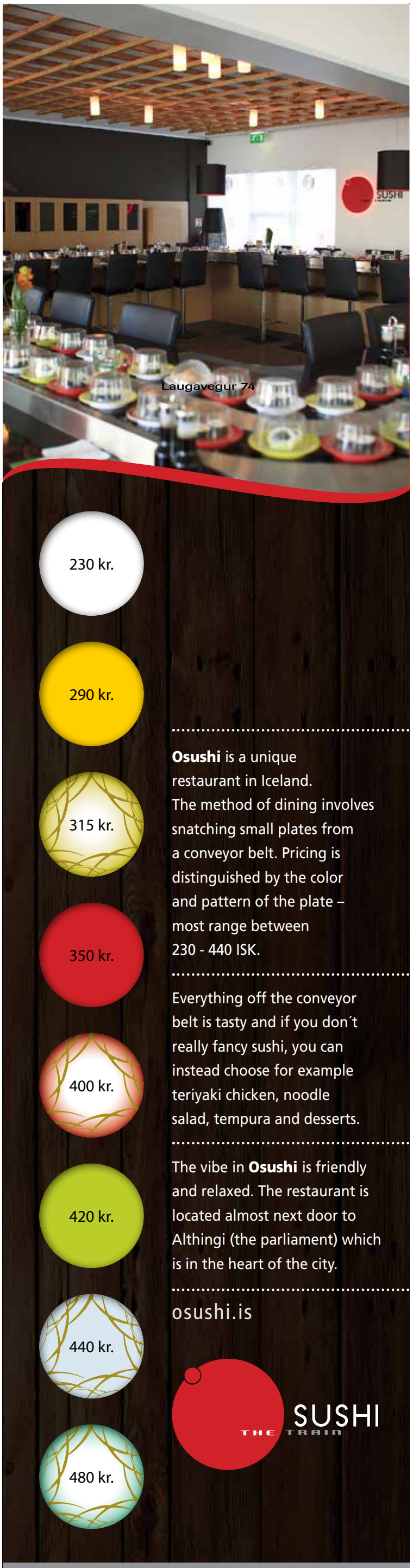
E



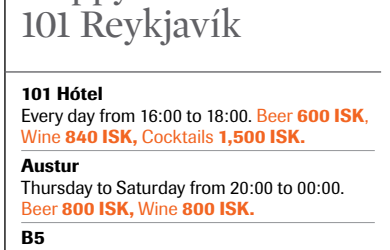
Best Of Reykjavík

Every year around the beginning of July, we make a BEST OF REYKJAVÍK ISSUE celebrating some of what makes Reykjavík-life worthwhile, posting some good entries into a hopefully never-ending discussion. The primary purpose of BEST OF REYKJAVÍK is celebration! It's about big-upping stuff, giving mad props to it and patting it on the shoulder. The following are some nice tips we pulled from BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2014 which you can read in full at www.grapevine.is.

DINING & GRUBBING — The BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2014

BEST NEWCOMER RESTAURANT: K-BAR

Laugavegur 74



K-Bar made a splash when it opened in late 2013 and it continues to roll out innovative new dishes. But thanks to creative cocktails, a strong line-up of beers and trendy yet cosy décor, K-Bar is satisfying even before the food arrives. The menu is detail-oriented and exciting, showcasing a unique fusion of Korean and Portuguese influences. Though the Korean staple, Bi Bim Bap, is good, the soft shell crab tempura sandwich and fish burgers are standouts. K-Bar also has a special place in our hearts because they offer what might be the best food and drink deal in the city. Between 16:00 and 18:00, you can stop in and get their sauce-slathered KFC (Korean Fried Chicken) wings and the beer of the day for only 990 ISK. From the fresh flavours, the steal of a deal and the cronuts, K-Bar is an extremely welcomed addition to the Reykjavík dining scene.

ACTIVITIES & FUN TIMES — The BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2014

BEST PLACE TO GO ON A RAINY DAY: A HOT TUB

Behind Every Nook & Cranny!

So you came to Iceland knowing, of course, that the weather is not, let's say, its finest feature. You knew that there would be rain and wind (so much fucking wind) and that it wouldn't be all sunshine-on-the-mountaintops like 'The Sound of Music' or an Icelandair promo video. You knew this, but you didn't believe it, and now you're sad because you came all this way and the weather blows. Literally. We feel you, man. What hot pot, you ask? Any hot pot. You'll be warm and toasty and relaxed and the fact that it's sleeting or hailing in your face will suddenly feel bracing or even a tiny bit amusing, instead of symbolic of humanity's futile struggle against nature and the fragility of the human vessel.

SHOPPING & COMMERCE — The BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2014

BEST HABERDASHERY: HERRAFATAVERZLUN KORMÁKS & SKJALDAR

Laugavegur 59

Tucked under the Bónus on Laugavegur is a classy gentleman's heaven. Herrafataverzlun Kormáks & Skjaldar sells everything for an elegant man's wardrobe, from leather shoes and top hats to tailored suits and bowties. The store carries many great brands such as Barbour, Loake, Hackett and Filson. There is also a great barber who'll give you a stylish haircut and beard trim.

A GUIDE THAT FUCKS YOU UP

A list of every Happy Hour in 101 Reykjavík

101 Hótel
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00. Beer **600 ISK**, Wine **840 ISK**, Cocktails **1,500 ISK.**

Austur
Thursday to Saturday from 20:00 to 00:00. Beer **800 ISK**, Wine **800 ISK.**

B5
Every day from 16:00 to 22:00. Beer **550 ISK**, Cider **700 ISK**, Wine **700 ISK.**

Bar 7
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00. Beer **350 ISK**, Shot **450 ISK**

Bar 11
Thursday from 21:00 to 1:00. Beer **450 ISK**
Friday to Saturday from 21:00 to 00:00. Beer **500 ISK**

Bíó Paradís
Monday to Sunday from 17:00 to 19:30. **500 ISK** all beers, **500 ISK** selected wines.

Bjarni Fel
Monday to Friday from 21:00 to 23:00. 2 for 1 Beer **990 ISK**, single with mixer **1,300 ISK**.

Boston
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00. Beer **600 ISK**, Wine **650 ISK.**

Bravó
Every day from 17:00 to 21:00. Beer **500 ISK**, Wine **750 ISK.**

Bunk Bar
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00. Beer **500 ISK**, Wine **750 ISK.**

Cafe Haiti
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00. Beer **650 ISK**, Wine **800 ISK.**

Den Danske Kro
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00. 2 for 1 Beer **1,000 ISK** and 2 for 1 Guibess and Wine **1,200 ISK.**

Dillon
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00. Beer **550 ISK**, Wine for **700 ISK**, Whiskey **550 ISK.**

Dolly
Wednesday to Thursday from 20:00 to 22:00, Friday to Saturday from 20:00 to 23:00. Beer **600 ISK**, Wine **600 ISK.**

Download the FREE Grapevine Appy Hour app!

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Dubliner
Every day from 16:00 until 22:00. Beer **600 ISK**, 2 for 1 Wine **1,000 ISK.**

Einar Ben Every day from 17:30 to 20:00. Beer **500 ISK** , Wine **800 ISK**

Frederiksen Ale House
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00. 2 for 1 Beer **1,000 ISK** and Wine **1,100 ISK**

Gaukurinn
Every day from 20:00 to 22:00. Beer **500 ISK**, Wine **700 ISK.**

Glaumbar
Thursday to Saturday from 20:00 to 00:00. Beer **500 ISK**, Shot **390 ISK.**

Hótel 1919
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00. Beer **600 ISK**, Wine **575 ISK**, Cocktail **1,050 ISK**

Húrra
Every day from 18:00 to 22:00. Beer **500 ISK**, Wine **700 ISK.**

Iða Zimsen
Coffee happy hour weekdays 8:00 to 10:00, weekends 10:00-12:00 All coffee **300 ISK**.
Every day from 19:00 to 22:00. Beer **445 ISK.**

Kaldi Bar
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00. Beer for **650 ISK**, Wine for **650 ISK.**

Kiki Queer Bar
Thursday from 21:00 to 01:00. Beer **500 ISK**, Shots **500 ISK**.

Kolabrautin
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00. Beer **450 ISK**, Wine **500 ISK**, Cocktails **1,000 ISK.**

Lebowski Bar
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00. 2 for 1 Beer and Wine **1,100 ISK.**

Loft Hostel Bar
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00. Beer **600 ISK**, Wine **700 ISK.**

Micro Bar
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00. Beer **700 ISK.**

Mímisbar
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00. Beer **500 ISK**, Wine **650 ISK**, Cocktail of the day **1,100 ISK**, Shot + Beer **1,000 ISK.**

Jörundur Öl- og Matstofa
Every day from 14:00 to 19:00. Beer for **650 ISK**, Wine for **750 ISK**, Beer and snaps for **990 ISK.**

Nora Magasin
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00. Beer **650 ISK**, House Wine **600 ISK.**

Park
Friday to Saturday from 22:00 to 04:30. Beer **500 ISK**, Shot **400 ISK.**

Prikið
Monday to Friday from 16:00 to 20:00. Beer **500 ISK.**

Rio Sport Bar
Monday to Sunday from 12:00 to 19:00. Beer **500 ISK**, Wine **700 ISK.**

Slippbarinn
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00. Beer **500 ISK**, Wine **500 ISK**, selected Cocktails **1,000 ISK**.

Solon Bistro
Weekdays from 15:00 to 18:00. Beer **650 ISK**, Wine **700 ISK**.

Stofan
Every day from 17:00 to 20:00. Beer **750 ISK**, Wine **950 ISK**

Thorvaldsen Bar
Monday to Saturday from 16:00 to 20:00. Beer **500 ISK**, Wine **600 ISK.**

Tíu Dropar
Every day from 18:00 to 21:00. 2 for 1 Wine for **1,000 ISK** and Beer **1,000 ISK**.

Vínsmakkarinn
Monday to Sunday from 17:00 to 20:00. Beer **600 ISK**, Wine **700 ISK.**

ART

ONGOING

lights and holidays, but at the same time it has the air of darkness and danger. Similarly, the works of the 14 different artists participating in the exhibit each have their own perspectives that at times clash with one another.

Runs until January 4

Arion Bank

Speglað landslag

In this exhibition (which translates as "Flipped Landscape"), Hrafnkell Sigurðsson examines the relationship between man and nature, showing man-made structures that resemble nature, and natural phenomena that look humane.

Runs until February 20

Árbær Museum

The Árbær Christmas has become a popular fixture on the annual festive calendar. The idea behind it is to relive the festival of christmas in the manner of generations gone by. This includes preparation of traditional Icelandic Christmas food and crafts, such as candle making. During the holiday season, there are Yule lads abound, daily guided tours, and a pagan-themed settlement exhibition.

Runs Until December 21

Artótek

'Figures and Forms' by Auðir Inga & Hafdís Brands

The two ceramic artists both studied fine art at the Glasgow School of Art. Hafdís specialised in ceramic sculptures while Auður Inga makes ceramics as well as painted works.

Runs until December 7

Better Weather Window Gallery

Deathbed visions

This sister gallery of Wind and Weather Gallery features a site-specific mixed-media installation window space on Laugavegur by artist Freyja Eilíf Logadóttir.

Runs until December 29

The Einar Jónsson Museum

The museum contains close to 300 artworks including a beautiful garden with 26 bronze casts of the artist's sculptures.

On permanent view

Gallerí Skilti

Pura Vida

British artist S. Mark Gubb went to Costa Rica, got inspired by the casual atmosphere and the concept of "pura vida," the catchall phrase for positivity. So he brought it to Reykjavík with a sign that points anyone in the right direction to find their own Pura Vida, or good life.

Runs until December 15

Gallery Bakarí

'Lumine Maris Ubique' by Alexander Zaklynsky

Alexander Zaklynsy exhibits new works on paper, bronze, aluminium and wood. The works developed for this exhibition are loosely inspired by Deiter Roth, Alexander's experience of moving back to Iceland, as well as the experiences accumulated through art residencies in Spain, Italy, Ukraine, Germany, The Netherlands and Poland.

Runs until December 5

Hverfisgallery

'Tilfelli Og Ný Loðferð' by Shoplifter

Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir aka Shoplifter is an Icelandic artist living in New York. Shoplifter makes sculptures, drawings and installations with various materials and found objects. Her works take on themes relating to vanity, self-image, fashion, beauty and popular myths, and often tackle notions that border on obsession or fetishism.

Runs until January 31

Hafnarborg

Lip-Sticks

This is an engaging exhibition featuring paintings by leading young Icelandic artists who dazzle the viewer with colourful narratives and blunt attitudes. The artists in question are Gabríela Friðriksdóttir, Guðmundur Thoroddsen, Helgi Þórsson, Hulda Vilhjálmsdóttir, Ragnar Þórisson, Þorvaldur Jónsson and Þórdís Aðalsteinsdóttir. Hulda Vilhjálmsdóttir has a special artist talk on December 7, and Ragnar Þórisson on January 4.

Runs until January 4

Hitt Húsið – Gallery Tukt

Breiðholt Upper Secondary School Sculpture Exhibit

Students from the Breiðholt upper secondary school have a sculpture exhibit on display.

Open until January 6

Hverfisgallerí

'Nonsicles and New Fur-lings' By Shoplifter

The Fur-lings are a continuation of Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir aka Shoplifter's interest in using human and synthetic hair that make up her new furry "paintings" and the so-called Nonsicle sculptures made with a combination of found materials the artist obsessively collects. The work dwells in the gray area between beauty and ugliness, challenging and questioning our pre-conceived ideas of beauty and art.

Runs until January 31

i8

'Snið / Transects' by Eggert Pétursson & Friederike Von Rauch

The two person show features works by Icelandic painter Eggert Pétursson and German photographer Friederike Von Rauch. Their works share certain similarities such as the reduction in material content, stillness and concentration.

Runs until January 31

The Icelandic Phallological Museum

The museum contains a collection of more than 215 penises and penile parts belonging to almost all the land and sea mammals that can be found in Iceland. There's also a penis sculpture honoring the Icelandic men's handball team, though confusingly it does not feature their actual penises.

On permanent view

Not Just Mistletoes And Ribbons

Meinvill In Amarkía

Anarkía

Hamraborg 3, 200 Kópavogur | Nov 29 - Jan 4 | 10-17 | Free

Anarkía, that hip anarchist-themed art gallery in Kópavogur, has been around for a year and a half already, playing host to upwards of 30 different exhibitions. Fourteen of its founding members are joining forces in a group exhibition called "Meinvill in Anarkía," whose name is inspired by the Icelandic version of Christmas carol "Silent Night." Thus, the title brings to mind thoughts of Christmas lights and holidays, but at the same time it has the air of darkness and danger. Similarly, the fourteen different artists participating in the exhibit each present their own unique perspectives, that at times clash with one another. **ER**

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Works by 7 contemporary artists
Works from the collection of Hafnarborg
by Elías B. Halldorsson

Kópavogur Art Museum / Gerðarsafn
Hamraborg 4, Kópavogur
Open 11–17 / Closed on Mondays
www.gerdarsafn.is

Hönnunarsafn Íslands / Museum of Design and Applied Art
Garðatorg 1, Garðabær
Open 12–17 / Closed on Mondays
www.honnunarsafn.is

Hafnarborg / The Hafnarfjordur Centre of Culture and Fine Art
Strandgata 34, Hafnarfjörður
Open 12–17 / Thursdays 12–21
Closed on Tuesdays
www.hafnarborg.is

HARPA
Location: Harpa - Reykjavik Concert Hall and Conference Center.
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ART

ONGOING

Home Sweet Home
'Forest Embrace and Home' by Yvonne Larsson

Nordic House

Sturlugata 5 (F5) | Nov 29 –Jan 1 | 12:00- 17:00 | Free!

In this exhibit, the Swedish artist Yvonne Larsson examines and exhibits her own interpretation of the term "home." Her work has been said to glide between memory and present, reality and imagination. In her patterns, she plays with sunlight, shadows and half-tone effects. Her raster graphics give the viewer space to recall their own stories and own interpretation of home, all in an attempt to trigger an emotional reaction from the viewer. Yvonne wants the viewer to see that home isn't just a place; it's a feeling.

SV

Knitting Iceland
Whether you are a beginner or pro, you can come knit at Laugavegur 25, 3rd floor, every Thursday, 14:00 - 18:00.
On permanent view

Kópavogur Art Museum
Gerðarsafn

'Impressions' by Hólmfríður Árnadóttir
Hólmfríður has a series of textile and paper works from early parts of her career on exhibit.
Runs until January 4

'Óp/Op' by Jón B. K. Ransu
Jón B. K. Ransu has an exhibit with numerous artworks on display.
Runs until January 4

Kunstschlager

'The mask is the face' by Arnfinnur Amazeen
As with Arnfinnur's previous work, the artist plays with different mediums, resulting in unusual outcomes. Daily objects are placed side by side and next to other works of the exhibitions. This results in a reasonable amount of beauty, ugliness, profoundness and lightness, hardship, fineness, humour and seriousness.
Runs until December 12

Mokka Kaffi

'Músik & Sport' by Stephan Stephensen
In this exhibition Stephen revisits an odd little shop from his childhood, that he cites as the starting point where he embarked on the journey to become the man he is today. The show offers a glimpse into that journey. As a founding member of electronic band Gusgus, the exhibition also features a photographic chronicle of his time with the group.
Runs until 6 December

Museum of Design and Applied Art

Are you ready, Madam President?
The exhibition displays clothing and other accessories from the wardrobe of former Icelandic President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir. The exhibition gives visitors a glimpse into Vigdís's preferences in choosing her wardrobe and style, and also the personal lives and habits of heads of state.
Runs until February 22

Prýði
To celebrate 90 years of the Goldsmith's Association of Iceland, 40 icelandic goldsmiths will exhibit their works. Expect a diverse variety of jewellery and other pieces, with inspiration spanning from over the century.
Runs until January 25

The National Museum

Icelandic Silverwork
See various silver pieces and the methods of their making at this exhibit commemorating the 150th anniversary of the National Museum of Iceland.
Runs until December 31

'Sodium Sun' by Stuart Richardson
Photographer Stuart Richardson exhibits a series of photographs on Icelandic streetlights, their locales and the weather.
Runs until December 31

The Making Of A Nation
This exhibition is intended to provide insight into the history of the Icelandic nation from the Settlement to the present day.
On permanent view

'Snapshots Of A Moment' by Þorsteinn Jósepsson
Þorsteinn Jósepsson was a widely travelled author and journalist. Þorsteinn's photography presents an intricate panorama of Icelandic life and a rapidly changing rural landscape. His collection of photographs is one of the largest, most important and most comprehensive private collections from the 20th century.
Runs until December 31

Nordic House

'Forest Embrace and Home' by Yvonne Larsson
The title consists of two themes that Yvonne Larsson has been working with in the form of fourteen big paintings. According to many, Yvonne's work glides between memory and the present, between the mundane and the existentially ambiguous. With her paintings, Yvonne is trying to see beyond and to make the intangible things visible.
Runs until January 11

Christmas Calendar 2014
The Christmas calendar in the Nordic House takes place daily in the festival hall in December until Christmas. The first window of the calendar will be opened on December 1, and the audience will then get to know about the performance of the day. There are numerous participating artists, but the order in which they perform is a secret. There will be live music, dance performances, readings, yoga, and games requiring audience participation.
Runs until December 23

The Old Harbour

Iceland Expo Pavillion
Every day from 10:00 to 22:00, Saga Films projects a film of Icelandic scenery inside their Iceland Expo Pavillion which provides a unique 360 degree movie experience.
On permanent view

Reykjavík Art Museum – Ásmundarsafn

A posteriori: House, Sculpture
A posteriori, or "from what comes after," is a selection of artworks with original references to buildings or houses. The artists involved in the exhibition have used existing or fabricated architecture to create new works.
Runs until February 1

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ART

ONGOING

Reykjavík Art Museum – Hafnarhús

'Flatland' by Sirra Sigrún

In her exhibition, Sirra Sigrún juxtaposes structural stasis with movement by integrating video with text, movement and sculpture. The exhibit's title is a reference, among other things, to a book of the same title published in 1884 which is a satirical portrayal of the social hierarchy using the language of mathematics and geometry.

Runs until January 25

Synthesis

This international exhibition comprises works by seven artists. The artists make three-dimensional installations which share the qualities of reflecting a certain perception, thinking and rhythm, which may be seen as an echo of life itself, of primal forces, the structure of the fabric of the world and the ongoing genesis of the universe.

Runs until January 15

'Worlds And Ways' by Gunter Damisch

This exhibition is a selection of works by Gunter Damisch from the 1980s to 2013. On display are both graphic works which Gunter has given Reykjavík Art Museum and a selection of other works by him. The works are highly individual iconography and mythology oscillates between figuration and abstraction.

Runs until January 25

Reykjavík Art Museum – Kjarvalsstaðir

'Roundabouts' by Andreas Eriksson

Andreas Eriksson is one of the most acclaimed Swedish artists of his generation. The exhibition presents Eriksson's works from the last ten years, spanning his entire oeuvre including painting, photography, sculpture, film and textile.

Runs until January 4

'Top Soil' by Andreas Eriksson

For the exhibition, artist Andreas Eriksson has selected paintings and drawings by Kjarval, which will be shown along with new work by Andreas himself in appreciation of Kjarval's art.

Runs until January 4

The Reykjavík City Library

The collection centres around new Nordic literature, both fiction and nonfiction. The library lends out novels, academic publications, audiobooks and more.

On permanent view

The Plant In The Hallway – Comics Exhibition

Sisters Elísabet Rún and Elín Edda will open a comics exhibition. On display will be their first graphic novel, 'The Plant in the Hallway.' They have been working on the graphic novel for two years, and its story is about the protagonist's life changes when she puts a plant in her hallway.

Runs until January 15

Reykjavík City Museum

Reykjavík 871 +/- 2: The Settlement Exhibition

Archaeological findings from ruins of one of the first houses in Iceland and other excavations in the city centre, open daily 10:00-17:00

On permanent view

Reykjavík Maritime Museum

From Poverty to Abundance

Photos documenting Icelandic fishermen at the turn of the 20th century.

On permanent view

The History of Sailing

Iceland's maritime history that showcases the growth of the Reykjavík Harbour.

On permanent view

The Coast Guard Vessel Óðinn

This vessel sailed through all three Cod Wars and has also served as a rescue ship to over 200 ships. Daily guided tours at 13:00, 14:00 and 15:00, admission 1,900 ISK.

On permanent view

The Reykjavík Museum of Photography

'Girl Culture' by Lauren Greenfield

Lauren's exhibit focuses on the central role occupied by popular culture in the construction or deconstruction of female identity. The exhibition consists of portrait images and interviews that cast a light on the experiences and expressions of women today.

Runs until January 11

'Iceland' by Beth Yarnelle Edwards

Fascinated with the relations between people, their living spaces and possessions, the San Francisco based photographer Beth Yarnelle Edwards collaborates with her subjects to recreate scenes from their daily lives. The Iceland series was created when she spent a summer month in Iceland. Her aim is to seek out intersections of the mythic and mundane.

Runs until December 9

Spark Design Space

Salon

Every year the Spark Design Space installs a collection of projects they have exhibited in the past.

Runs until January 5

volcanic eruptions and other magnificent aspects of Icelandic nature.

On permanent view

Challenging Beauty And Ugliness

'Nonsicles And New Fur-Lings' by Shoplifter

Hverfisgallery

Hverfisgata 4 (D4) | Nov 30 – Jan 31 | 11:00-17:00 | Free!

Artist Shoplifter, AKA Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir, likes to make art out of hair, both human and synthetic. You might not be aware of the fact, but you've definitely seen her work (you're quite possibly a fan, even), most likely through one of her many collaborations with Björk (that hair sculpture Björk donned on the cover of 'Medúlla' was an original Shoplifter piece, for instance). At her Hverfisgallerý show, you can view Shoplifter's latest obsession, the Fur-Lings, which are reportedly furry paintings made with generous amounts of hair. Go see it, you will like it. **HSM**

Tveir Hrafnar

X-mas

For this special holiday show, the artists and affiliates of Tveir Hrafnar band together to offer a diverse exhibition.

Runs until December 31

Volcano House

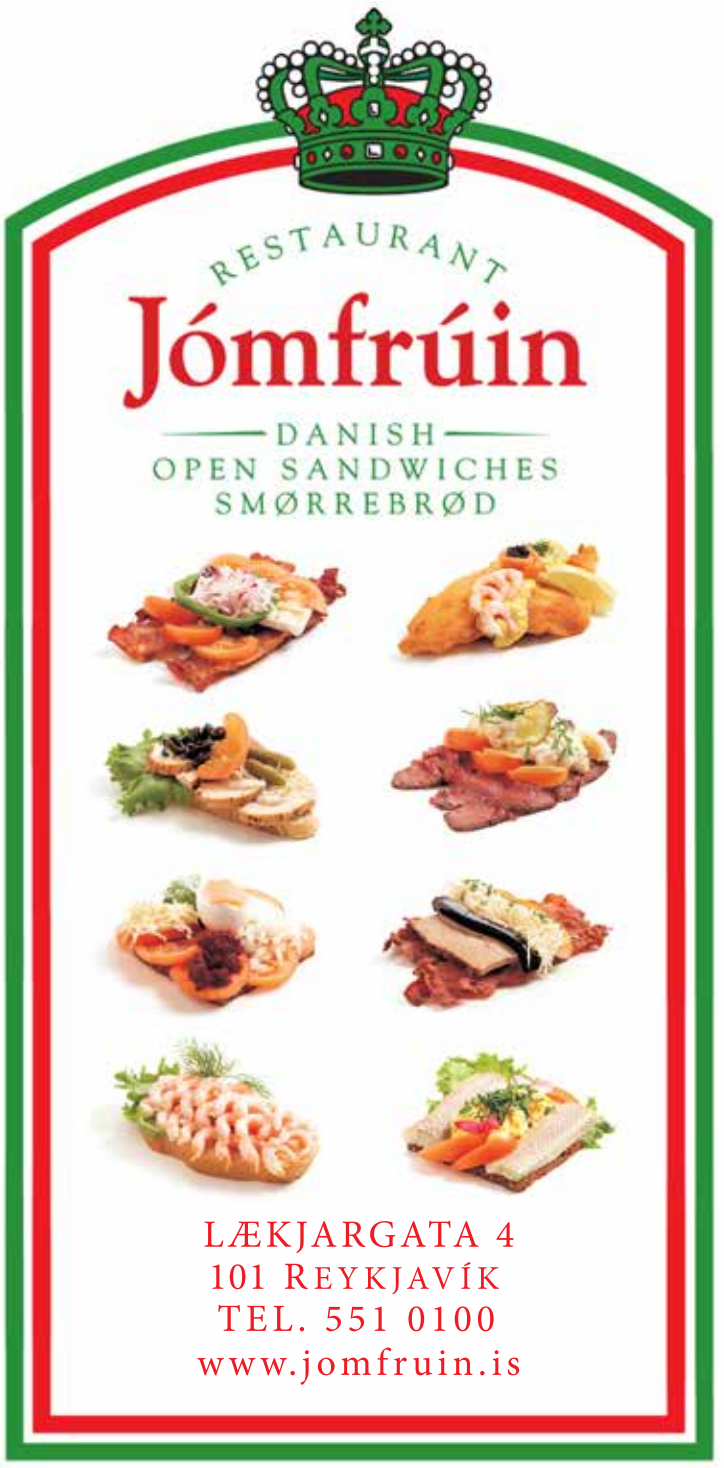
The exhibition gives a brief overview of Iceland's geological history and volcanic systems with superb photographs of

Wind And Weather Gallery

'Enter. Space.' by Auður Ómarsdóttir

The exhibit focuses on those two buttons: enter and space. Both make space. Enter gives you an invisible pass into another realm or a leap down as far as possible. Space gives you an invisible room that keeps words apart from each other.

Runs until December 29



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FOOD

FOR YOUR MIND BODY AND SOUL

What Icelanders Eat For The Holidays

Look, intrepid traveller! Here is a primer on the usual suspects and new additions to the ever-popular Icelandic Christmas buffets, found at various restaurants around the country. If you're around in time for one of those, why not give it a whirl? You'll certainly be immersing yourself in Icelandic culture, if nothing else.

The Kings of Meat Town

Hangikjöt should be the first word in any discussion of Icelandic holiday culinary traditions. A common misconception is that Hangikjöt can only be made from lamb, but the name only refers to the processing method of the meat as it literally translates as "hung meat" (colloquially known as Jon Hamm). The Vikings would be just as likely to use horsemeat as they would mutton. Traditionally, the meat is cured with nitrates and saltpetre, and slow-smoked with dried horse manure until it has lost over 30% of its weight. Modern Hangikjöt is usually smoked for a shorter amount of time, with or without manure, and will then need to be boiled before eating. Other recent innovations include double-smoked Hangikjöt and dried Hangikjöt (much like Spanish Jamón). With changing trends, the salt content has been reduced overall. Hangikjöt is also enjoyed all year around in the form of sandwich cold cuts.

A traditional un-processed leg of lamb is another holiday staple. Less rare of a treat in Iceland than it used to be, but likely to make an appearance at some point during the three main days of the Christmas celebrations.

Pork is the redheaded stepchild of Icelandic proteins, cheap by modern standards and rarely seen in the classic national dishes aside from our Danish-style hot dogs. It does, however, enjoy a brief moment in the spotlight during the holidays with the "Hamborgarhryggur." The Hamborgarhryggur is often misspelled as "Hamborgarahryggur," but has no relation to hamburgers. It consists of a large pork loin, which is salted and cured before being boiled, glazed and oven-roasted. It is very similar to what the Germans call "kassler." The glaze differs from family to family, but usually includes mustard, muscovado sugar, and ketchup.

The alternative pork dish is "Pörusteik," roasted pork, usually shoulder, with a thick layer of crisp crackling, usually served with brown sauce made from stock, roux, food colouring and some form of booze.

At last but not least is a dish almost exclusively associated with Christmas, the rock ptarmigan. For those about to rock ptarmigan, you may be in for a disappointment, as the hunting quota for this croaking, birch-fed game bird is at an all-time low. This has given rise to a vibrant black market in ptarmigan breasts, despite all ptarmigan trade having been made illegal. The bird has an intense game flavour not unlike that of the spruce grouse (who names these birds!?). If that sounds like something you would like, just keep an eye out for shifty men in suspiciously long trenchcoats leaving a trail of white feathers behind.

Pretenders to the Meat Throne

Poultry in general is a new thing in Iceland. Icelanders have never eaten as much chicken as they do now. A couple of generations ago, an average Icelandic family's annual poultry consumption was likely to have been lower than the current monthly quota. With that change came the turkey, a bird that has been gaining territory rapidly at the expense of established meats like Hangikjöt and the Danish Hamborgarhryggur. The turkey is often served in the American Thanksgiving style, with a mound of stuffing, sweet potatoes, and a Waldorf salad. It corresponds quite comfortably with Iceland's cultural allegiance shifting from Denmark to the United States over the last 100 years.

Wild game has been on the increase as well. Reindeers were imported into Iceland in the late 18th century and have become established in the east of the country. Mostly seen in holiday pâtés, they will grace the occasional main course listing come the 24th.

The roasted goose has also been a regular feature in game hunting households, usually stuffed with a triple sec cream sauce and the occasional piece of shotgun pellet.

The latest additions would have to be the vegetarian nut loaf and tofurkey, which have arrived with the growing community of vegetarians and vegans in Iceland. The restaurant Fjalakötturinn will be open over the Christmas holidays and they have offered an impressive vegetarian holiday menu in the past for those who haven't felt up to the task.

Sweets & sides

Appetizers include the classic shrimp cocktail, langoustine tails in garlic butter, creamy langoustine soup and pâtés.

Among the sides you will get various combinations of the following: "Laufabrauð" (deep-fried, thin pancakes cut with geometric patterns), pickled red cabbage (canned or homemade with a stick of cinnamon), Ora peas, Ora mixed diced "vegetables," creamy Waldorf salad, steamed Brussels sprouts, canned sweet corn, steamed broccoli, caramelized potatoes, boiled potatoes in béchamel, diced red beets and apples in whipped cream, and green salads.

The sweet dimension of the holidays starts with the usual variety of cookies, with the Sarah Bernhardt cookies being a particular favourite. Among the cakes, the "Lagkaka" and "Randalína" reign supreme. The Lagkaka (layer cake) consists of slabs of something like soft gingerbread layered with vanilla frosting, while its close cousin the randalína is slabs of yellow cake layered with rhubarb jam.

Desserts vary, but it is difficult to make it through the season without being confronted by the classic Scandinavian "Risalamande"—a rice pudding folded into whipped cream, almonds, vanilla and berry syrup.

Now you know. You cannot claim you didn't know what you were getting into.

RAGNAR EGILSSON
ART BICNICK

#109

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FOOD

FOR YOUR MIND BODY AND SOUL

Icelandic Christmas Buffet at Skrúður

Skrúður at Hótel Saga

Hagatorg, 107 Reykjavík

What We Think:
Happy holidays

Flavour:
Salted, smoked, creamy

Ambiance:
Cavernous, quiet, surprisingly casual

Service:
Sparse but good (we were there very early)

Price for 2 (no drinks):
3,900 ISK (lunch), 6,300 ISK (dinner), 50% off for children 12-16 years old, free for under 12s.

Skrúður is an institution in family-friendly Christmas buffets. There are fancier buffets, there are more innovative buffets, but I was interested in this one because of how resolutely decent and representative it is. And it doesn't hurt that it holds some personal nostalgic memories for me. What is Christmas if not blatantly maudlin nostalgia? Skrúður is a place where grandparents take their grandchildren: when I went, there were no less than five separate groups consisting of three generations of Icelanders. But the median age was generally a little higher than at your average buffet.

Hótel Saga contains three restaurants in total: Skrúður, Súlnasalur, and Grillið. There are two Christmas buffets on offer, one in Skrúður and one in Súlnasalur, the latter being the more elaborate one, and paired with some dinner entertainment.

The space is enormous, with enough ceiling height to stack up a couple of tour buses, and the ambience is a little like a Vegas dining hall without the crushing claustrophobia. It's self-serve and all you can eat, with the cold dishes and appetizers set aside, a dessert area and ice-cream bar and a section where the chefs carve up your meat of choice.

Cold dishes included a delicious Akvavit-cured salmon, lightly smoked Greenland halibut and a selection of pickled herring. It also included cold, white-wine boiled mussels layered on a steel serving tray sans ice, which seemed like a risky choice and tasted like you would expect. In addition to that, they had cold cuts of Hangikjöt (smoked lamb) and Hamborgarhryggur (smoked glazed ham).

Standouts from the hot dishes were the lemon-chilli turkey breast and the pork roast with crackling. The marinated lamb was well cooked but completely under-seasoned, and did not seem to have seen much marinating. The rib-eye came in an enormous lump that brought tears to the chef's eyes and saliva to our mouths.

The only thing missing form the hot dishes was a greater selection of sauces—all we had to go with was a single brown stock sauce for four kinds of meats.

Sides included the classic Waldorf salad, "gular baunir" (literally "yellow beans," actually sweet corn), "grænar baunir" (literally "green beans," actually green peas), shredded red cabbage, red onion jam, red beets, potato salad and greens.

The dessert bar included three types of buttery, creamy desserts in shot glasses: a Risalamande, a white chocolate cream and a chocolate mousse. It also offered a selection of cookies and a Pavlova, which could have used some of the whipped cream that went into the other three (and we ended up fixing that ourselves, turns out white chocolate cream Pavlova is pretty damn good).

Overall, Skrúður offers a nice, traditional, Icelandic holiday buffet. The food was a bit hit and miss, as is always the case with those sorts of things, but this was more than made up by the great value for money, and the solid introduction to Icelandic Christmas traditions it offers.

RAGNAR EGILSSON
ART BICNICK

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HÚRRA

December

VÍKING

5.
DJ Ívar Pétur

6.
DJ Reagan &
Gorbachov

7.
Lowercase Nights
experimental music
free entry 21:00

8.
Monday Night Jazz
free entry 21:00

9.
DJ Ísar Logi

10.
Teitur Magnússon
album release show
1500isk 21:00
DJ Óli Dóri

11.
Árstíðir 21:00
DJ Logi & Pétur

12.
Berndsen
album release
show
1500isk 22:00
DJ Disco Owes
Me Money

13.
Kott Grá Pje
1500isk 22:00
DJ Styrmir Dansson

14.
Lowercase Nights
experimental music
free entry 21:00

15.
Monday Night Jazz
free entry 21:00

16.
DJ Myth &
Lazybones

17.
Kimono &
Just Another
Snake Cult
1500isk 21:00
DJ Einar Sonic

18.
Hits & Tits
Christmas karaoke
free entry 21:00

19.
DJ KGB

20.
FM Belfast
2000isk 22:00
DJ Óli Dóri

21.
DJ Mr. Silla

22.
Christmas bingo
free entry 21:00
DJ Sunna Ben

23.
DJ Pabbi

24.
Closed

25.
Closed

26.
Húrra's Christmas
ball with Brim
free entry 22:00
DJ Simon
FKNHNDSM

27.
East of My Youth
& Lily the Kid
DJ Katla

28.
Board game night
free entry 20:00

29.
FESTIVUS
Seinfeld Quiz
hosted by Sin Fang
free entry 20:00
DJ Sin Fang

30.
Moses Hightower
2000isk 21:00
DJ Ladyboy

31.
New Years Eve
party with DJ KGB
01:00 (1/1/15)

The Reykjavík Grapevine's *Xmas Special Spectacular*

The merry Christmas men that are plastered all over the Grapevine this issue just happen to be veritable legends in their own right. Guðmundur Oddur Magnússon, Goddur, (left) is Professor of Graphic Design at the Icelandic Academy of the Arts, while Jörmundur Ingi (right) served for years as Allsherjargoði (Head Goði) of the Ásatrú Association (he is currently Reykjavík Chieftain for the Pagan Association, which he founded in 2007).

Why do we love having them dress up like a couple of Santas and then have them pose for photos, and then putting those photos on our magazine covers? Because they are very wonderful people who have actively enriched Icelandic culture for decades, that's why. Plus, they both sport great beards. And a Santa needs a beard.

We asked the two to relay a few childhood Christmas memories to mark their appearance on our cover.

Goddur
(b. 1955)

My most vivid memory of Christmas as a child is when my father would bring home a case of apples, which were a rare treat at the time.

My parents weren't very religious. Like most Icelanders, they would sort of pay lip service to Christianity. Regardless, it should be clear that Christmas was a solemn, even sacred, time. We would listen to the Christmas mass on the radio before dining on Christmas Eve—and playing games was strictly forbidden until the second day of Christmas.

Thinking back, I am only now realizing that in post-war Iceland, Christmas had already become fully Americanized. The Yule Lads had morphed into imitations of the Coca Cola Claus, while retaining their traditional names—Stúfur, Kjötkrókur, et cetera—and their background.

Jörmundur Ingi
(b. 1940)

My fondest memories of Christmas are from the time when the whole family would get together at my grandparents. You'd anxiously wait for grandpa to read the labels on the presents and see what books you got for Christmas. The extended family would be there, and you'd get to sit with the grownups if you knew your manners and how to eat with a knife and fork. Grandpa was in charge, like a general, which was only appropriate as he was of Prussian lineage.

Skírnismál, one of the Old Norse Poetic Edda chapters, talks about the love between the gods Freyr and Gerður, and is a symbolic way to talk about the renewal of the sun around Christmas, and it's one of my favourite Christmas plays. In it, the character Skírnir plays the role of Santa Claus, and I will never stop believing in him and the sun.

Photo by Baldur Kristjáns

Be A Peaceful Infant Smiling In The Manger

A Christmas Homily

WORDS BY A.M. FINNSSON
JESUS CLAUS ILLUSTRATION BY K-FAI STEELE

Feast of lights and love, the family days of Christmas; "what to dine and how to dress"— oh, don't we all just thrill up on the quirky-looking sweaters and find it all so amusing? And don't we, just this season, take the necessity of "having a good time" all too seriously concerning all the consumerism attached, as it is almost obligatory to accept February's Visa bill without any grudge, the late-Christmas-hangover? At least, most of the time "doin' what ya wanna cuz it's Xmas" has been, in my context, stepping just a little bit over the line; knowing how much I have and pushing the limit just a little.

This is the norm—I guess—for most of us Icelanders. And here we are, once again. Capitalism has taught us well, and our little shopping spree is just a symbol of our celebration of innocence, as we search our own infancy for acceptance with the idea of a charming infant in a manger as our abundant Saviour. With a smile. We have baby-Jesuses and Marias and Josephs luring us in, with the Wise Men in the windows in the overcrowded shopping malls of Reykjavík, along with all our modern era's seasonal Santas, Yule Lads and Yule Cats. Nothing is sacred—so it seems—except on our personal level; our experience and the traditions that make up our own feast of light and love, with a variety in drinks and dining...

Or so it seems, as the Advent passes. It is a stressful time, when mixed emotions boil to the surface, old sorrows, tough memories, as we yet prepare for passing beyond the tragedy which life may seem to be sometimes into the glorious and peaceful nights around Christmas day. Those couple of days when our problems are set aside and seem unreal. Yes, these days are holy. In some sense. There is this hope attached, something not of this world. The compensation for all the stress is peace. A happy infantile smile. A Christ in us.

Still—as traditions halt—the secularized focus leads more and more onto the bigger picture, the myths and contexts that were here before; Winter Solstice has its place on December 21, the renewed Horus, son of the Sun, turns the cycle into rhythm at this point. Who needs this Church and Christ and traditions from that context while we have... another context. Or, let's think again: What is the context of Christmas in a faith-based symbolism of the Western society we inhabit? Is it just a marketing feast for merchants and charity pimps, or maybe a little warm-up for the New Years party? Do we have to secularize it just to be politically correct, as the multicultural aspects concerning traditions built on faith question how Christian Christmas can be?

I don't know, but there is something in the culture about how we treat certain traditions, which tells me they are less important, if they are faith-based. In my mind, there is no imposing a mindset of belief attached to singing Christmas songs that tell the Nativity story of Jesus. Or how detached can a culture become, if we keep the feast but ignore the fact of why it is a part of our culture? To me it is more important to understand what the entering of Christ into this world was supposed to mean, as that idea changed the world, and why it still has significance in the modern era that Christ may live inside me as he entered the world. Open your heart for the Christ in Christmas this year. It might just save your day.

A.M. Finnsson is a candidatus theologiae who works as a a theological consultant to various cultural projects, ranging from strategy and development to fieldwork with Reykjavík's homeless. He lives and works in the Westfjords of Iceland.

Pagan Christmas

History lesson, pt. I

WORDS BY RAGNAR EGILSSON

The idea of throwing a big celebration in honour of the birth of Christ is a relatively recent idea. Nobody knows exactly when he was born; guesses range from 7 to 2 BC and the date is a mystery. His date of birth was once estimated to be January 6, in an attempt to beat a competing holiday (the celebration of the virgin birth of Aion, the Hellenistic deity of eternity). In the process they borrowed the symbolism of the stables. Christianity is in the business of mergers and acquisitions.

The date was later changed to December 25, partly because of the swap from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, and partly to steal a little thunder from Saturnalia—a holiday dedicated to the deity Saturn, which was celebrated from December 17-23.

Saturnalia was a festival of role reversal, gambling, ritualistic sacrifice, drinking, binge eating, and the quest for knowledge. People took the day off work, slaves were allowed to be disrespectful to their masters, and people satirized leaders by randomly appointing a King of Saturnalia, who got to shout arbitrary decrees. A topsy-turvy day to let people vent their frustration on the Winter Solstice. Think of it as a benign version of The Purge.

The Christmas practise of gift giving was probably picked up from Saturnalia, as Christianity continuing accumulating customs like an endless game of Katamari Damacy. But of course they dropped all the healthy venting and partying in favour of good old-fashioned repression.

As the Christian faith spread into areas that celebrated the Winter Solstice, slapping their Aion-Saturn holiday onto the pagan customs was a smooth process. This was quickly rationalized by the birth of Christ being a sort-of solstice celebration, as Christ was the most awesome sun of them all, conquering the darkness, changing his own diapers, etc.

Deck the halls with geysers of vomit

With the Winter Solstice merger, Christmas absorbed the indoor fir trees and the parasitic plant mistletoe, both of which played an important role in Norse mythology. The mistletoe played a pivotal role as the plant that was used to slay Baldur, the closest thing to a Christ figure found in Norse mythology. The fir tree is thought to have been in celebration of the great world tree Askur Yggdrasil. Also, these were simpler times and evergreens were thought to be magic, as they opted out of the whole seasonal cycle of death and rebirth that the other plants put up with. Finally, those nice green trees looked nice and served to slightly cover the common medieval poverty urine smell so pervasive in homes at the time.

For the Norse and Germanic pagans, late December was chosen, ostensibly due to the Winter Solstice. It is just as likely, however, that those pagans felt it was a suitable time to get properly shitfaced, as it represented a lull in the yearly workload that happened to coincide with everyone having enough to eat and drink.

The pagan Yuletide celebration may have stretched over the whole of November and December, as the ostrogoths named November the first month of Christmas and December the second. Anglo-Saxons celebrated Yule from December into January.

Not that much is known about the Yule celebrations, but odds are things weren't as coordinated as many modern pagans would like to believe. Icelanders in those days were a ragtag group of tax-dodgers, and it's doubtful that they had a distinctly hierarchical and well-organized system of belief.

We do know that it involved the sacrifice of livestock and systematic binge drinking. In a 9th century poem to Harald Fairhair, the first king of Norway, there are references to the "playing of Frey's game," which is thought to have been some kind of sexual fertility ritual. It goes on to describe the ritualistic slaughter of a hog devoted to the deity. As the hog was a common fertility symbol in the region, it does seem to indicate that there was a significant hanky-panky side to the Yule celebration. Which is par for the course when you combine loose morals and weeks of heavy drinking.

The heavy drinking aspect of the pagan feast can't be overemphasized. People were legally required to brew ale and maintain a supply in their homes, in case any chieftains decided to pop in for a quick one. Peasants would actually be fined if they were found to be lacking in ale.

Chieftains themselves were required to stage elaborate and generous feasts, and as with the Saturnalia, they were an all-inclusive booze-up where slaves were allowed to participate.

Modern pagans

Modern pagan celebrations are a hodgepodge of dubiously sourced, cobbled-together traditions, much like Christianity (although modern pagans are generally much more likeable and way more likely to be into heavy metal).

Icelanders are creatures of habit and strong herd-instincts, and their celebration does not differ from that of the Christian in any major ways. And why should they? The tree, the gifts, the gorging, the decorations, the date... like Ray J said: "I Hit It First."

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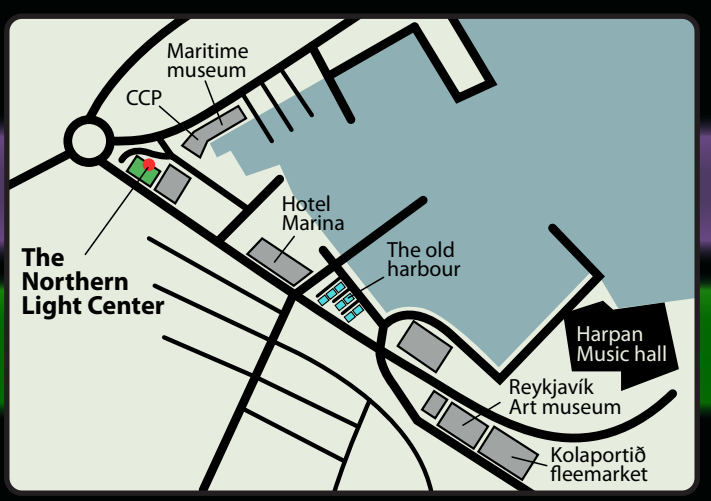

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Christmas In The '70s— A Remembrance

Musician, writer, pop music scholar and nostalgicist Dr. Gunni (born 1965) pays a visit to The Ghost of Christmas Past

WORDS BY DR. GUNNI
PHOTOS PROVIDED BY DR. GUNNI

The family bought a Grundig console cabinet stereo in 1976. I know what year it was because I remember the LPs that came with it: 'Horft í roðann', the debut solo album by Stuðmenn's Jakob Frímann Magnússon, and 'Einu sinni var', wherein beloved poems and verses from the 'Vísnabók' ("The Rhyme-book"—a popular tome of traditional Icelandic children's poems) were translated into pop hits by genius of the craft Gunnar Þórðarson and superstar singer Björgvin Halldórsson. 'Horft í roðann' contained a smash hit, "Röndótta mær" ("Striped maid"), which justified its invitation into our household, while 'Einu sinni var' went on to become Iceland's best-selling album ever, shifting more than 20,000 units before Christmas of 1976 alone—an unheard-of number at the time.

Christmas was—and remains—merchants' time to shine. Christmas can make or break a shop's existence. Today, record sales are next to nothing compared to book sales, but in the '70s—and the '80s and '90s—the season was categorized as either a "Book Christmas" or "Record Christmas," depending on which medium sold in greater numbers that year. "Will this Christmas be a 'Book Christmas' or a 'Record Christmas'," newspaper articles would earnestly ponder.

I never got any records for Christmas; for me, it was always Book Christmas. The Tintin books were coming out in Icelandic translation at the time, and I would get the latest one every year. Tintin books are really the only thing I remember getting for Christmas as a child. I guess I did receive clothes and some toys, but I just can't remember anything about it. I do remember that my brother-in-law Jón once promised to give me a book that he was sure "young boys like you" would love. It was a thriller by either Sven Hassel or Alistair MacLean—two authors who were extremely popular at the time. Of course, I didn't even read it, because I wasn't the kind of boy that my brother-in-law took me for. For me, everything was all about music since I was aged eleven or so, and learned to strum my first guitar chords.

The only time I was nice to my grandmother

My grandmother Guðrún would come from the gruesome retirement home Grund to spend the holidays with us. We sometimes went to visit her art the old folks' home. Out of all those visits, I only remember one, because I got a new type of ice cream from Kjörís, a small white plastic ball with vanilla ice cream inside. My grandmother was always going to the toilet while we were visiting her. Having a piss was probably the most fun she had, and her toilet business was what she talked most about. I guess I can say that I found her quite boring. In all of my memories of her she is tense and anxious. If I was late to return home, she would be looking out the window when I came back. When I went out she would force me to wear thick gloves and woollen hats. She was 82 when she died, on New Year's Eve of 1980. She was back at the old people's home when death got her. In my diary I wrote: "Grandmother Guðrún Lára dies. Perfectly normal New Year's Eve."

I should have been nicer to my grandmother. I was always kind of grouchy towards her. Only once, that I can remember, was I nice to her. That's when I played "Silent Night" for her on my guitar. The old people's home Grund was a pretty horrid place (and still is?). Especially "The final ward" that my grandmother spent her final days at. I remember all the old people sitting in silence, staring vacantly at nothing.

I should have been nicer to my grandmother. I was always kind of grouchy towards her. Only once, that I can remember, was I nice to her. That's when I played "Silent Night" for her on my guitar.

Commercial Christmas

The weeks before Christmas are a thrilling time for a kid. They're probably better than Christmas itself. In the '70s, the mechanized Santa in the Rammagerðin storefront was the first public sign of Christmas. His appearance announced that Christmas was formally on. TV commercials got people into the right mindset. The most Christmas-y ad was for Coca Cola, where young people of all races belted out The New Seekers' "I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing" with Coke in their hands on top of a hill. To this day, many of my generation can't get into the Christmas groove until they've seen this ad.

Cookies of all sorts were baked. The "air cookie" was my favourite. Fruit also play a role in Icelandic Christmas tradition. Clementines were eaten in large quantities (as they are today), and older people told stories of the red apples they got to have for Christmas in their youth—only half an apple per person or something, as apples were such rarities back in the '40s and '50s.

The patriarchy's stranglehold

The day of Christmas Eve is when Christmas officially begins in Iceland, at precisely six o'clock. Every home would blare the National Radio broadcast loudly. At six, after church bells had been chiming for some time, a live broadcast from Mass would start, and the family began stuffing itself with food while the Christmas gospel went on in the back.

In my family, the dinner would always start with asparagus soup. Tinned asparagus was not so common at the time, so my dad would use his connections to score a tin of Green Giant asparagus from some guy who worked at an import company. The main course was a lamb or a pig, and for dessert we would have something funky like a sherry "fromage." Something was lost in the translation from French (fromage means cheese in French) to Icelandic (frómas means parfait in Icelandic).

The patriarchy had a stranglehold on my family. The women ALWAYS washed the dishes while the men lay down, usually unbuttoning their shirts after all the gluttony. Nobody could open a present until the dishes were clean, but sometimes the cat had managed to rip his one open, as it always contained a bag of foul-smelling dried fish.

We fear change

For me, Christmas means revisiting old times, chilling and eating so much that you must unbutton. That Nói Síríus assorted chocolates rush is also a vital part of the feast. In my opinion, Christmas should be an old-fashioned and well-versed routine. All the decorations should be old and corny. The older and cornier, the better. They should have been part of the family for decades. That plastic Santa that you forget about for 11/12th of the year is a well of good memories. You remember when you as a kid dragged his trousers down to reveal a flat black plastic groin. My '70s Christmas tree was fake and tiny, and sometimes it was covered with webs of "angel-hair."

I hate "modern" Christmas decorations. During the bubble years, a few idiots even decked their halls and trees with "tasteful" shiny black ornaments and shit. Even black Christmas trees. What dismal stupidity! Jesus Christ is surely rolling in his grave over such Christmas blasphemy.

New year's concerts in Harpa

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30. Dec - Tuesday - 17:00
1. Jan - Thursday - 17:00
2. Jan - Friday - 17:00
3. Jan - Saturday - 17:00
4. Jan - Sunday - 17:00

The concerts are held in Harpa, the new concert and conference hall in Reykjavík.

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www.pearls.is

The Encyclopaedia of Icelandic Holidays

WORDS BY HAUKUR S. MAGNÚSSON
ILLUSTRATIONS BY INGA MARÍA BRYNJARSDÓTTIR

Aðfangadagur
(Ath-founga-dager)

December 24, Aðfangadagur, is the day Icelanders celebrate Christmas (as opposed to December 25 in most countries). The first half of the day usually goes towards finishing off all of the last-minute preparations, making food, wrapping presents, bathing and putting on nice clothes. Children are often occupied by the television set, as most stations broadcast a non-stop programme of cartoons throughout the day.

Six o' clock marks the official start of Christmas in Iceland, marked by state radio broadcasting the traditional "ringing of the church bells." This is when most households sit down to enjoy a pleasant holiday meal. After dinner (and the subsequent clean-up), most people commence opening their presents. They then hang out and indulge until bedtime.

Aðventa
(Ath-venta)

Aðventan, or the Advent, is the month leading up to Christmas. Icelanders celebrate each Sunday of the Advent (starting on the fourth Sunday prior to Christmas) by lighting candles on an Advent Wreath ("Aðventukrans"), which is usually a four-candle (one for each Sunday of the Advent) evergreen wreath. The first Sunday of Advent marks the time most Icelanders start decorating for the holidays and preparing in general.

Aðventukrans
(Ath-ventou-kraans)

See: Aðventa.

Aðventuljós
(Ath-vent-uh-lyows)

Aðventuljós, or Advent light, is a decorative object somewhat unique to Iceland. This seven armed electric candlestick is found in at least one window of almost every Icelandic home throughout the holiday season. See our Xmas guide for more info.

Annar í jólum
(Aann-arr ee yo!-luwm)

December 26, the second day of Christmas, is the designated party day of the holiday season (New Year's notwithstanding). The day itself usually entails heavy lounging and attending a family Christmas party or two, but the evening has most of the action, with bars and clubs opening for business around midnight. Revellers like to go out at that time, decked in their fancy holiday attire and re-connecting with friends and acquaintances that they haven't seen for all of three days.

Áramót
(our-a-mowt)

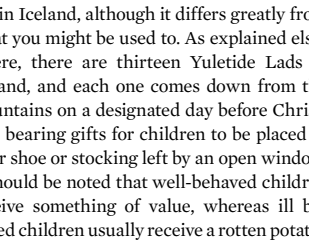
See: Gamlársdagur/Gamlárskvöld.

Áramótaskaupið
(our-a-mowt-a-skoj-pith)

Gathering around the TV on New Year's Eve to watch the Áramótaskaup comedy special on RÚV is an old and honoured Icelandic trad tion—in fact the streets fall completely silent during its broadcast time of 22:30-23:30. The show itself is a comedy revue, featuring many of Iceland's best-loved actors, which aims to parody the year's events in sketches and song. The quality differs from year to year, but Icelanders love even the especially bad ones (because then they can complain to each other about how much they sucked). Áramótaskaup is not subtitled, so the fun is likely lost on non-Icelandic speakers. It's worth checking out, though, you can always make fun of Icelandic TV's production standards.

Attire

Icelanders like to dress smart and snazzy over the holidays. Formal attire is usually expected in the parties of the 24th and 25th, on other days go for neat casual outfits.



Christmas music

Iceland doesn't have a lot of original Xmas songs, although there are a few to be found. Mostly the tunes meant to get you into the holiday spirit are translations of international Xmas ones (some of them don't have anything whatsoever to do with Xmas), so the stuff blaring from the radio in the knick-knack shop should sound familiar. There are some popular local songs, however, the most infamous one being Sniglabandið's "Jólahjól" ("Christmas bike").

Christmas stockings

See also: Jólasveinar, Santa Claus
The Christmas stockings tradition is celebrated in Iceland, although it differs greatly from what you might be used to. As explained elsewhere, there are thirteen Yuletide Lads in Iceland, and each one comes down from the mountains on a designated day before Christmas bearing gifts for children to be placed in their shoe or stocking left by an open window. It should be noted that well-behaved children receive something of value, whereas ill behaved children usually receive a rotten potato.

Decorating

See also: Aðventa, Aðventuljós
Icelanders like to decorate their houses a lot in time for Christmas, with the start of Advent usually marking the official 'OK time' for decking the halls. Decorations are similar to what may be found in the rest of the Christmas-celebrating world: pine branches, light sets, Santa-related effigies and various knick-knacks and doodads. American style lighting monstrosities are uncommon, but not unheard of.

Drinking

See also: Annar í jólum, Gamlársdagur/Gamlárskvöld
Heavy drinking is generally not condoned on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day—although indulging in a glass of wine or two isn't frowned upon—as the days' festivities are generally reserved for family activities. The 26th, 31st and New Year's Day are popular for binge drinking and partying, however, as are any weekend days that fall on the holiday season.

Eating out

See also: Christmas buffets
Icelanders generally don't like to eat out during the holiday season. If you are visiting, and you plan on dining at a restaurant during the holidays (see our special Xmas listings for details), chances are you'll be dining with some fellow tourists. However, attending special Xmas buffets is a popular activity over the advent.

Family

Icelandic Christmas is all about one's family, extended and otherwise. Generally speaking, most Icelanders will be busy spending time with their families from December 24th until the eve of the 26th, so don't expect that hot boy (or girl) you hook up with on the 23rd to be available for any immediate follow-up sessions (you should still try, though. Who knows?).

Flugeldar
(fluuhg-oeld-arrrrr)

See also: Gamlársdagur/Gamlárskvöld
are an essential part of the Icelandic New Year's Eve experience; in fact, the sale and deployment of fireworks is only legal in Iceland between December 28—January 6.

Icelanders take their fireworks seriously—most of those who have witnessed the mass employment of fireworks at New Year's will agree that the act is far beyond over-the-top. But most will also attest that the display can be striking and beautiful.

An added bonus is that most of the places selling them are doing so for charity, or to fund rescue teams (avoid the for-profit ones).

Expect small blasts here and there as of December 27th, culminating in an all-out orgy of explosions around midnight of New Year's Eve (and then followed by sporadic, really annoying blasts throughout the month of January).

Gamlársdagur/Gamlárskvöld
(gahml-ouwrs-daager / kvoeld)

See also: Fireworks, drinking, Áramótaskaup, Áramótaannáll, Áramótabrenna [Note: Gamlársdagur refers to New Year's Eve's Day, and Gamlárskvöld refers to New Year's Eve itself]

The coming of the New Year is celebrated pretty heavily in Iceland. Drinks are drunk, fireworks are lit and vomit is, eventually, spewed. Although there is no rule, most folks like to gather for a nice dinner feast with family and/or friends at the start of the evening (or late in the afternoon). They hang out, drink drinks, play board games and watch the TV recap of the preceding year. Many head out to their local New Year's bonfire, a complete list of which is published in local newspapers on the days leading up to the 31st.

After watching the Áramótaskaup comedy revue and lighting some fireworks, most will head to rowdier, less family oriented gatherings and stay there 'til dawn.

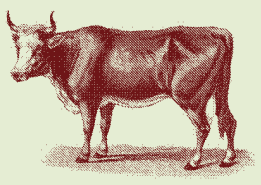
A note about the word "áramót": like many Icelandic words, it is impressively and descri tively sensible, and it does not have a counterpart in the English language. Quite literally, "áramót" translates as "the meeting of years." Makes sense, doesn't it?

Hangikjöt
(Howen-geh-kjoet)

See also: Jólamatur
Hangikjöt—literally "hung meat"— is smoked Icelandic lamb which takes its name from the old tradition of smoking food in order to preserve it by hanging it from the rafters of a smoking shed. Hangikjöt is a traditional Christmas dish, often served with potatoes in a béchamel and pickled red cabbage. It's pretty awesome.

VALID DURING LUNCH
11:30 – 17:00

FOOD

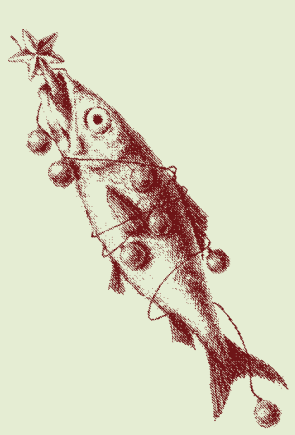


Fire baked bread & smoked buttermilk.
The world is full of possibilities – this is one of them and you can't possibly go wrong.
450 KR.

Crispy fried pork skin, christmas seasons and roasted lemon cream.
Nothing fits in a belly like a belly. Hit it!
450 KR.

Potatoes and leek soup, Christmas tree oil and potato salad.
We have to start by defining the essence. When saying "A" you better be ready to say "B". Being a human being carries certain responsibilities.
1.150 KR.

Smoked salmon, cottage cheese, fennel & herbs.
The gentlemen who caught this one are heavy smokers. After all, smoked salmon is yummy. Listen to The Helmsman, he knows his salmon.
1.250 KR.



Herring, crispy rye bread, pickled onions and Dill.
There are plenty of fish in the sea. And on land as well.
1.250 KR.

PIZZAS

Bottom; cream cheese, baked red beets, estragon & walnuts.
Composition is a key art form. Everything is important.
1.990 KR.

Hamborgarhryggur
(Haam-bouwrgahr-hreggurrrr)

See also: Dining
A traditional Christmas food eaten on the 24th at six o'clock. It is pork, usually with a honey glazing and pineapple, cooked in an oven for a few hours. This is a pretty heavy meal, and its consumption reportedly results in the number of heart attacks increasing around Xmas, when people who really shouldn't eat fatty meats gorge themselves almost to death.

Heitt súkkulaði
(hate sooqou-laethi)

Indulging in a cup of freshly made heitt súkkulaði ("hot chocolate") is an essential part of the Icelandic holiday experience. The classic recipe is thus: melt one plate of 'Suðusúkkulaði' (available everywhere one might buy chocolate) in a double boiler with 1–2 cups of water. In a separate container, heat one litre of milk to the boiling point. Slowly stir melted chocolate into boiling milk. Enjoy.

Jólaball
(yo!-la-baahl)

See also: Jólaboð
The jólaball, or Christmas dance, is a lon standing tradition where children are herded by their parents or schools to hang out, eat cake and candy and dance around a decorated tree while singing some classic Christmas tunes. More often than not, one or more of the Yule lads will make an appearance and disburse small gift bags of candy.

Jóladagatal
(yo!-la-dae-gah-taahl)

The jóladagatal ("Christmas calendar") is used to count down the days from December 1 until the 24th, and is a must for children of all ages—some adults like to indulge as well. The most common variety has a differently shaped piece of chocolate for each day, although some of the crappier ones just have dumb, holiday related pictures (seriously mom?). Some families like to craft their own, wrapping small gifts for each day.

Jóladagur
(yo!-la-daguer)

See also: Jólaboð
Jóladagur—Christmas Day—is the big day for family gatherings and Christmas parties. Many like to sleep in and relax before putting on formal attire and heading out to a friend's house to indulge in some hangikjöt or hot chocolate. Everything is closed. A very relaxed day, for most.

Jólaglögg
(yo!-la-gluhg)

See also: Jólahlaðborð, drinking
A hot beverage consisting of red wine, vodka, and spices (kind of like mulled wine, really). Often served with raisins. The word can also just mean a party of friends around Christmas time who get together under the pretext that they will drink Jólaglögg, when all they really want to do is drink anything with alcohol in it. You know, because of the dark.

Jólahlaðborð
(yo!-la-hlaeth-boerth)

See also: Christmas dining, eating out, Hamborgarhryggur
A fairly new tradition in Iceland. A Jólahlaðborð is a Christmas buffet that people attend in groups, usually coworkers go together for a night of eating, but mostly drinking. Many a marriage has been put to a serious strain after a drunken night at a Jólahlaðborð.

Jólakort
(yo!-la-kowrt)

Many Icelanders choose to parlay greetings to their friends and loved ones over the holidays via the mailing of Christmas cards, or jólakort. They will most often feature a generic Christmassy motif and some standard well wishes, although some use the opportunities to send along pictures of the family.

Jólakötturinn
(yo!-la-koett-ur-enn)

To avoid, as the saying goes, "going to the Christmas cat," children are required to receive at least one piece of new clothing in time for Christmas each year. Otherwise, the cat will eat them.

Jólamatur
(yo!-la-maw-tuer)

See also: Christmas buffets, rjúpur, kæst skata, hangikjöt, jólaöl, jólasmákökur
Like in most other places, nourishing oneself over the holidays is all about indulgence. When it comes to jólamatur ("Christmas food"): the richer, sweeter, fattier and saltier, the better.

Jólasveinar
(yo!-la-svain-er)

The Icelandic Jólasveinar (Yule Lads) have little to do with the international Santa Claus. They are descended from trolls, and were originally bogeymen who scared children. During this century they have mellowed, and sometimes don red suits. Their number varied in old times from one region of Iceland to another. The number thirteen was first seen in a poem about Grýla (the Lads' mother) in the 18th century, and their names were published by Jón Árnason in his folklore collection in 1862.

On December 12, the Yule Lads begin to come to town one by one on each of the thirteen days before Christmas.

The first is Stekkjastaur (Sheep-Cote Clod), who tries to drink the milk from the farmers' ewes.

On December 13, Giljagaur (Gully Gawk) arrives. Before the days of milking machines, he would sneak into the cowshed and skim the froth off the pails of milk.

Next comes Stúfur (Stubby) on December 14. His name implies that he is on the small side. He is also known as Pönnuskefill (pan-scraper), as he scraped scraps of food off the pans.

On December 15, Þvörusleikir (Spoon-Licker) comes down from the mountains. He steals wooden spoons that have been used for stirring. When he visits the National Museum, he goes looking for wooden spoons.

On December 16, Pottasleikir (Pot-Licker) comes visiting. He tries to snatch unwashed pots, and licks the scraps from them.

Askasleikir (Bowl-Licker) arrives on December 17. He hides under beds and if someone puts his wooden food-bowl on the floor, he grabs it and licks it clean.

Hurðaskellir (Door-Slammer) comes on December 18. He is an awfully noisy fellow, who is always slamming doors and keeping people awake.

The Lad who is expected on December 19 is called Skyrgámur (Skyr Gobbler), because he loves skyr so much that he sneaks into the pantry and gobbles up all the skyr.

Bjúgnakrækir (Sausage Swiper) comes on December 20. He loves sausages of all kinds, and steals them whenever he can.

On December 21, Gluggagægir (Window-Peeper) arrives. He is not as greedy as some of his brothers, but awfully nosy to the point of voyeurism, peeping through windows and even stealing toys he likes the looks of.

On December 22 Gáttaþefur (Doorway-Sniffer) comes calling. He has a big nose, and loves the smell of cakes being baked for Christmas. He often tries to snatch a cake or two for himself.

December 22 is sometimes called hlakkandi ("looking forward"), because the children have started looking forward to Christmas.

On December 23, St. Þorlákur's Day, Ketkrókur (Meat-Hook) arrives. He adores all meat. In olden days he would lower a hook down the kitchen chimney and pull up a leg of lamb hanging from a rafter, or a bit of smoked lamb from a pan, as smoked lamb was traditionally cooked on St. Þorlákur's Day.

Kertasníkir (Candle-Beggar) comes on Christmas Eve, December 24. In olden times, candlelight was the brightest light available. Candles were so rare and precious that it was a treat for children to be given a candle at Christmas. And poor Candle Beggar wanted one too.

During the thirteen days before Christmas, the National Museum presents actors dressed as the old-school Jólasveinar. They show up around 11 am each day. National Museum, Suðurgata 41, 101 Reykjavík. Tel. 530 2200. www.thjodminjasafn.is
Originally appeared in issue 16/2005.

Jólaöl
(yo!-la-oel)

See also: Christmas dining
The ultimate Christmas drink, Jólaöl (or: "Christmas ale") is created by mixing an elusive ratio of Malt and Appelsín orange soda. Although you can now buy this drink premixed, it's way more fun to mix it yourself, according to taste (try two parts Appelsín to one part Malt, in that order). Note that it contains no alcohol. Which is nice for a change.

Jólasmákökur
(yo!-la-smouw-koek-er)

See also: Dining
Jólasmákökur ("Christmas cookies") are an essential part of the Icelandic holiday experience. Most households bake their own cookies in the weeks leading up to Christmas, making an average of three to five different types. They are then consumed at Christmas gatherings or while lounging about with one's new presents. Some classic types include: Piparkökur ("ginger snaps"), Mömmukökur (ginger snap-type cookies sandwiched around white frosting), súkkulaðibitakökur (chocolate chip cookies) and hálfmánar (rhubarb preserves wrapped in dough), although the varieties are endless.

Jólatré
(yo!-lah-tr-yeah!)

See also: Þorláksmessa, Christmas presents
Icelanders' Christmas trees are usually installed on December 23, with the actual decorating taking place on the 24th (although this does differ between households). Various organisations, such as the local rescue squads, sell live trees to fund their operations, although private companies also partake. Fake plastic trees aren't very popular, although some folks prefer them.

Bottom; cream cheese, smoked lamb, apple salad and walnuts.
You can't trust just any clown when it comes to smoked lamb. Ketkrókur is our man!
1.990 KR.

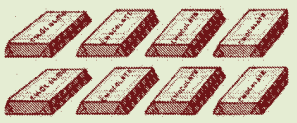
Bottom; Christmas bbq, salted and smoked pork, and red cabbage.
Krampus fills his box with those who have not eaten smoked pork at least once in the year.
1.990 KR.

Bottom; tomato sauce, cheese, spicy sausage, mushrooms, soy & pickled chili.
This pizza is trying to tell us something! We are not sure what it is but we are paying close attention.
1.990 KR.

Bottom; garlic oil, mozzarella & oregano.
All things considered, simplicity is always the best outcome. Or at least the most simple one.
1.990 KR.

DESSERTS

Deconstructed apple salad & gingerbread crumble.
Yes, this is just as it is supposed to be. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this.
1.150 KR.



Christmas Omnom, mandarins and almond crumble.
We should expect great things from life. It is important to simplify taste...
1.150 KR.

Hverfisgata 12
101 Reykjavík
437 0203

OPEN EVERY DAY
11:30 AM – 11:00 PM
(THE BAR CLOSES AT 1:00AM)

Kæst skata
(kjae-st skaaah-taaaah)

See also: Þorláksmessa
The consumption of kæst skata, or rotted skate, on December 23 is a holiday tradition derived from the Westfjords of Iceland. The dish—which many swear by, and others find especially foul—is most often imbibed at special skate gatherings around noon on the 23rd, and is often served along with potatoes, butter, rye bread and shots of brennivín (most Westfjörds experts recommend drinking milk with the skate, as the fish is "intoxicating in and of itself").

The skate is a chondrichyte, and therefore ferments when allowed to rot, as its urine is distributed through its flesh and goes through a chemical change over time. They are in fact poisonous if eaten before the fermentation process is complete. It is fermented by throwing it in a box and letting it lie for three weeks.

Laufabrauð
(loi-fa-brau-eth)

See also: Aðventan
The making of laufabrauð, or "leaf-bread," is usually a family-affair that takes place early in December. People gather together to cut intricate patterns into this deep-fried, thin flatbread, which is then enjoyed as a tasty snack to accompany any Christmas event or meal. It goes exceedingly well with butter.

Nýársdagur
(knee-ouwrs-da-guer)

See also: Drinking
Icelanders like to spend most of New Year's Day feeling hung-over and sorry for themselves. As the evening approaches, many will start pulling themselves together and dressing up for New Year's Day banquets or parties that have grown popular lately. Others will stay in watching DVDs or something.

Presents

See also: Aðfangadagur, jólatré
Of course Xmas is all about the presents, and a lot of debt is incurred during the season. There are no specific guidelines for Xmas gift giving in Iceland, but a good rule of thumb is to avoid being extravagant in your gift choices, unless maybe something extravagant is called for or expected on the other end. Generally most folks tend to stick with bestowing presents upon their immediate family and loved ones, although some like to spread the joy to their entire group of friends. In any case, there's nothing wrong with asking. Xmas presents are stored under the Xmas tree until they're due to be opened.

Religion and church

Even though around 80% of them are enrolled in the State Church, Icelanders have never been known to be particularly enthusiastic churchgoers or observers of religious customs. Indeed, Christmas isn't a particularly religious holiday in Iceland. However, many folks like to attend Church services and concerts during the holidays, particularly on the 24th and the 31st. Check with your tourist information centre for complete church listings.

The ringing of the church bells of Reykjavík's Lutheran Cathedral is broadcast on all major television and radio stations throughout the country promptly at 18:00 on Christmas Eve, at which point everyone wishes each other a Merry Christmas and sits down to eat.

Returning gifts

See also: Commerce
Exchanging one's Xmas gifts in favour of something more desirable is a common practice in Iceland. Most stores will accept returns until the second week of January, although policies differ.

Rjúpur
(ryooh-purr)

See also: Jólamatur
Wild fowl rjúpur, or ptarmigan, are a popular main course for many families Christmas meals. The small birds can be delicious if handled properly, and have a rich, gamey sort of taste. The Grapevine recommends trying some if you have the chance.

Santa Claus

See also: Jólasveinar
We have no need for your international big, fat, jolly, capitalist greed-mongering Coca Cola Santa Claus in Iceland, as we have thirteen of our own that are much cooler. He still makes an appearance from time to time. Oh we like him fine enough, he's a jolly good fellow and all.

Þorláksmessa
(thoer-louwks-mess-ah)

See also: Kæst skata
In celebration of one of only two Icelandic saints, St. Þorlákur, Icelanders eat fermented skate, which is often enjoyed with copious amounts of Icelandic Brennivín. Then, they will traditionally gather on the shopping street Laugavegur to do some last minute shopping (although some do the bulk of their shopping on that day), drink Christmas beer or hot chocolate and have a merry ol' time. Also, this is traditionally the day that children are allowed to decorate the Christmas tree.

Þrettándinn
(thu-rhett-ouwn-din-n)

January 6 is Þrettándinn ("the thirteenth"), the thirteenth and final day of Christmas a cording to Icelandic tradition. The event is celebrated with torch processions, bonfires, fireworks. The king and queen of the hidden people traditionally join the festivities. Back in olden times, it was a scary time to be out and about, as the hidden people can be surprisingly sinister.

Holiday Opening Hours Your Grapevine Guide

COMPILED BY ELÍN RÓS

If you are a tourist stranded in Iceland over the holiday season, you may find yourself hard pressed to come up with activities to engage in, as the country practically shuts down in late December (admittedly, this has been changing along with the increased tourist influx). Most shops are closed, tour operators generally run a limited schedule, and some of our favourite restaurants close down (although, again, this has been slowly changing for the better). Rather than let you depend on dumb luck, we at the Grapevine compiled a list of what's open and when for your convenience. Rest assured, there are things to do in Reykjavík over Christmas. You just have to be smart about it, and manage your expectations somewhat.

We've tried to make sure this guide is as comprehensive as possible, but there may be changes from when we print the issue. For a complete list, check out The Official Tourist Information Centre.

Travel

STRÆTÓ

23: Regular schedule
24: Saturday schedule until 14
25: No Service
26: Sunday schedule
31: Saturday schedule until 14
1: No service

REYKJAVÍK EXCURSIONS

24: Reduced service
25: Reduced service
26: Normal schedule
31: Normal schedule
1: Normal schedule

ICELAND EXCURSIONS

24: Reduced service
25: Reduced service
26: Normal schedule
31: Reduced service
1: Reduced service

THE OFFICIAL TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

24: Open 10-14
25: Closed
26: Open 10-14
31: Open 10-16
1: Open 11-16

THE BLUE LAGOON

23: Open 10-17, restaurant open 12-15
24: Open 10-17, restaurant closed
25: Open 10-15, restaurant closed
26: Open 10-20, restaurant open 10-20
31: Open 10-16, restaurant open 12-15
1: Open 10-20, restaurant open 12-20:30

Pools

ÁRBÆJARLAUG

24: Open 08-12:30
25: Closed
26: Open 12-18
31: Closed
1: 06:30-22

BREIÐHOLTSLAUG

24: Open 08-12:30
25: Closed
26: Closed
31: Open 06:30-22:00
1: Closed

GRAFARVOGSLAUG

24: Open 08-12:30
25: Closed
26: Closed
31: Closed
1: Open 06:30-22

KLÉBERGSLAUG

24: Open 11-15
25: Open 10-12:30
26: Closed
31: Closed
1: Open 15-21

LAUGARDALSLAUG

24: Open 08-12:30
25: Closed
26: Open 12-18
31: Open 12-18
1: Open 06:30-22

SUNDHÖLL REYKJAVÍKUR

24: Open 08-12:30
25: Closed
26: Closed
31: Closed
1: Open 06:30-22

VESTURBÆJARLAUG

24: Open 08-12:30
25: Closed
26: Closed
31: Closed
1: Open 06:30-22

Museums/ Galleries

The following museums are open on the following days:
24: Volcano House
25: Volcano House
26: Hafnarhúsið, Kjarvalsstaðir, The Phallic Museum, Volcano House
31: Reykjavík Museum of Photography, National Museum, The Phallic Museum, Volcano House
1: Volcano House, Reykjavík Museum of Photography

Stores

KRINGLAN

23: Open 10-23
24: Open 10-13
25: Closed
26: Closed
31: Open 10-13
1: Closed

LAUGAVEGUR & DOWNTOWN

23: Open 10-23
24: Open 10-12
25: Closed
26: Closed
31: Open 10-12
1: Closed

SMÁRALIND

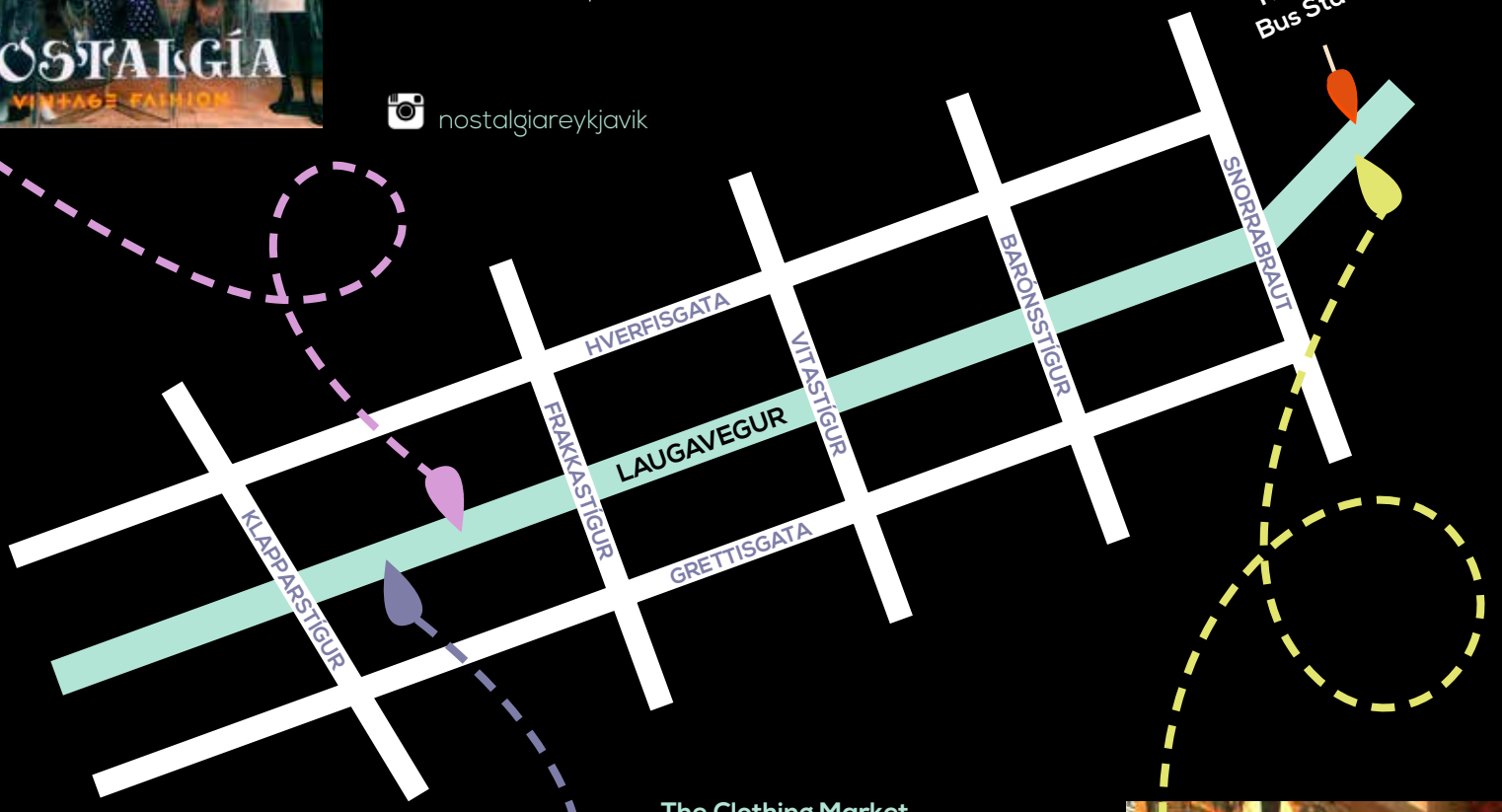
23: Open 11-23
24: Open 10-13
25: Closed
26: Closed
31: Open 10-13
1: Closed

YOUR CHRISTMAS GUIDE TO VINTAGE SHOPPING

Nostalgía
Laugavegur 39

A beautiful and unique vintage store where every item is carefully handpicked, wether looking for some outstanding party pieces or a vintage designer wear, this is the place to visit.

nostalgiareykjavik



The Clothing Market
Laugavegur 118

Are you a second hand freak that loves to scan the flea markets for some great vintage finds? Then this is the place for you. The Market is both a funky place to visit, stuffed with great variety of 2nd hand clothing and a very friendly place for the wallet!

fatamarkadurinnhlemmi

Spúútnik
Laugavegur 28b

A true second hand heaven. Spúútnik has been a local favourite for over 25 years. Here you will find a great variety of vintage clothing, shoes and accessories for both men and women.

spuutniklaugavegi

All Out Of Ideas? Grapevine's Got Your Back!

Seven stylish Xmas presents for less than 3,000 ISK

COMPILED BY ELÍN RÓS
PHOTOS BY ELÍN RÓS

Get some Yule Lads!
Jólabúðin, Laugavegur 4

This lovely Christmas shop on Laugavegur (open year round!) offers a wide range of cool, Iceland-specific Christmas crap your friends back home will totally appreciate (a lot of it's on the cheap side, too). For a safe bet, go for one of the sweet Icelandic Yule Lad figurines. We're talking lovlingly hand-crafted miniatures of all your favourites, from Sheep-Cote Clod to Doorway-Sniffer, presented in all their kitschy glory. A quirky present if there ever was one.

Stay warm!
Gyllti kötturinn, Austurstræti 8

Who wouldn't love to get a pair of Christmas socks as a present, or a knitted Christmas hat? In Iceland, a pair of warm socks and a hat are never not useful, especially during the holiday season. Warm someone's heart, head and feet this Christmas, why don't you?

Sheep it up!
Eymundsson, Austurstræti 18

Icelanders love everything about their sheep: the cute, fluffy lambs; their tender, juicy meat; and their delicious faces (don't knock it 'til you've tried it). This sheep brooch is surely the thing this Christmas—as it's available in a range of colours, you can safely give one to all your friends. Alternatively, get the hairclips. Everyone loves hairclips.

Chocolove
Ostabúðin, Skólavörðustígur 8

If you're looking for a small edible thing to top the perfect Christmas present, head to Ostabúðin for one of the delicious chocolate treats on offer. Complete your gift with a few of the yummy chocolate stars or pretzels, and make someone very happy.

Get quirky!
Minja, Skólavörðustígur 12

Minja on Skólavörðustígur offers a lot of quirky, adorable stuff at affordable prices. Whether it's a carrot sharpener, hand-painted cups, beautifully decorated glasses or trendy wall stickers, their loot is guaranteed to satisfy any receiver.

Treasure hunt at Tiger
Tiger, Laugavegur 13

Make sure to make a stop at Tiger on Laugavegur during your Xmas shopping sojourn. You'll often find the most unexpected and affordable gems there, at prices that can't be beat. For instance, the cute penguin and polar bear lunch boxes are the perfect size for any school bag. They can also be used as a tin for Christmas biscuits, and if you top it with a ribbon and some candy, you've just crafted an original gift.

Around Iceland
Laugavegur 18

This cool store has some exquisite stuff to to give to someone who has everything. For instance, check out the luxurious vegan soaps—the herbal aromas are sure to fill every home with peace and tranquillity. Plus, they're vegan.

A Magical Amulet: The Best Xmas Gift EVER?

Kira Kira and Eskmo team up for a super limited edition release

HAUKUR S. MAGNÚSSON

Hey. If you want to give your friend or loved one an almost absurdly unique Christmas present that will make them think you're one of those adventurous, spiritual types: your search is over.

Check it out: Icelandic experimental electro-noise artist Kira Kira has teamed up with LA musician Eskmo to bring you 'The Kira Kira Eskmo Amulet', a super exclusive EP limited to 100 copies. The Amulet EP comes not in the form of your usual, boring CD, 7" or cassette tape, but as, well, an amulet. A handmade wooden amulet at that, one that's filled with Icelandic volcanic ash, California Sage, crushed crystals (Malachite, Pyrite, Brazilian Amazonite) and—according to the press release—magic.

Yup, magic.

On top of all those crazy crystals and their magic, you also get a download code that grants access to the actual songs from the two-track EP, one from each artist. Both tracks are live recordings and both feature the talents of The Echo Society, an LA-based twelve-piece chamber orchestra.

A quick listen on Kira Kira's Bandcamp reveals that the music sounds pretty much like you'd imagine magic amulet music would sound. Kira Kira's track, "Call It A Mystery—A Remedy For Patience," is indeed all mysterious and understated, perfect for long walks through thick, mossy fog while pondering the glory of futility. Eskmo's song is rather more traditional, featuring a rhythm and everything. Definitely not as mysterious, but then not everything needs to be mysterious. Note that this is not an amulet review—this is the kind of music that takes repeat listens to properly assess.

That fancy musical, magical amulet is going for $65. Get it at Mengi, Óðinsgata 2, or at www.kirakira.bandcamp.com, while supplies last.

Now offering catering service!

sushibarinn

laugavegur 2 101 reykjavík ☎ 552 4444

Open:
Mondays-Saturdays 11:30-22:30
Sundays 16:00-22:00

TVEIR HRAFNAR
listhús, Art Gallery

offers a range of artwork by contemporary Icelandic artists represented by the gallery, selected works by acclaimed artists and past Icelandic masters.

Hallgrímur Helgason
Húbert Nói Jóhannesson
Jón Óskar
Óli G. Jóhannsson
Ragnar Þórisson
Steinunn Þórarinsdóttir

Also works by:
Guðbjörg Lind Jónsdóttir
Hulda Hákon
Sara Oskarsson
Kristján Davíðsson
Nína Tryggvadóttir
– among others

TVEIR HRAFNAR listhús, Art Gallery
Baldursgata 12 101 Reykjavík (at the corner of Baldursgata and Nönnugata, facing Þrír Frakkar Restaurant)
Phone: +354 552 8822 +354 863 6860 +354 863 6885 **art@tveirhrafnar.is www.tveirhrafnar.is**
Opening hours: Thu-Fri 12pm - 5pm, Sat 1pm - 4pm **and by appointment** +354 863 6860

Christmas Shopping in Reykjavík
Open 10-22 from December 11

Advertisement

Kirsuberjatréð

Vesturgata 4
www.kirs.is
+354 562 8990

Kirsuberjatred is a gallery run by 12 women in the heart of the city. With different backgrounds and an individual approach to materials and fields of interest they approach the subject in their own way joining together in displaying their outcomes. Whether it be a single item or a series of objects, the focus is on the magic of reflection and the curiosity behind looking, viewing and experiencing what is seen.

Rammagerðin

Hafnarstræti 19
www.rammagerdin.is
+354 535 6690

A Lopapeysa is a wool sweater with a diamond pattern, the kind that almost every Icelander owns. The pattern itself isn´t that old. It was first used in the 50´s, but today a sweater can hardly be called a proper Lopapeysa without the proper wool pattern. You will find classic icelandic wool blankets, the original Lopapeysa along with a wide selection of gifts at Rammagerðin store.

Sturla

Laugavegur 27
www.facebook.com/sturlastore
+354 852 8866

Be on the lookout when strolling the Laugavegur in Reykjavik. You will come across a large red bass drum which means you are in luck. At Sturla you will find the internationally renowned Scotch & Soda fashion brand, Icelandic design and a fine selection of Icelandic music. We look forward to seeing you.

Jólahúsið

Hafnarstræti 2
+354 519 6050

Jólahúsið or The Christmas House, is a must visit for this holiday season. For those who get all warm inside this time of year, this is the store of your dreams. Located in the heart of downtown Reykjavík, it is filled with a great variety of tasteful ornaments and all the other stuff to get each and all into the true spirit of christmas.

Macland

Laugavegi 23
www.macland.is
+ 354 580 7500

For all your Apple needs, Macland is the place to go. The only Apple retailer in downtown Reykjavik, Macland is a strange mix of an Apple store and a laid back coffee house. Repairs are done in-house and if you are having 99 problems with your Apple stuff, check them out.

Húrra Reykjavík

Hverfisgötu 50
www.facebook.com/hurrareykjavik
+354 571 7101

Húrra Reykjavík is the brainchild of two young men born and raised in Reykjavík. The ideology is quite simple, offering Icelandic men the finest streetwear and contemporary fashion brands from around the world. Húrra Reykjavík has a passion for functionality, quality, the classic and the ultra modern. Blending traditional work and outdoor pieces with the avant garde, technical outerwear and sportswear that fits the Northern climate.

Spúútnik

Laugavegur 28b
www.facebook.com/Spuutnik
+354 533 2023

A true second hand heaven. Spúútnik has been a local favourite for over 25 years. Here you will find a great variety of vintage clothing, shoes and accessories for both men and women.

Hildur Hafstein

Laugarvegur 20b
www.hildurhafstein.com
+354 777 1553

Textile and Jewellery designer Hildur Hafstein runs a small design studio and workshop right in the centre of Reykjavik. Her handmade Jewellery is inspired by the nomadic culture of the Gypsies, the ethical respect of the Hippies and the meditative traditions of the Far East. The jewellery is made out of semi-precious gemstones and sterling silver and set out to complete your looks and nourish both body and soul.

Farmers Market

Hólmaslóð 2, Fishpacking district
www.farmersmarket.is
+354 552 1960

Farmers Market is an Icelandic design company and clothing brand, founded in 2005 by a young artist couple - a designer and a musician. With strong ties to the vibrant Icelandic music and design scene, the Farmers Market design concept and inspiration draws from Icelandic roots, combining classic Nordic design elements with chic modernity.

Kormákur & Skjöldur

Laugavegur 59
www.herrafataverslun.is
+354 511 1817

Located on the main shopping street at Laugavegur 59, Herrafataverzlun Kormáks & Skjaldar is a unique menswear shop that offers a great variety of clothing and accessories. In addition to brands such as Barbour, Filson, Ben Sherman, Loake Shoemakers & Hackett of London, they have an in-house brand that offers suits, shirts and more. The shop has a feel good decorative atmosphere and a staff that treats each person in a personal and gentle manner.

Aurum

Bankastræti 4
www.aurum.is
+354 5512770

The Aurum store has attracted considerable attention for its quirky and unique merging of products and design, featured in numerous media outlets both in Iceland and abroad. Guðbjörg Kristín Ingvarsdóttir's nature-inspired designs are a breath of fresh air and a celebrated entity of Icelandic design. Her jewellery/concept store offers stunning accessories for both you and your home.

Handprjónasambandið

Skólavörðustígur 19
www.handknit.is
+354 552 1890

Handprjónasambandið is as authentic as can be. Everything is made from Icelandic wool and knitted by Icelanders: The store features pullover sweaters, cardigans and other wool accessories.

Nostalgía

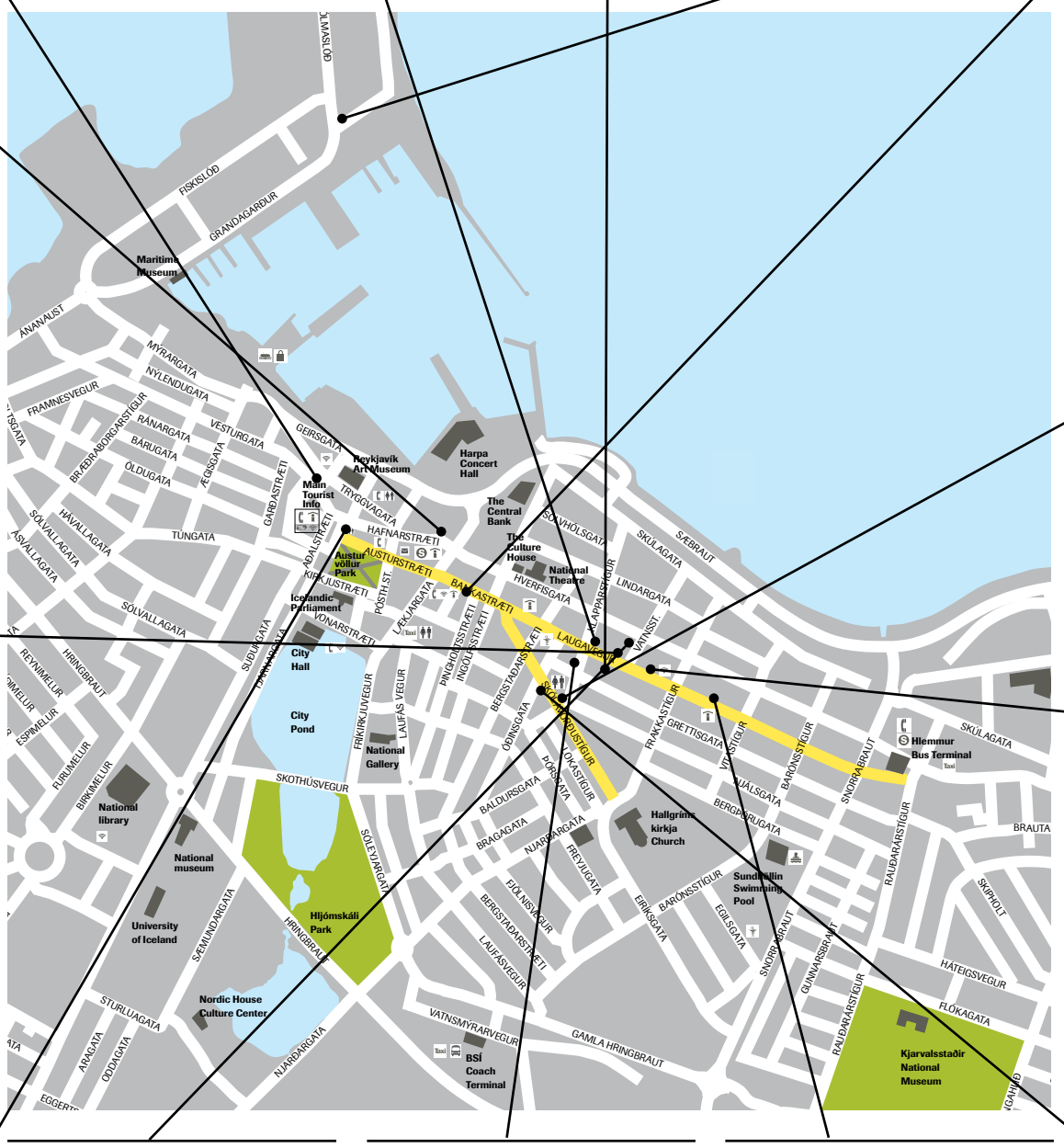
Laugavegur 39
www.facebook.com/nostalgia.laugavegi
+ 354 511 2023

A beautiful and unique vintage store where every item is carefully handpicked, wether looking for some outstanding party pieces or a vintage designer wear, this is the place to visit.

Geysir

Skólavörðustígur 16
www.geysir.com
+354 519 6000

When you walk up the charming street towards the big church on the hill you'll find Geysir, a charming store giving you a true taste of Icelandic design. The store is inspired by Icelandic history and the strong relationship between Icelanders and the unique Icelandic wool that has kept the nation warm through the centuries. Featuring labels such as Farmer's Market, Vík Prjónsdóttir and their own clothing line Geysir. Geysir is a store you must visit.



The Hallgrímskirkja Friends of the Arts Society 33. season

Christmas Music Festival at Hallgrímskirkja

November 30th – December 31st 2014

IN DULCI JUBILO

Christmas Concert with The Hallgrimskirkja Motet Choir

Sat dec 6 at 5pm / Sun dec 7 at 5 pm / Tue dec 9 at 8 pm

Lenka Mateova organ
Vocal solists from the choir
Conductor: Hörður Áskelsson

Program includes Advent and Christmas music by:
Praetorius, Eccard, Sigvalda Kaldalóns, Gustav Holst, Andrew Carter, Eric Whitacre and Morten Lauridsen.

Delightful and festive Christmas concert with the outstanding Motet Choir, which recently won three gold medals and the Grand Prix in an International Choir Competition in Spain.

Admission ISK 3.500

December 3rd – Wednesday

12-12.30 pm O come, O come, Emmanuel – Schola Cantorum Advent concert

On the first of it's Advent's concert series, Schola Cantorum will offer divinely beautiful music connected to the Advent and Cristmas. A perfect opportunity to come to Hallgrímskirkja at noon and enjoy a short and festive moment to prepare for Christmas. Conductor: Hörður Áskelsson.

Admission ISK 2.000

December 12th – Friday 22 Years Anniversary of the Klais Organ

8 pm Christmas Organ Concert with a world renowned organist

The German organ star, Christian Schmitt, who received one of the most prestigious prices for musicians in Germany „Echo“ in 2013 will perform organ works by Bach, Mendelssohn, Messiaen and others. The concert is jointly hosted by the German Embassy in Reykjavík and The Hallgrímskirkja Friends of the Arts Society.

Free Entrance.

December 17th – Wednesday.

12-12.30 „Hátíð fer að höndum ein“ – The festivities are approaching. Concert at noon with Schola Cantorum

The Schola Cantorum Chamber Choir invites you to the second Advent Concert at Noon with the emphasis on beautiful Christmas music. A perfect opportunity to come to Hallgrímskirkja at noon and enjoy a short and festive moment to prepare for Christmas. Conductor/Organist: Hörður Áskelsson.

Admission ISK 2.000

December 28th – Sunday

5 pm Schola Cantorum‘s Christmas Concert

The Schola Cantorum Chamber Choir performs enchanting Christmas music with and without accompaniment, including new charming pieces by Hafliði Hallgrímsson, O, Holy Night by Adams and more. Soloists: Thelma Hrönn Sigurdórsdóttir, Fjölnir Ólafsson et al. Organist: Björn Steinar Sólbergsson. Conductor: Hörður Áskelsson.

Admission ISK 3.500

December 31st – Last day of the year

5 pm Festive sounds at the turn of the year

Festive music for 3 trumpets, organ and timpanis. Trumpet players Ásgeir H. Steingrímsson, Eiríkur Örn Pálsson and Einar St. Jónsson, organist Hörður Áskelsson and timpanist Eggert Pálsson perform splendid festive songs by Vivaldi, Purcell, Bach and Albinoni. The New Year‘s mood is set by the Festive Sounds of the long time musical partners, and this concert is hugely popular as it has been performed for a full house on the last night of the year since the inauguration of the Klais organ in 1992.

Admission ISK 3.500

Reykjavíkurborg

Mennta- og menningarmálaðuneytið

Gunnar Eggertsson

Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany Reykjavík

Ticket sale in Hallgrimskirkja tel. 510 1000 and midi.is
listvinafelag.is / motettukor.is