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Issue 12 / 11august - 25august 2006

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On cover: Georg from Sigur Rós performing at Öxnadalur

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SOUR GRAPES

Complaints, criticism, suggestions, praise, money, anything at all: Contact letters@grapevine.is or send your mail to: The Reykjavík Grapevine, Vesturgata 5, 101 Reykjavík.

Hello editor (Bart?)

I would like to start off by telling you that you and your staff are doing a "orl korrekt" job with your newspaper. Although I find every month's paper exactly what I expect, mostly sufficient. But my acquaintances, all foreigners, many of whom get Grapevine at Nings were I work, tell me that it's somewhat too political and the rest ads.

If I understand your targeting correctly, you are trying to reach tourists and new immigrants. But, the big but, there are people here in Reykjavík who live and work here for a short amount of time (weeks or months) and needless to say, they are not learning Icelandic to read our other newspapers such as Morgunblaðið or Fréttablaðið. And therefore I (we) challenge you to publish more submitted articles. I bet you get tons of them! I have often thought of writing a bit or a piece, which would be more easy reading about common life here in Reykjavík.

I guess this group could stroll down to the nearest bookstore and get a foreign magazine if they want easy comfortable reading, instead of a newspaper full of statistics and politics. Will information about Reykjavík be in it? No, and probably nothing about life here in Reykjavík. So that's what your paper lacks.

Whenever a foreigner steps into my place of work to grab a bite to eat, I try with my best, modest behaviour to place a copy of Grapevine on their table. That is my contribution to Reykjavík residents, to make immigrants more aware of Reykjavík and its community. How about community profiles?

I hope you take this under some consideration,

Best wishes,
María Worms

María,
Thank you for your letter. First and foremost, we welcome submissions from anyone. We don't publish most of our submissions because the writing isn't clear enough, and it is usually too subjective - while I enjoy light reading, I don't believe in printing diary entries.

The submissions we get go like this: 1) poetry with photos of the author, usually young women in stages of undress (serious), 2) political submissions and accusations, 3) rants about how to pick up women or men. We would love to read community descriptions.

We'll continue to improve; you just continue pushing our paper on unsuspecting tourists. Finally, not to nit-pick, but we haven't done much on politics in the last month or so. Our political discussions may be our most famous articles, but they only come

around every few months. Stay in contact, and submit, please. The worst thing that will happen is we'll say no.

Dear publisher/editor,
I must respond to your offensive review of the cookbook Delicious Iceland.

To begin with, it seems strange that you would review a book of recipes and dwell mostly on the Icelandic authors' imperfect English. This is at best a cheap shot, since neither is a native English speaker. But it is also childish, and highlights what seems to be a trend at the paper: criticism which focuses less on evaluating a book's merits and more on showcasing the critic's own wit and erudition. For Delicious Iceland we made a conscious choice to keep the writing in the author's voice, imperfections and all. We think it adds to the charm and intimate feel of the book. We'd naturally assumed that the reader's main interest would be in the exquisite recipes, gorgeous photography, and getting to know the author. We certainly never imagined that the Grapevine critic would single out former president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir (a woman respected all over the world) for her "second grade English," as he calls it. This is not only extremely insulting, but quite irrelevant as well. Ms. Finnbogadóttir is not an author of the book, she was simply expressing her support for Chef Völl's talent and hard work. But the fact that you zero in on her dedication page (!) points out the deliberate nastiness in the review. Perhaps we Icelanders don't learn much English in second grade, but it's clear that some Americans don't learn any manners at all.

We sent you a cookbook, not a novel. You admit, almost grudgingly it seems, that the recipes are wonderful, yet devote only a single paragraph to discussing some of them. Obviously you had other intentions in mind when reviewing the book, as is revealed most clearly in the following sentence: "Yeah, it's a good time to laugh at people who have learned a few crafts, but decide to embarrass themselves publicly by failing in others." A tragic sentiment. It's your critic's naked shallowness that embarrasses me, not the book's grammatical errors. He should be embarrassed as well.

Though I'll be surprised to see this letter printed in your paper (I expect a "witty," cutting aside would accompany it), I would hope that you'll take it to heart and seriously reconsider the tone your otherwise fine newspaper takes in its criticisms.

Sincerely,

Hildur Hermódsdóttir
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Hildur,
First, let me compliment your groundbreaking choice to make a conscious decision to avoid spell-check, or even a casual glance at the authors' work before you published it. I apologise for reading your book before reviewing it. Had you read the book you published, you would realise that when you printed a dedication from the former president of Iceland, you not only failed to edit for tone, but you left little doozies like this: "Food is a part of every nation's culture and no less so in Iceland than in other countries." Neat. Way to be authentic to the author's voice.

Sorry to be witty. Let me strip this response of any wit. You, as a publisher, failed your writers absolutely and completely. Writers place some trust in their publishers to monitor quality and do things like proofread - not publish whatever comes in the door and then attack reviewers who take the time to read your product.

As for why we didn't call this a book of recipes: your sub-header is "Tales of unique northern delicacies." It doesn't say "Down home, illiterate recipes."

Ultimately, we use wit and humour in the Grapevine reviews to mask the all-consuming pain of having to deal with incompetent people like yourself, and others who ask for reviews, then say that we were supposed to just look at the crap produced as though it were made by cute Icelanders. Our harshest reviews are usually written by Icelanders - and they spell many words correctly, and write sentences that go somewhere, and they don't assault people who point out mistakes - but they are just fed up with a culture of "tourists will take anything you give them."

On a lighter note, as one Icelandic who laughed his way through your letter noted, there does seem to be a fundamental cultural gap going on: you think that someone pointing out mistakes is being rude for doing so; I think a critic doing his or her job is being professional. The Grapevine printed a legitimate review of your book. You have decided to use the ad hominem response and just attack the reviewer and hold up the reputation of the people whose work you Xeroxed, without bothering to check if there was anything correct in the review. Our review is accurate.

In any case, I'm glad you've learned what shame is. If you feel shame when other people point out your errors, well, that's a step towards something.



Bart Cameron,
Editor

Back to the Country

The Grapevine offices have relocated, closer to the centre of downtown Reykjavík. We are also undergoing some staff changes. Still, it may come as a surprise that of all the employees at a magazine dedicated to Reykjavík, a magazine that published a book about Reykjavík, only one of twenty stayed in town for the biggest holiday of the summer, Verslunarmannahelgi - and I stayed because I had obligations at the city's music festival.

As I write this editorial in our massive and empty office then, looking out at confused tourists who can't find any Icelanders in downtown Reykjavík, I have to acknowledge that there has been a cultural shift in the last few months. Icelanders have rediscovered their own countryside.

Visitors might be stunned to believe that anybody here could ever forget the countryside - the lava moonscapes, the moss fields, the waterfalls, even the gentle hilly slopes of Iceland do gentle hilly better than anywhere else in the world. Compared to the natural beauty the countryside has, it doesn't make sense that, last summer and the summer before, so many more Icelanders could be seen choosing the claustrophobic interiors of crowded concert halls and bars in Reykjavík than the countryside. But they did. At least

more so than this year.

When I was an avid hiker, I would ask why no Icelanders wandered around their own country. The reasons I got made a certain amount of sense: 1) The króna was far too strong, and it was cheaper to fly out to Copenhagen than it was to drive out to Akureyri or the Westfjords and pay for gas and guesthouses and restaurants. 2) There was no tradition of going out for real exploration, just car camping and summerhouse travel with board games and TV watching. 3) Rich, snobby people had taken over the countryside with SUVs and fishing rights, a point bemoaned repeatedly in this very newspaper.

Then there was a large set of protests regarding the industrialisation of rural Iceland, kicked into gear by an enormous concert at Laugardalshöll on January 7th, and reaching what looked like a high point with the Election Day protests this May. Both of these protests took place in Reykjavík, and both were bolstered by local artists, among them Sigur Rós.

The protests had limited effect - they severely damaged one political party's credibility, the Progressive Party, who have been shouldered with all the blame for mismanaging Iceland's natural resources (though,

curiously, their policies are still followed, even as they leave office). Beyond the single issue of complaints over flooding a natural wilderness area, though, the protests seem to have at least had one remarkable effect - no matter their political view, the population of Iceland is now at least conscious of their landscape, and of the possibility that its pristine beauty isn't permanent. Iceland has rediscovered one of its greatest resources.

So, with this issue, we present more information about life away from Reykjavík. In part we were following Sigur Rós, but we also found other inspiration. In a feature I'm especially proud of, Haukur Magnússon presents the problems facing a small town in the Westfjords, Flateyri, known in Reykjavík mainly because of the devastating avalanche that struck the town 11 years ago. I am especially proud of Mr. Magnússon's feature because it serves as a reminder, now that we are falling in love with small-town Iceland again, of how much has to be done to preserve the character of this country, of how much responsibility we are avoiding by sticking to Reykjavík as the end-all-be-all of Icelandic culture.

Super Salaries for the Fortunate Few

The local tax lists are public in Iceland, and it has become an annual ritual in the country to closely examine the publication of the estimated wages of 2,400 wealthy Icelanders as put together by the business magazine Frjáls Verslun (Free Enterprise).

Of course, this year, already two of the tabloids found a hook that has grabbed the local imagination. "The biggest wage differential in Iceland's history," DV stated. "The celebrities' earnings," and "Magnificent millionaires" is a fraction of headlines in Séd og Heyrt. Both papers used up a lot of space to write about known Icelanders and their monthly salaries. Actors, athletes, persons in authority, musicians and media personalities were put into numbers, 431,000, 171,000, 1,145,000 or 22,500,000 ISK.

As absurd as it is to look at smiling celebs with all sorts of numbers printed on their chests, and as sad a fact it is that we are even interested to know what each makes in a month, DV has a point. Even though many of the numbers listed in Frjáls Verslun aren't necessarily 100 percent correct, the wage gap in Iceland has become surreal, which has truly stirred things up in common discussions.

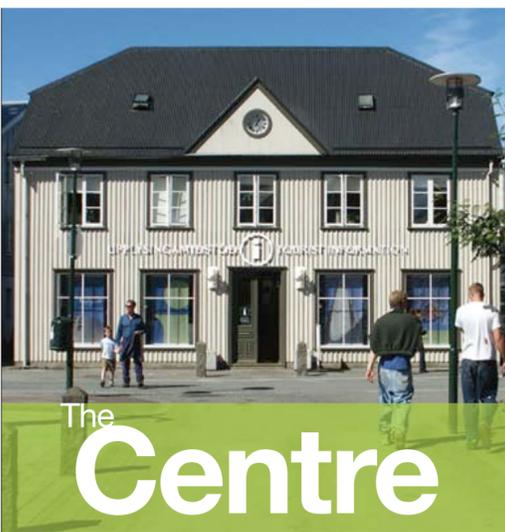
Some directors and bank presidents now earn around ten to twenty million a month while

common citizens with low-wage jobs earn 100,000 ISK or less. This is not to mention sky-high termination agreements the public has been witnessing repeatedly. We are not talking about just high incomes anymore. We are talking about super incomes a fortunate few who are sitting on the top of the iceberg enjoy every month.

Various politicians and trade union spokesmen have been critical of the super salaries escalation. Short-term thinking and greed are considered the main factors behind companies' personnel and compensation decisions, which hurts the general employee as well as society in the long run. Some find it "an unfortunate development for our small society," others want to spread the prosperity to a larger group than just a small handful of upper-class elites. The news has even spawned opinions that the current government should step down so it will be possible to counteract the situation. Repealing the recently repealed super-tax - an extra four percent tax for any earnings over 4.2 million ISK a year, which classify the earner as extremely wealthy - has also been mentioned. Whether there is a solution in all of this remains to be seen, but it has become clear that the gap between the rich and poor in this country is far from narrowing, a fact that can't be ignored anymore.



Steinunn Jakobsdóttir,
Journalist



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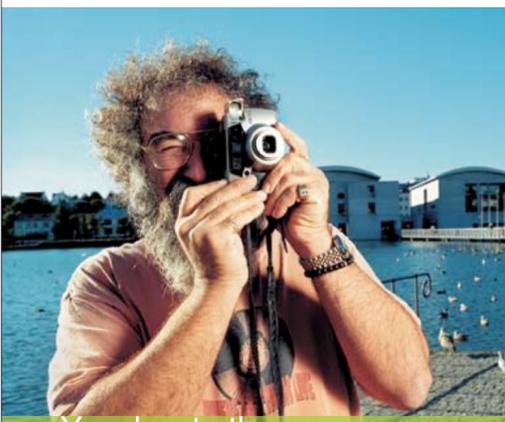
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No More Guerrilla Garments

Comme des Garçons's final weeks in Reykjavík

BY STEINUNN JAKOBSDÓTTIR PHOTOS BY SKARI

With no mannequins, no large sign, and a location in the middle of an old industrial harbour, you'd be forgiven for not spotting the Guerrilla Store on the dock Slippurinn. The concept of the Guerrilla Stores was developed by Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo, founder of the fashion label Comme des Garçons. With the opening of the boutique at Mýrargata 2-8, Icelanders got the chance to buy her products for the first time, but not for long. The store closes at the end of September, even though business has been booming for the last year.

"The philosophy of the Guerrilla Stores is that each shop can't be open longer than 12 months at the same location," Sonja, who is standing by the counter as I walk in, tells me. "The location also has to be somewhat special. It can't be in the shopping centre of a town or in a shopping mall, for example, and, therefore, Mýrargata was a perfect spot, close to the centre but not in the main streets."

Together with three of her friends, Birna, Anna, and Gurry, she opened the Guerrilla Store on 24 September 2005, and they are now using the last few weeks to make the most of the place and sell the collections to all the regulars who will soon have to say their goodbyes.

"The centre of Reykjavík is more than just Laugavegur and we chose Mýrargata because we wanted to raise awareness of the area around Slippurinn. The build-up in the neighbourhood is just amazing, but we also wanted the location to be connected to the country. Here you have the harbour, the sea, the ships and a lot of interesting things to see and enjoy only minutes away from the big shopping streets. Therefore, we thought the area would be perfect for a Guerrilla Store. This is all part of the concept. Being located in a fresh and different environment, quite hidden and unusual," Sonja says.

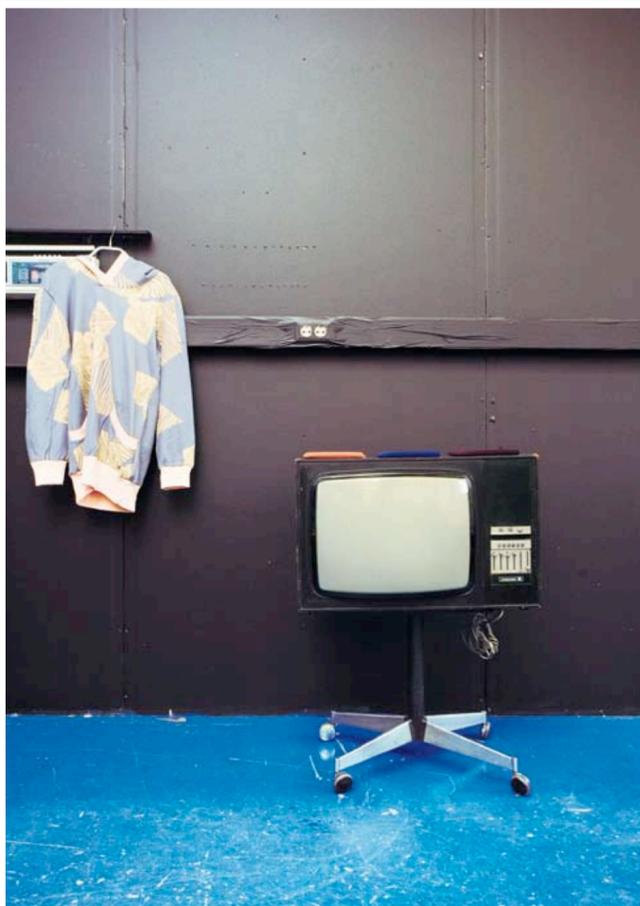
Nothing inside was changed before the store moved in and little has been done to give an impression of a fashion shop. "The product itself is supposed to be the main at-

traction, not the decorations inside the store. Designer clothes shouldn't be exotic. People are supposed to scrounge and look around and feel good while doing it," Sonja tells me. The atmosphere of this historical area with its raw interior, degraded, concrete floor and plain walls has a certain integrity. The owners added some personal touches, mainly through self-styled graffiti, and they offer a large chill-out lounge with old sofas and books to read for customers who want to relax after browsing through all the clothes.

When the Guerrilla Store opened almost a year ago, Reykjavík joined cities like Berlin, Glasgow, Hong Kong, Warsaw, Athens and Cologne, all selling extremely unconventional designs from the Japanese high-fashion label Comme des Garçons. The design could be called anti-fashion as the garments are sewn together in a non-conventional way, like reversed or missing a sleeve. Among their more unique touches: the Parachutes line with dresses, shirts and even pants resembling parachutes, unusual handbags, socks, shirts, wallets and everything between. Even a unisex perfume line Guerrilla 1 and 2 with the fragrance of a garage, church and rhubarb, if those kinds of smells tickle your olfaction, can be found inside.

As the business may only remain open for a year, the Comme des Garçons Guerrilla Store will soon be closing its doors but not without a farewell celebration. Various events are being planned at the shop as well as in the area around before everything closes. Stop by to see when they'll have their grill party, flea market and concerts, as well as some Culture Night events. As the foursome aren't planning to open another store in a different area in Reykjavík, the next couple of weeks will probably be the last time to buy Comme des Garçons products in Iceland.

*The Guerrilla Store,
Mýrargata 2-8, 101 Reykjavík*



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News in Brief

BY HAUKUR MAGNÚSSON PHOTOS BY SKARI AND LEÓ STEFÁNSSON

Golden Circle bus driver suspected of drunk driving

A group of 16 British tourists partaking in a guided tour of the Golden Circle on Sunday was left in shock as Selfoss police apprehended their bus driver on suspicion of drunk driving.

According to the police, the driver engaged in a bout of reckless driving, which included driving in the wrong lane on the main route Vesturlandsvegur and skidding against that road's guard-rail for an extended period of time.

An on-duty Selfoss policeman told the Grapevine that that same guard-rail, along with the coincidence that the bus faced no oncoming traffic, probably prevented a serious accident from occurring.

The unfortunate bus driver's blood test is currently being tested for traces of alcohol, along with samples from five other drivers also suspected of DUI in the same area.

Improper dynamite dump leads to bomb crash

Last Thursday, Selfoss police requested the Icelandic Coast Guard's bomb squad to the town's municipal waste area, following calls from a distraught employee who was left in a state of shock after two construction company workers brought (and left behind) a case containing 30 sticks of dynamite.

The employee told the Grapevine that before leaving the dynamite, the construction workers explained that they had discovered it while cleaning around the office. They claimed they were unsure as to where to dispose of it, figuring the town dump the obvious choice.

After confirming said explosives were indeed rogue dynamite, the bomb squad duly disposed of them. The dynamite is believed to have been around 30 years old and thus highly volatile. Selfoss police officials went on record as saying that disposing of old explosives is serious business and those interested in doing

so should consider contacting proper authorities beforehand.

Fatal car crash on Suðurlandsvegur

Shortly after midnight on Monday, Suðurlandsvegur saw a fatal collision near Langsstaðir in Flói, when a car collided with a small SUV going in the opposite direction. The car's driver and sole occupant, a woman in her thirties, was declared deceased at the site of the accident, while the driver of the SUV and his two passengers suffered minor injuries.

According to Icelandic traffic control, 12 people have thus far been killed in traffic accidents around the country this year. In the Selfoss police district, where the accident occurred, 77 drivers were ticketed for speeding this last weekend, and six individuals apprehended on suspicion of driving under the influence.

Almost 400 busted speeding through tunnel

According to the Reykjavík police department, close to 400 (391 to be exact) drivers were caught speeding in the Hvalfjörður tunnel during the weekend of Verslunarmannahelgi.

"All of them will face fines," officials asserted in a statement on their website, logrejan.is.

For those not in the know (visiting travelers, for instance), the Hvalfjörður tunnel is monitored by a highly sophisticated system of automatic speed cameras that photographs anybody who exceeds the tunnel's speed limit of 70 km/h. The fines are mailed out to their vehicle's registered owners.

The police statement concludes by stating that during the weekend, Reykjavík police officers caught and fined 51 speeding drivers and 15 drivers under the influence.

Verslunarmannahelgi body count nearly complete

Another glorious Verslunarmannahelgi (Merchant's Holiday) has passed, leaving several wounded and/or jailed – although most had a good time, reportedly.

Akureyri's "Ein með öllu" festival seems to have been the most popular one this year. Festival spokesman Bragi Bergmann told the Grapevine that organizers estimated attendance at around 18,000, not counting the Akureyri locals.

Vestmannaeyjar's "Þjóðhátíð" organizers estimate 10-11,000 guests, 2,500 are reported to have kicked back at Neskaupsstaður's "Neistaflug" shindig. Around 3,000 Jesus-enthusiasts celebrated His eternal presence at the Fljótshlíð "Kirkjulækjarkotmót".

As per usual, the weekend left a lot of carnage. Police reported a total of over 100 drug busts throughout the weekend, most of them in or around Akureyri (66 at the time of writing). Vestmannaeyjar came in a close second with 12 separate cases.

Most of the aforementioned are said to be small in scale, with the four drug dogs working Akureyri that weekend apparently doing a good job of sniffing out the single-serving portions of various recreational substances Akureyri's guests (and locals) brought with them.

Sandwiched between usual Verslunarmannahelgi reports of vehicle-related offences (including, but not limited to, drunk or reckless driving and severe speeding) and bodily assaults and scuffles, were Verslunarmannahelgi's usual reports of rape and sexual assault. At the time of writing, rape charges have been filed in two separate cases and more instances of rape or sexual assault have been reported. In line with the Verslunarmannahelgi tradition, more charges can be expected to surface as the year progresses.

In a Tuesday afternoon phone conversation, a very tired Bergmann told the

Grapevine that Akureyri had recovered amazingly quickly from its at times rambunctious visitors, stating that one could not tell by looking that the town had hosted 18,000 visitors days earlier – a record number for the event.

He went on to say that 99 percent of the festival attendees had behaved impeccably, blaming the weekend's sporadic outbursts of violence, vandalism and drug-related offences on a few "black sheep" visitors.

"The number of drug-related incidents serves to reflect an increase in Icelanders' drug use. I think they also bear witness to successful policing throughout the weekend. We are sending a clear message to drug-fiends: 'Stay out of Akureyri!'" He went on to tell us that, "Personally, I would have been more worried had there been no drug-busts."

Several Akureyri townfolk have voiced complaints over the weekend's festival, seeming mostly concerned with acts of petty vandalism and violence. On behalf of Akureyri's Friends, the festival organisers, Bergmann says that the surge of violence and vandalism it evokes is regrettable, but points out that Icelanders are used to partying hard.

"This is not something we invented. Over 40 years ago, police closed off Þórsörk to hinder a similar festival. Hell, Egill Skallagrímsson himself is probably the nation's first reported drunken teenager. The organised family activities – which we are responsible for – take place during the day and are over by midnight, which is when the town's taverns and clubs take over."

The organiser went on to point out the benefits of his festival: "If we were to stop organising our part of the weekend, Akureyri would likely alienate the families and fun-seekers, being left with nothing but the troublesome element. Reykjavík's Menningarnótt has to deal with similar problems, namely that trouble rears its head when the family festivities are over. Ours is a city festival and



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we have no control over what the nightclubs have to offer. Either way, we are always working on making this a better, more comfortable event and this one was by far our best organised and policed."

War on innocent tourists observed at Kárahnjúkar protest

A series of dubious tactics by law enforcement officials in the area around the Kárahnjúkar dam protests have left protestors and conservationists throughout Iceland screaming "foul".

Local law enforcement officials began to get involved with the peaceful protest on Monday, July 31, when the Seyðisfjörður police force arrested 14 individuals from the protest camp, accusing them of entering a closed off Kárahnjúkar work area and disturbing the peace there.

Contractors pressed charges against the 14 protestors, who were released later that day, and the Egilsstaðir police are currently in the process of investigating the alleged crimes.

Based on the charges put forward by contractors working on the Kárahnjúkar dam, the Seyðisfjörður sýslumaður, (rural position: something between a sheriff and councilman), Lárus Bjarnason, issued a statement that same day stating that Seyðisfjörður police had successfully removed all protestors from their camp and dissolved it following requests from local landowners.

According to the statement, his decision to close down the camp was made in light of several and continuous alleged illegal activities of the protestors and is grounded in the 15th article of Icelandic police laws, which ensures the police a right to prevent people from dwelling in certain areas in order to ensure public safety and thwart illegal activities.

An NFS report quoted Egilsstaðir senior policeman Óskar Bjartmarz as saying that evacuating the remaining 12 protestors from their camp went smoothly. They were transferred to Egilsstaðir, where their confiscated equipment was still being kept at the time of writing. He went on record saying that most of the protestors were foreigners and that the police would continue to monitor them in case they decide to return to their protests.

The Iceland Nature Conservation Association in turn issued a press release, harshly criticising the police force's recent actions against protestors and other tourists travelling the highlands north of Vatnajökull.

"The association emphasises that citizens of democratic societies have an unquestionable right to peaceful protest and that officials should treat them with utmost respect. The association also criticises police advances against people travelling around the area," stating that they've repeatedly harassed them, going so far as searching their cars.

"Members of the public have an unquestionable

right to travel the area unharassed, as long as they clean up after themselves and stay out of pronounced work areas. The Iceland Nature Conversation Association encourages the government not to let the war on Icelandic nature now taking place at Kárahnjúkar and in the highlands turn into a war on innocent tourists."

Andrea Ólafsdóttir, spokesperson for the Íslands-vinir group and one of the organisers of the ten-day long 'family camp' for protestors that took place at the end of July commented to the Grapevine that closing down the protest camp was surely an ill-founded, if not wholly illegal, move by the police force.

"The camp was four kilometres from any work area. These actions are comparable to evacuating a village because a few of its inhabitants are suspected of foul play – it doesn't make sense and isn't justifiable however you choose to look at it."

Ólafsdóttir, who left the area by the end of July, also states that she has received reports of police officers using force against the protestors to the point of brutality.

"Among other things, I've heard reports that a female protestor was clubbed by a police officer that I sincerely believe. I doubt she has hard evidence to support her story, but hopefully she does. It would be awful to let the police get away with such illegal activities."

The Grapevine has been unable to maintain contact with any sources at the protest camp, as computers and agents of communication – including, according to sources associated with the camp, GSM phones – have been confiscated.

Sigur Rós end tour with protest

Popular rock band Sigur Rós performed an acoustic set at the Snæfellskálur protest camp, close to the construction site of the much criticised Kárahnjúkar dam project. The small concert got underway in the afternoon of Thursday August 3rd and, according to the popular Sigur Rós website 18 Seconds Before Sunrise, the band played five songs, including material from debut Von as well as unreleased songs.

18 Seconds moderator, Björn Erlingur Flóki Björnsson, wrote on the site's message board that police had prevented the band from entering "the actual plant area (fucking fascists)."

Some weirdness precluded the band's reportedly moving Snæfellskálur performance, as the night before, Ríkisútvarpið reported that police had thwarted Sigur Rós's attempt to play a concert there by blocking roads leading up to the camp.

Later that night, the story was heavily refuted by police officials who claimed that they had blocked the road to prevent cooking equipment being transferred to the protest site. Ríkisútvarpið in turn promptly withdrew the story, which has since then gone unmentioned.

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Bringing People Back into the Religious Dialogue

BY TOSHIKI TOMA PHOTO BY SKARI

Karl Balth was one of the greatest theologians of the 20th century. He was generally critical of every religion in the world. The story goes that once, after he had criticised Hinduism, he was asked how many Hindus he had ever met. "None," he answered. Balth was then asked why he could be sure Hinduism deserved his criticism. He answered: "A priori". This funny tale is often told to theology students learning about Balth for the first time, but Balth is not a role model for dialogue between religions in the 21st century.

We need to get to know religious believers as people. Theologians speak of reasoning from our life, experience and surroundings (theological induction), as opposed to reasoning from the text of the Bible (theological deduction). To oversimplify, using the example of the relationship between Christianity and other religions, theological deduction would try to define other religions using concepts and ideas from the Bible itself. Theological induction would try to understand the experience of being a Christian amidst people of many faiths, even though the Bible does not specifically suggest how Christians should act towards (for example) Buddhists. I would like to explain the importance of theological induction a bit better using my personal experience.

My father lives in Tokyo and he is now 80 years old. At times, recently, he has been sick and in hospital, and that has made me think a lot about his role in my life.

My father became a naval officer when he was 17 years old. In the last stage of World War II, there was nobody else left except boys of that age. Luckily, the war ended a few days before his assigned departure for a suicide mission. The experience of youth for my father's generation was totally different than for mine. Society was in ruins. My father had good luck again, went to medical school, and became a psychiatrist. He is a real family man (always came home from work at 5:30) though in the traditional Japanese male style (my mother did all the housework). My father had little interest in money or getting a promotion. For my father, the main thing was to establish a family and feed it. He never even dreamed of being able to choose the life that would best please his own tastes. My father has lived his life at a particular time and place and under conditions that are very different from mine. I was born into a richer and more peaceful time. I learned since childhood to choose things that fit my tastes in clothing, food and lifestyle. This explains many of the differences in ideas and behaviours between my father and me. And one of those has to do with religion.

My father is a Buddhist. Many Japanese see Christianity as the "religion of the enemies," as the authorities proclaimed it during the war. Nevertheless my father supported me



without any hesitation when I decided to go to a Christian seminary. "It is better to work for God than to work for money," he said, and this was typical for him.

I became a Christian when I was 20 years old and I am still the only Christian in my whole family in Japan. Accepting a religion at a later stage of life is not the same as being born into it. Religiously both involve the same blessing from God, but one is an event that one cannot choose by oneself, while the other is an independent conscious action. When I made my decision, my life had been influenced by my own cultural and sociological surroundings, just as my father's life had been in a different way. Christianity appeared as the religion of the enemies to my father, but for me it was (and is) the religion of innovation and humanistic restoration.

I am not trying to say that everything depends on its time and circumstance, and therefore that there is no absolute truth beyond time and space, or that all religions are essentially the same. But I do want to emphasise the importance of recognising our own limited ability to grasp religious truth. After all, we can live only our life, bound to a certain time, place, and gender, and we cannot declare whether we would have the same religious convictions if our circumstances were totally different.

The funny thing is while we try to respect each person's independence in having their own

religious attitude, and our own independence as well ("I love my father as a Buddhist, but I live my life as Christian"), our own life is inevitably entwined with other lives in other faiths. For example, my parents, though Buddhists, supported me both spiritually and financially when I chose to join the Christian clergy. They helped me become what I am now as a pastor. We tend to talk in vague images that suggest that Christian society is here, Islamic society over there, and Buddhist society somewhere off in the distance, each on its own. But it is not so simple. We are in lively communication with each other. Buddhists show kindness and love, or antipathy, to individual Muslims, and others too, just as they do to other Buddhists – and vice versa. Sometimes I work with people in the Soka Buddhist Society here in Iceland and we laugh together, saying: "Look, a Japanese man is a priest in the state church of Iceland while native Icelanders have become Buddhists!". The simple fact is that we all live amidst rich diversity, in a tapestry of mutual relationships that are complicated beyond our expectations.

Many religious leaders are aware of this, and eager to push religious dialogue forward. I think this is a good thing. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church invited many religious leaders to a discussion conference this summer, and the bishop of Iceland went all the way to Moscow to take part.

At the same time, it is even more important that regular people and not just scholars talk about religion. The dialogue must be inductive, about peoples' lives, and not just deductive, about the Bible and the Koran. People make dialogue meaningful. People need and want to learn what they share with others who live in a different reality.

Karl Balth was convinced of the existence of an "a priori" critique of Hinduism. But I am convinced of my love towards my parents and of their importance through my life. Therefore I am convinced, "a posteriori," of the importance of religious dialogue instead of the stereotyping of religions. I need to know who I am and what I believe in, by understanding my parents through my faith. An understanding of our commonality and of the irreplaceable worth of each person in the world should not be simply a consequence of religious dialogue, but rather the reason to have the dialogue in the first place. Balth would have had a different attitude if his father were Hindu. Of course it was not his fault. He lived his reality in his life. But it would be our fault if we just continued to go the same way as he did, by closing off everyday life from the table of dialogue. In this century the main cast in the drama of religions is not only God or gods, but also us, the people.

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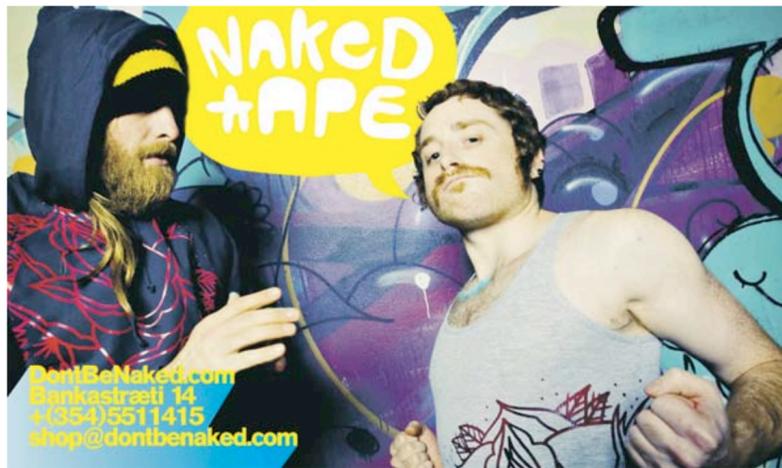
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SUPERSTAR



Magni Surpasses Jesus Christ
 Supernova goes supernatural

BY BART CAMERON

Religion comes to mind frequently when you watch Rockstar: Supernova, the reality television show that Icelandic country band singer Magni Ásgeirsson somehow got himself involved in. In fact, I would compare the show to the religious paintings of Hieronymus Bosch. Presented with such supernatural grotesquery, your mind searches for myths or stories that might help you clear a path before the nasty confusion. So it is that Magni, a soft-spoken, decent small-town Iclander, has taken the role of Jesus in the Satanic shitfest that is the Rockstar, described before in this paper as karaoke from hell.

To be cast as Jesus, you need to perform some miracles, though. Magni is up to his third right now. As we reported in the last issue, Magni managed to bend the universe and atomic structure of Los Angeles so that, somehow, Tommy Lee was capable of wordplay. Assounded by Magni's performance of, of all things, a Stone Temple Pilots cover, Tommy Lee jumped to his feet and said the word "Magni.... Ficent."

By any account, that is a freakin' miracle.

One of this week's miracles also involved Tommy Lee. As Magni concluded a passable, honest interpretation of a Coldplay song, Tommy Lee announced that he understood the needs of the family, and told Magni, "We all appreciate your sacrifice here. We would like to fly your family out."

Magni's reply, a humbled, "I'm going to go cry now," likely convinced many that, somehow, family has a place with the rock 'n' roll lifestyle on Rockstar.

In the realm of miracles, this ranks pretty high.

We can't question Magni, who has a legitimate reputation in

Iceland as a good father and boyfriend. (It's a small country, people's conduct gets out, even the positive stuff.)

However, Tommy Lee, by interacting with Magni, somehow came off as a rock n roll Alan Thicke.

It prompted some of us to go back to the book of Tommy Lee, his band's autobiography Dirt. In that text, Tommy Lee extols different domestic virtues. There, when his fiancée insults his mother, who accidentally called her the name of another of Tommy Lee's girlfriends, he throws her out of a limousine.

Here is how Tommy Lee resolved the conflict, in his own words:

"I drew my arm back and... squeezed my hand into a fist and fucking smashed her right in the grille, dude. Her hands flew to her mouth, and she dropped to the ground... I jumped back in the limo and slammed the door shut. As we drove away, I looked back and saw her kneeling on the pavement and spitting teeth into her hand, which was dripping with mucousy strands of blood."

Again, Magni made this guy look domestic.

Magni's other miracle was his performance on Rockstar, where he somehow picked up the song "The Dolphin's Cry", by Live, a number with lyrics even more mind-numbingly stupid than its title, and made it sound like it meant something.

Maybe this is the best way to explain the power of his performance, and of his overall charm, in the last weeks. A message on the chat board for Rockstar from Julius in the Philippines stated the following: "We love you in our country. I got my last month's salary and I spend it all voting for you."

Yeah. This was definitely the week Magni became a Jesus figure.

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“Please Do Not Refer to Me as an Entertainer”

An interview with comedy icon turned pontificator Jón Gnarr

BY SINDRI ELDON PHOTO BY SKARI

Jón Gnarr is most famous for his radio show *Tvíhöfði*, and his award-winning comedy TV show *Fóstræður* – shows that established comedy in each respective medium. He has also done theatre, feature films, commercials, an animated TV show, written poetry and prose, and aside from having a hand in writing most of the things he’s starred in, from 1992’s TV show *Hegðun, Atferli, Framkoma* to 2004’s TV show *Svínasúpan*, he’s recently penned a play of his own, *Naglinn*, a play on the realities of being a man in today’s Iceland. In it, the protagonist argues that society has relegated manliness to one room in the house: the bathroom.

Jón is currently writing a book. His autobiography, or at least the first volume of it, to be exact. He says it’s a very honest, candid and altogether splendid book, and he says everyone should read it. So much for being your own worst critic.

/// You recently wrote a play, *Naglinn*, where you touched on social commentary in quite a serious way, whereas up until recently, all you’d really done is comedy. Do you find that people are unable to take you seriously?

– Of course. When I started writing Christian opinion pieces, a lot of people simply dismissed it as phoney.

I’ve never really agreed with most people’s perception of comedy. I think comedy is a kind of art, an art in and of itself. Not everybody thinks that. Most people think comedy is just a pastime activity, some kind of meaningless entertainment. Until recently, there hasn’t been much of a tradition for comedy, other than Spaugstofan-type satire, or impression and mockery. The main reason I’ve become less attached to comedy and kind of removed myself from it, is so that I can see the divide between (seriousness and comedy), because I’ve never really liked a lot of comedy that’s going on (in Iceland today). There’s not a very high standard for it.

/// Do you mean now, or when you started, or just always?

– Well, it’s kind of selfish or self-centred to say this, but I’ve never really found any Icelandic comedy funny that I haven’t done or been a part of. I’ve never liked anything else. These days I’ve been looking it all over, what people are finding funny today, and I didn’t find anything until I started listening to (talk radio) *Útvarp Saga*. (Laughing.) That’s the only originally funny thing going on in Iceland that you can really laugh at. It’s unique, really.

/// So I imagine it must have frustrated you when you were doing *Tvíhöfði* and people were categorising it as just another shock-jock morning show. Did you think that was unfair, seeing as how you view comedy as being an art form, rather than a pastime?

– No, not really, that’s never really annoyed me. What really annoys me is when people call me an ‘entertainer’. I’ve called up papers to tell them “I’m not an entertainer, please do not refer to me as an ‘entertainer’.” Those are the guys with bowlers that do shows at annual balls.”

/// You’ve appeared in pretty much every medium there is. You’ve done TV, movies, theatre, radio, commercials, in pretty much every conceivable way. Have you discovered anything about the nature of entertainment? Which medium reaches people best? What do people follow the most?

– It depends on the timing. They kind of go in and out of fashion. Sometimes there will be a focus on a certain medium, and then it just disappears, moves along... For a time, Icelanders were very book-oriented, which we really aren’t anymore... after that, we became a TV nation... it changes a lot, depending on the nature and situation of things. For example, the TV commercial scene now is completely different now than it was ten years ago.

/// Do you miss radio?



– That’s a touchy question, but yes, I miss radio... I find myself longing to go back there, and maybe I will go back one day, it’s not out of the question.

/// I can imagine that it’s a lot easier to get your opinion across than on TV, where you need all kinds of preparation, such as make-up, costumes, a script, whereas on radio, you just... do it.

– Yes... like I said, I’ve been listening a lot to *Útvarp Saga*, and I think that that’s a lot of fun. They’re brilliant, absolutely brilliant, the people working there. *Arnprúður Karlsdóttir*, for example, she was on yesterday and she was very angry, very opposed to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and saying how disgusted she was that a Christian nation could do such a thing. (Laughs.) I thought that was interesting. (*Útvarp Saga*) also have fortune tellers on.

/// Don’t you think that humour is just like fashion, with different kinds of humour becoming popular at different times? Like when you guys were on top, everyone was laughing at *Tvíhöfði*, and today there’s something else that people are laughing at. I mean, people are actually laughing at the morning shows on FM 957.

– Exactly. People are laughing at things that I just... don’t find funny, and I don’t understand what they like... I mean, humour is a part of life, it’s part of being a human being. Humour is only found among higher primates, like chimpanzees and humans... and orangutans and people like that.

/// (Laughing) Chimpanzees have a sense of humour?

– Oh sure. It’s a sign of intelligence, humour is a sign of intelligence. To have a sense of humour is connected to the enlargement of the brain. It’s about being able to see life from an absurd standpoint, and be able to find something funny in one’s difficulties, and there’s a sense of empowerment to that. There’ll be something that happens to you, or you’ll have to cope with, and if you can make fun of that, then it’s not such a big deal. A sense of humour is vitally important to human beings. People without a sense of humour, they just wither away in some corner and die.

/// Maybe. So you have always been known as, and kind of still are, a rebel of sorts. You’ve been in the position of having fairly unpopular opinions on things, and even your name, Gnarr, isn’t really a name, it’s just something you’ve taken up yourself.

– Uh...

/// Is that just something that happened, that you had opinions like that, or did you just adopt them because they weren’t popular to begin with?

– No. No, I’ve just always had my opinions, my views, and have just been more inclined to pursue those opinions when they’re unpopular, you understand? It’s like punk. I’m punk, and I’ve always been punk... I’ve always been *Jónsi Punk*, and in a lot of ways, this whole (conversion to Catholicism), I find that very punk.

/// In what way?

– This has never been confirmed or anything, but I am retarded. I’m retarded, in the way that I find it very difficult to handle any kind of structure, you see. Any kind of organisation is just impossible for me, it’s just chaos. I’ve always been that way, since I was little. I’ve never been able to write in a straight line, for instance. Every time I try to write, the writing just starts to curve up or down. Even if it’s lined paper, it just goes everywhere.

I was pressed into a whole system... I wrote an article about it all, this phenomenon that I called drawerism. It’s like there’s this imperative to shove everything into a drawer. I’ve always found it cool to rebel against this drawerism, this obsession with classifying everything, you know, this sort of “If you do this, then you must be this.” Every time when there’s been something like that, something politically correct, I’ve rebelled against it, it just isn’t me, somehow. That’s just my opinion, it’s not really a calculated sensibility, I mean, I don’t just say “I’m going to be against this just because it’s fashionable,” it’s just my opinion. That may be due to my being retarded.

/// More of an instinctual thing?

– Yes, it’s just instinct. Nothing I’ve done has ever stirred up as much controversy as my conversion, or christening, or whatever you want to call it. I can’t remember getting such a harsh reaction since being in *Hegðun, Atferli, Framkoma* (an early, somewhat racy TV col-

laboration with *Sigurjón Kjartansson*). I mean people were calling in with death threats, they were going to kill me because they didn’t agree with things I said, and to take that position, to be pro-Christianity, it was impossible to be any more politically incorrect than that.

/// How did that happen? When did it become politically incorrect to be Christian?

– The position I was in at the time just made it very politically incorrect. Being *Jón Gnarr*, being in *Tvíhöfði*, being in *Fóstræður*, all that, and then suddenly, oomph. I’m Christian, and writing opinion pieces and ponderings (in *Fréttablaðið*).

/// You mean that Christians that hadn’t agreed with (your work) were unwilling to accept you as one of their own?

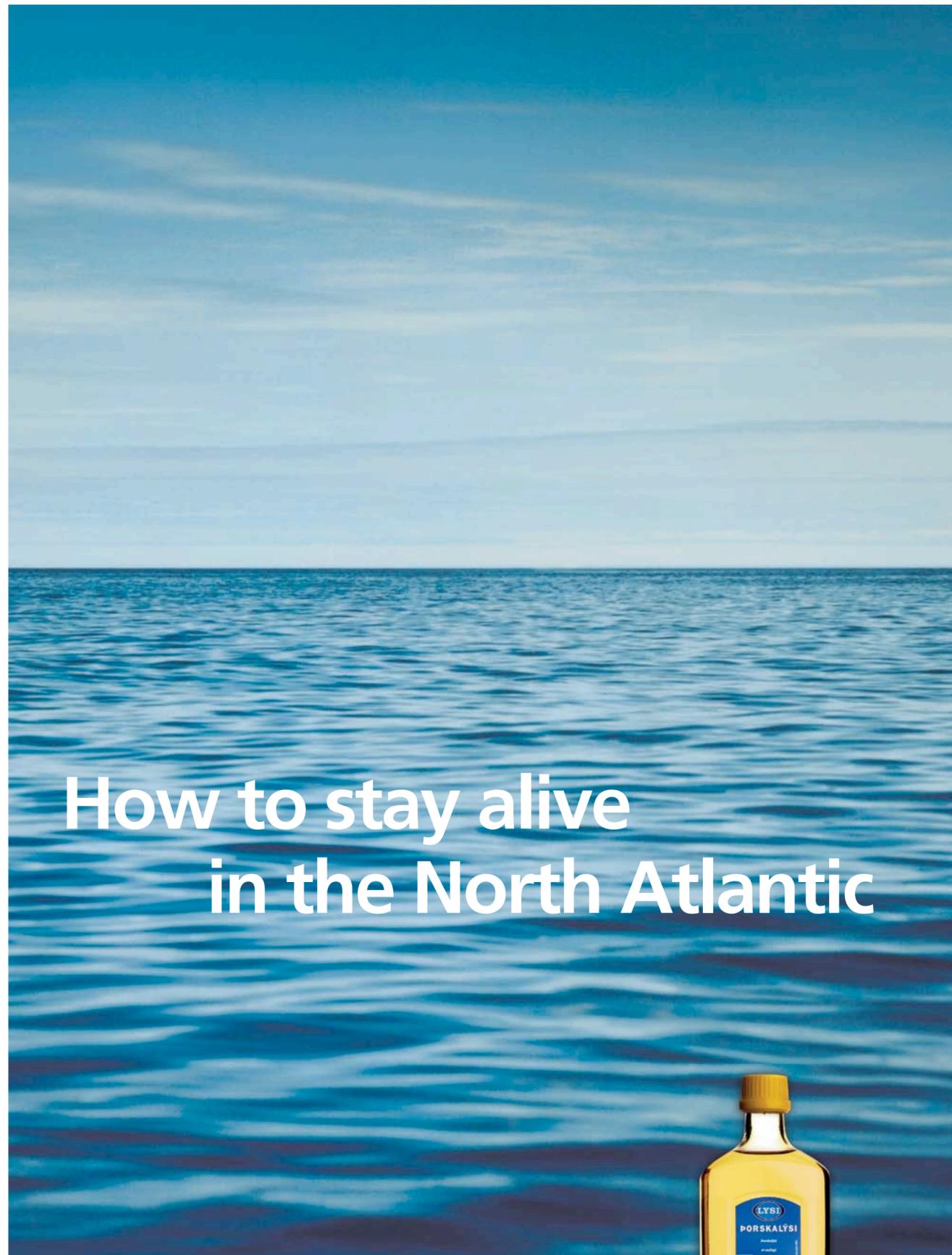
– No, it was mostly those who weren’t Christian. Those who were against the religion, or the church. That’s what things are like today. There’s a lot of unrest in religious circles, mostly due to homosexuals, whether or not homosexuals can exist or get married or something, and very strong movements form against organised religion. (Organised religion) becomes some kind of regressive force that’s just singling out people to hate, and things like that... and I found it a lot of fun to go against that kind of drawerism, you know? Why can’t I be Christian, if that’s my belief? I don’t give a shit what people think about that, I’ll do as I please and I’ve gotten very mixed opinions about that.

When I started having a no-swearing policy on (*Tvíhöfði*)... you heard that, right?

/// Yeah, you had a swearjar, right? Strange that the only way you can be unacceptable today is to be very acceptable, taking up religion and becoming a stand-up citizen... people suddenly find that very offensive.

– Yes, you’re right. I supported *Gisli Marteinn* (*Baldursson*, an unpopular right-wing mayoral candidate and former TV show host) when he ran for office. I supported him, and that was very politically incorrect, and people were asking me if I was insane... and no, I’m not... I’m not certifiably insane. (Laughing.)

/// Good to get that cleared up.

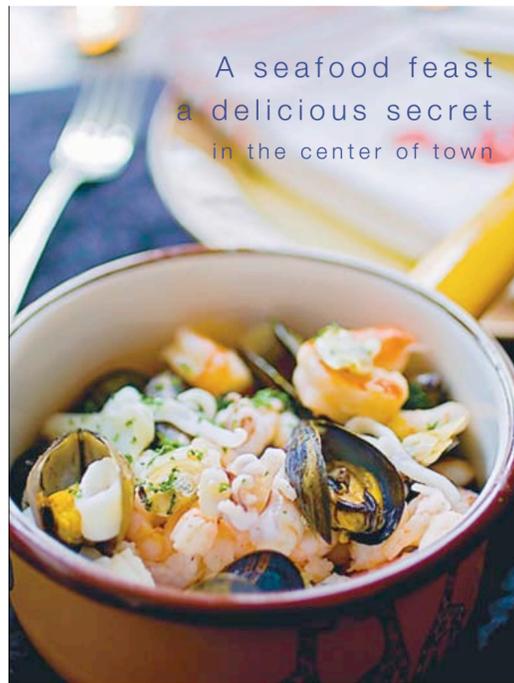


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OPINION



Martin Luther King, Jr. Was Wrong

BY ERIK DAVIDEK

Between my Icelandic language courses, the hours that I have spent at immigration, and my time hanging around downtown, I have had the chance to talk with fellow immigrants from around the world about their experiences in Iceland. One unfortunate matter that seems to always pop up is the racial discrimination that so many of them feel they have encountered during their stay. For the most part, I have managed to avoid this, thanks no doubt to the fact that I look like a younger, chubbier American version of Bubbi Morthens. But it's not hard to figure out that the ever-increasing number of people coming to Iceland from Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe might be easier to classify as "different" by the locals. Now I'm not suggesting that all races should live together in peace, as Martin Luther King, Jr. and many other progressive thinkers have in the past. I don't believe that's possible, because race doesn't exist.

"Hell yes it exists!" you protest. "I am white, she is black, and that guy looks a bit Asian or something."

I can't disagree that for the history of mankind, we have grouped culturally-related people who share physical attributes into "races," but this makes no logical sense. My father recently visited South Africa, and he was startled by the simplicity of the old Apartheid system. Under Apartheid, people were split into four groups: White, Indian, Coloured and Black. At a time when some Americans were busy refining and instituting the eugenics movement and the Nazis were developing various "scientific" methods of determining a person's race (such as measuring nose size and cranial capacity), South Africa had the simple pencil test. Government officials would take a standard HB pencil and insert it into the hair of an individual. If the pencil didn't fall out, they were classified as "Coloured." The problem was that this test was notoriously unreliable, and often resulted in several members of the same family being classified in different racial groups. Oops.

More recently, people have pointed to blood tests and DNA to make it easier to figure out what they are, or more importantly what they are not. But this too is problematic. According to the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, it is true that certain physical traits have been linked to various groups of people. However, most of the genes that cause these traits have not been mapped at the DNA level, meaning that linking one person with their possible ancestry becomes scientifically hopeless. To further complicate matters, we only inherit two of our 23 pairs of chromosomes from our parents, leaving the rest to our collective ancestry and to environmental factors. The Human Genome Project, a 15-year study of DNA funded by the U.S. Department of Energy, has determined that of the 25,000 genes in human DNA

(including the sequence of the three billion chemical base pairs that make up that DNA) 99 percent are identical. If you do the math, that means that Dorrit Mousaieff is basically the same person as Silvia Night.

And let's face it, how much do we really know (or want to know) about the mating habits of our great-grandparents? All it takes is a bottle of rum and a broom closet to alter the DNA makeup of an entire family.

Naturally, as different governments try to use this information to determine what percentage of a group's ancestral blood a person must contain to be part of that group, inconsistencies have arisen. For example, there are places in South America and Asia where crossing over a national border makes you a different race, due to the divergence of classification systems.

If our idea of a human being's race is determined by arbitrary physical characteristics, which change depending on where you happen to be in the world, then race becomes simply a tidy little manmade way of grouping people, and nothing more. In other words, the word "black" and "white" could just as easily have been "fork" and "spoon." You could then take a set of those eating implements all over the world and hear them called by thousands of different names. The names of the utensils would change, but they would still be the same tools that help us consume food. They would cease to have names, and just become identifiable by what they do; their basic description. Just as, I would propose, we should all be categorised – by our most basic description: Human.

This may feel too all-encompassing. The Smithsonian Institution's definition of human includes "habitual bipedality," and "functional hairlessness," which would cover damn near everybody outside of the sailor's bars downtown. But we like to see different groups of people as, well, different. Why? I can understand the evolutionary need to protect one's resources in order to ensure survival, but is that really necessary here and now? Iceland has more Mercedes per capita than Germany, and I just paid more for a miniature apartment in Reykjavik than the gross domestic product of Guatemala. It seems that resources abound... so why are we dealing with this here?

America has struggled with the effects of racial categorisation and disharmony for over 200 years, and the rest of the world has for much longer. Iceland is now faced with the growing issue of how to address the needs of its immigrant population. I hope that my new home country will learn a valuable lesson from the mistakes of the past and lead its citizens by example.



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Flateyri and the Fate of Small-Town Iceland

After a natural disaster, how does a fishing village cope with a modern economy?

BY HAUKUR MAGNÚSSON PHOTOS BY JULIA STAPLES

All in all, 1995 was a bad year for the inhabitants of the northern Westfjords. January 15th, following a long bout of heavy snowfall and general bad weather, an avalanche struck the small town of Súðavík, demolishing 20 houses and killing a total of 14 people. The event came as a shock to most Icelanders, serving as a reminder of just how dependent they still were on the mercy of nature. Much grief and soul-searching followed, not the least by inhabitants of the Westfjords, who now were suddenly thrust into the position of having to justify their living in what came to be seen as an extremely unsafe, even uninhabitable, area. The worst, however, was yet to come.

On the morning of October 26th that same year, another avalanche struck, this time devastating the equally small town of Flateyri (now a mere 30-minute drive from Súðavík). Some 500,000 tons of wet snow build-up crept from the ravine Skollahvilft (literally: “Demon’s gully”), destroying close to 30 buildings and killing 20 people.

Following the devastation of the town, close to 100 people left for good, many not able to cope with harsh memories of tragedy and others suddenly left with no reason to stay. A hundred people moving away may not seem a lot for the average New Yorker, but for a town that in its heyday counted about half a thousand inhabitants, it was tantamount to losing a limb.

Selfoss will be a relief

Flateyri’s inhabitants are known around Iceland for their jolly demeanour, hard-working and partying attitude and resourcefulness.

One of the few (if only) Icelandic films entirely shot and produced outside of Reykjavík was made by Flateyri folk (*I faðmi hafsins*, 2002), they’ve spawned several nationally regarded musicians and writers and have boasted of a cultural life greatly exceeding the town’s tiny population.

Growing up in the neighbouring town of Ísafjörður, which has more than eight times the number of Flateyri’s inhabitants, I can safely claim to have admired and at times envied the people of Flateyri for the atmosphere they managed to maintain for so long. Having worked there as a professional fish-gutter through two summers, half a decade ago, I was used to thinking of Flateyri as a fun and lively place, brimming with energy and ideas and its surrounding Öundurarfjörður as one of the most beautiful fjords available to man.

“Having worked there as a professional fish-gutter through two summers, half a decade ago, I was used to thinking of Flateyri as a fun and lively place, brimming with energy and ideas and its surrounding Öundurarfjörður as one of the most beautiful fjords available to man.”

Imagine my surprise when researching this article. Visiting Flateyri for the first time in two years, on a Wednesday afternoon in late July, I was all but shocked by its seeming deadness. The weather didn’t help; grey skies and heavy clouds can become oppressive when juxtaposed with the fjord’s massive mountains and this, combined with the fact that throughout the course of two hours spent there, I did not observe a single person walking the streets, made for a bleak view of the town. It seemed positively depressing.

Coming back a few days later did not make for a better impression. Even though the sun was basking the town in a warm glow, painting it beautiful instead of grey, there still was no one to be seen. Flateyri’s famous (and

only) watering hole, Vagninn, (“The Wagon”) had been closed for over a year. I passed a couple of Polish immigrant workers who wordlessly and promptly ran away from my greetings. A visit to the local gas station did not raise my spirits. The attendant, a girl of 24, who was born and raised in the town, save for a brief stint at beauty school in Reykjavík and as an au pair in Montréal, stated in an informal chat that she was moving to Selfoss.

“The town has changed,” she said, stating that there was nothing left for her. Nothing to

migrant workers who keep to themselves. According to her, summers are fun when the former townsfolk come back to party for a while, but mainly it’s drab and boring. Selfoss will be a relief for her.

Although one person’s view seldom serves to make up a complete horizon, the girl’s thoughts made me wonder if the town, and many others like it around the country (those without plans for huge aluminium smelting plants anyway), were indeed a thing of the past, doomed to suffer rapidly waning population numbers, quickly turning into burgs of nostalgia-addled summer cottages and minimum-wage-immigrant-worker-powered fish-processing plants.

The reason for the Westfjords (all of Iceland, for that matter) being inhabited in the first place stems from a convenient proximity to good fishing grounds; changing circumstances in the fishing industry (mainly due to the advent of the god-awful quota system and large freezer-trawlers) have effectively negated it to a great extent. So why should anyone choose to live there?

Couple that with the fact that the whole of Iceland’s remaining fishing industry is increasingly powered by immigrant workers who will accept worse work conditions and lower salaries than their Icelandic counterparts. Some of my correspondents in the Westfjords maintained that this could in part be traced to a shift in values during the past few decades; once, raising a family and providing for them through hard work until old age was deemed an acceptable and respectable pursuit. Now, Icelanders are raised to desire upward mobility and “making it”, whatever that means. “The fact is, once you’re working manual labour in the fishing industry, you’ve pretty much gotten your post and you’ll stay there ‘til you either die or quit. There’s not a lot to work towards,” maintained one Ísafjörður-based

“The town is dying,” the gas station attendant told me, certain that in a few years’ time its population will be comprised of a mixture of those too old to leave and the im-

friend who’s worked for various fisheries in the past, “People just want more these days.”

Hidden nation

Halldór Halldórsson has, on behalf of a coalition of the Independence and Progressive Parties, been the mayor of the town of Ísafjarðarbær for eight years. The township has encompassed the neighbouring towns of Flateyri, Þingeyri, Suðureyri and Ísafjörður ever since they united in 1996, following a majority vote to do so. He maintains that while the avalanche of 1995 has been a large factor in the way the town has evolved during the past decade, there are other equally contributing ones.

“A year after the avalanches, in 1996, the tunnel to Ísafjörður was formally opened, cutting what was once a very unstable and often blocked route between the places in half, thereby redefining the whole area as one zone of employment. That same year, the towns were united. One of the effects of this whole process was that most of the smaller towns’ commerce moved to Ísafjörður – people vote with their feet and understandably opt to shop at the cheaper Bónus store rather than their local Kaupfélag – along with the town halls, etc.

“By becoming part of a greater whole, those small towns forfeited some of the job versatility they used to have; what once were full-fledged towns with priests, town halls, mayors and doctors effectively became what may be regarded as ‘suburbia’ to the larger whole. People in Grafarvogur or Breiðholt do much of their commerce in downtown Reykjavík, for instance. This change of course affected Flateyri a great deal, for instance, and altered the options its inhabitants had for living and working there. These results were entirely foreseeable when the tunnel-digging and unification processes went in hand – had nothing been done, these smaller towns wouldn’t be in any better shape; they might even have been abandoned by now.”

I asked him about the effects of replacing the diminished population with immigrant workers.

“Well, we are having some problems getting them to fully function and participate in the community, something which ultimately affects the quality of life in a place like Flateyri. There are a lot of jobs available, for instance the local factory Kambur produced more than 8,000 tons of products last year – in what’s now regarded as Flateyri’s golden age the town’s record was around 5,000 tons. So there’s a lot of work to be had in that field, obviously, but there are problems manning it – just the same as there are problems manning much of the service industry in Reykjavík. As a result, close to 90 percent of Kambur’s workforce is comprised of immigrants. Every house there is lived in. Such a large group of non-Icelandic speaking immigrants is however bound to group together and form a community within the community, to isolate, like experience has shown us. Some of the immigrants who choose to stay to themselves are raising funds for their families abroad and would thus rather stay inside and save their money, which is understandable. However, this obviously has negative effects on those who strive to maintain a social and communal spirit in Flateyri.

“Integration has not gone as well as it should, not because of anyone’s hostility or closed-mindedness, but rather as an effect of the circumstances. We are working on ideas to solve this. Good work is being done in the schools, integrating the children, but we are having problems reaching the adults. As for the future of Flateyri and all of Ísafjarðarbær, I am confident that the unification process was a necessary step for all of the towns and that in time we will evolve into a strong and single-minded base whose inhabitants work, live and play wherever. For this to happen, our populace will have to start growing again. I am an optimist and am hopeful that in time it indeed will.”

Yes, of course there are the immigrant workers – what freelance journalist Páll Ásgeir Ásgeirsson called “The hidden nation of the Westfjords” in a rather bleak Mannlíf article earlier this year. Some regard them as a problem for Flateyri and similar towns, stifling the locals’ sense of community by not wanting (or being able) to learn the language and participate in their events. There are a lot of them,



too; although no definitive records exist – as Páll Ásgeir duly notes in his article, the census board regards them as Icelanders as soon as they receive their citizenship – people speculate that immigrants comprise up to (some say greater than) a third of Flateyri’s 300 inhabitants.

Bryndís Friðgeirsdóttir, a former school teacher and Ísafjörður councilperson, currently heads the Westfjords district of the Red Cross, overseeing charters spread all through the peninsula. Through her work the past decade, she has gotten to know many immigrant workers, informing them of their rights and duties, giving tips on how to work the system and providing help with various problematic situations that arise from time to time. She’s still at it. She met us just after assisting a Slovakian woman applying for a job at the Ísafjörður hospital. She says that resources for immigrant and migrant workers have improved greatly these past few years,

resources are needed and it is important to help newcomers see that it is to their utmost advantage to speak the language. We need to put greater emphasis on this, along with better funding. Lest we forget, these immigrants pay their taxes to the Icelandic government – while someone like Björgólfur, (owner of Landsbanki, one of the wealthiest men in the world) does not. As for other options, the Red Cross has a highly successful model for adapting refugees into their new hometowns, based on “friend families”. When Ísafjörður received several Yugoslavian refugees in the nineties, we set it up so that each family was put in contact with a similarly composed native one. Most of them still keep in touch even after all these years – I consider it a great success and think that similar tactics could work with worker immigrants in the smaller towns.”

It should be noted that while Westfjord immigrant workers and the effects of their presence were among the focal points of Páll

“The fact is, once you’re working manual labour in the fishing industry, you’ve pretty much gotten your post and you’ll stay there ‘til you either die or quit. There’s not a lot to work towards. People just want more these days.”

especially due to the foundation and advent of the Fjölmenningasetur (the Multicultural Centre) in Ísafjörður and its chairperson Elsa Arnardóttir’s tireless work to integrate it with local businesses and unions.

Still, there are problems in the treatment of immigrant workers that she says are “severely important to the native workforce as well.” Most recently, for example, she explains a “troubling development that needs to be dealt with is the advent of the so-called manpower rentals, many of whom treat their workers poorly and pay them badly. Not too long ago, an Ísafjörður contractor company discovered that their leased employees from Portugal were severely underpaid by their agency and were forced to take action.”

In our brief meeting, we discuss the possibility of employers requiring immigrants to vote a certain way, and the difficulty of the current system of binding work permits to employers, putting the immigrants entirely at the employer’s mercy. I ask what can be done to prevent further deterioration in the Westfjords.

“Well, first off, I think it is absolutely necessary that officials take measures to ensure that as many immigrants as possible learn Icelandic. I am not talking about forcing anyone to do so against their will, but certain

Ásgeir’s aforementioned Mannlíf article, even to the extent of drawing its title from them, he doesn’t seem to have interviewed or sought out a single one. Bearing in mind that a “hidden nation” is bound to stay hidden if no one ever looks for it, the Grapevine met up with some of them. They proved astonishingly visible and easy to find, a mere phone call away.

Brothers Edilberto and Edilito Villaespín (known to Flateyri locals as Berto and Lito), immigrated to Flateyri from their native Philippines some six years ago to find jobs, at the urging of their aunt who was working there. Previously, they had mainly made a living managing cock-fights, which are hugely popular in their hometown. They got jobs as fish-gutters at the local fish market and have been there ever since. I got to know them while working a stint there some years ago and although communicating with them was sometimes no mean feat (they speak in a mixture of poor English and Icelandic, although their skills have increased a whole lot since I shared a gutting table with them). They are friendly and fun to be around and welcome me to their rented apartment in Flateyri near midnight, after a long evening of gutting tons upon tons of catfish, cod and haddock. Also present is Lito’s girlfriend, one Steffell Lol Lissette Parilla, who is in her twenties and moved to

Flateyri at the urging of her aunt last year. She works at Flateyri’s fish processing plant, Kambur, and has an invigorating smile, usually followed by an infectious laughter. I am promptly offered a glass of cola, which I happily accept.

Berto and Lito’s apartment is nice and tidy and smells pleasantly of exotic cooking (they are generally fond of Icelandic cuisine, although Lito professes to hate lamb), and I caught them during post-work relaxation, watching the Discovery channel and sharing jokes. They both look forward to next year, when they will have stayed in Flateyri for the whole of seven years, a feat which grants them full citizenship. They tell me that they might consider changing jobs afterwards, although they like gutting fish (which they refer to by the Icelandic word of “slægja” well enough, especially since their (and my) previous boss left.

“Now Kambur manages the plant much better,” they tell me. “Old boss was always stressed and we maybe never get vacation or “pása”. Always “mikið slægja!” (more gutting). Now is much more relaxed.” They inform me of recent developments in my former place of employment and complain a bit about the Polish workers, who they say don’t gut fish nearly fast enough, though some of them are very diligent. “Always out smoking, always pása!”, they say. “You remember Andrew? Always taking breaks. Some are very good, however. It is different.”

Upon first arriving in Flateyri, in September of 2000, they recall being unhappy about all the snow, as is the case with most arrivals from the Philippines, according to them. They got used to it quickly enough, however, and now consider themselves natives of Flateyri and Iceland.

“This is our home,” Lito says. “We like the smell of the air, the water is very good and also it is very peaceful. No trouble here.” According to them, there are now close to 20 Filipinos working in the Kambur plant, along with the three of them working as fish-gutters (the third one, Jerry, who can play any Beatles song on the guitar and frequently does so at parties, was busy this particular night). They like to keep each other company, they tell me, and frequently have huge dinner parties and social gatherings within the group. They also regularly convene for basketball in the Flateyri gym and play ping-pong in the town assembly hall, which was renovated by a group of eager young Flateyri folk this winter, much to the Filipinos’ liking.

They also claim a love of the town festivals of Fisherman’s Day and the Flateyri street party (a legendary affair) and wish there would be more. They haven’t been to Reykjavík that much and do not seem excited about the place, their metropolitan affairs these days being limited to visits to the

>>> CONTINUES ON PAGE 39



Concerts So Successful the Band Was Forgotten

Extreme generosity from Sigur Rós, unrequited

BY BART CAMERON PHOTO BY ADAM SCOTT

Sigur Rós are an experimental rock band from Mosfellsbær, essentially a suburb of Reykjavík, who have become international critical favourites with three extremely respected albums. Yeah, odds are, you know who they are – the guys who sing the “ecccc eeh eeh, ooh ah ahhh ah ah” song. Or the guys who inspired you to come here.

The last week of July saw Sigur Rós return to Iceland after a year supporting their fantastically successful album *Takk*. As many four-star reviews as their album received, their live performances have left critics on at least three continents breathless. You would think they would be exhausted – before they set off on their tours, they warned that they likely would be, that they would tour hard for a year, then take a year off.

But whatever their state, they decided to dedicate their resources, talent, and the energy they had left after a year of touring, to performing a series of eight free concerts for their native Iceland.

The reaction has been divided: for their largest show, here in Reykjavík, there was casual approval from the local media, with very little critical discussion. For the shows in the north, especially in Isafjörður, the band got a better response.

Today, looking over a range of reviews and emails about the recent shows, though, I can't find much that puts Sigur Rós in perspective. Our own review of the Reykjavík show, written by our fantastically morose critic Sindri Eldon, cuts the band no slack at all. Our other review, by our other curmudgeon,

Helgi Valur, is ecstatic in its praise of the Öxnadalur show.

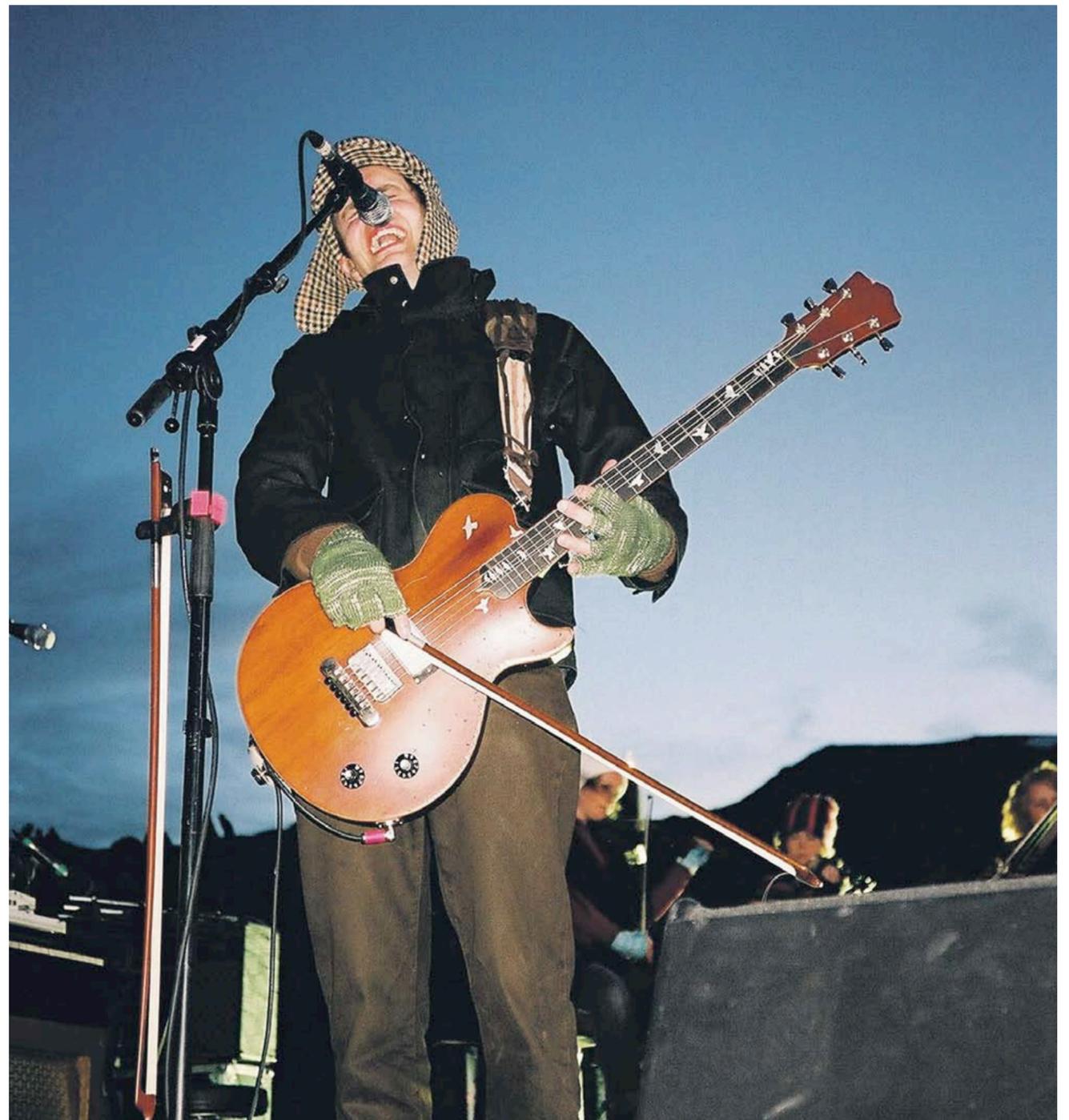
Both reviews, along with those sent in by casual fans, suggest one constant: the Sigur Rós shows that happened at the end of July weren't seen, by Icelanders, to be about Sigur Rós. The band itself, with music that would stand out anywhere in the world, faded into the background as their concerts became outdoor family events in a country that still celebrates weather and nature, at least in the summer, a little more than it does music.

I have sat at my desk absolutely bewildered by the number of descriptions of kids making out, at the number of “concert photos” featuring dogs, families on blankets, and rocks, that have been turned in.

And now, hell, I'm running 'em.

If you are a dyed-in-the-wool Sigur Rós fan, refer to previous coverage – especially the November 28th concert review we printed, as Sigur Rós played essentially the same set, with the same visuals, as they did during their official pay concert many months ago.

Mainly, though, realise that what happened when the Icelandic rock stars came home was that Iceland took a good long look at itself. While it might suck to be Sigur Rós, and not get all that much praise for a noble effort, one can at least realise that the band, in their unselfish behaviour, have accomplished something remarkable – they've helped Icelanders rediscover their countryside, their parks, and, in the case of our own critic, his dyspepsia.



Nature Grabs You by the Back of the Neck

A Sigur Rós concert in the rural north adds to the conservationist momentum

BY HELGI VALUR PHOTO BY JÓI KJARTANSS

The last weekend of July, you couldn't help but think that thanks to visionaries like Andri Snær Magnason and Sigur Rós you'd have to be a complete moron to support big industry in Iceland. This in spite of that fact our government has decided to let sleeping dogs lie while continuing to attack nature and its resources. If you can believe it, with one sweeping concert, Sigur Rós effectively raised the question, “What do we desire as a country?” Is it wealth? Are we going to consume until there is nothing left to consume? Are we going to continue to push “the ends justify the means” until there are no ends or until there is only “the end”?

I had just arrived by taxi at Öxnadalur, a beautiful place just outside Akureyri. Cars were piled up as Icelanders engaged in a

favourite local tradition... the celebrated tradition of getting free stuff. A free concert is something we Icelandic people cherish. I got out of the taxi hearing an unnamed song from Sigur Rós (it's not that I don't know the name of the song, just that, of course, it is actually unnamed). The weather was beautiful. People were standing, laying and sitting in the grass surrounded by mighty mountains. Children were running, dogs were barking, the Icelandic flag was waving. In the middle of all this there was a small stage and on that stage stood a band that could have been part of the cast of *Lord of the Rings*. Amiina and Sigur Rós were there playing their hearts out, or whatever it is that elves and dwarves have that make their bodies tick. I looked at the 2,000 people gathered there, and their faces

registered clear awe, amazement and joy.

Sigur Rós played for the nature that could one day cease to exist. I'm not sure that every person there was thinking consciously of the significance of that, but I'm sure each and every person felt it. People felt the closeness of nature as it grabbed the back of their necks and screamed, “I made you. Do you really wanna fuck me up?”

Amiina, the supporting band on Sigur Rós's recent tour, is an excellent addition. Looking like dwarves, Amiina banged xylophones, strummed and plucked violins, and did whatever was needed to complete the heavenly sound of Sigur Rós. In the encore the dwarf violin players went crazy as Sigur Rós reached gigantic heights during one of their famous climaxes.

In the end, Sigur Rós applauded the audience, showing they were one of us. But it was apparent they were not. They are obviously elves. Small mythical creatures that taunt, create beauty and bring joy to those deserving. If somebody attacks their beautiful forests or their lakes or their waterfalls they're going to attack. Not with the brutality of the Orcs. But with lyrical and harmonising beauty of the elves, which is much deadlier. The effect was mesmerising and a little dumbfounding. As one of my friends whispered in my ear, “They could tell us to mow all the grass and we would hop to it.”

If they ask us to protect that grass, the memory of the concert may go a long way to achieving it.



The Day the Hippies Took Over the Park

Sigur Rós and Amiina at Miklatún on Sunday, July 30th

BY SINDRI ELDON PHOTO BY ADAM SCOTT

The Sigur Rós show in Miklatún was a success, of sorts. They are probably the first Icelandic band to arrange a free outdoor show that wasn't part of an event or festival; in fact, they practically created their own festival. There were stands selling candy floss and pizza, people were camping out with blankets and lawn chairs. Hell, we were even blessed with adequate festival weather.

Particularly amusing in this case was the idea that random families showed up to be culturally aware for music that absolutely befuddled them. They stood around, looking all beautiful and happy with their 1.92 children as Amiina, the opening band and then backing orchestra, confused the hell out of them. And although their faces displayed great puzzlement (which they of course attempted to cover up with their oh-isn't-this-nice faces), they couldn't have been as confounded as those who spend a lot of time in the music community were irritated. Amiina's music was as depthless as their live performance was pointless. It was like watching a long build-up to absolutely nothing, unless you could call their closing number, a collection of bleeps, plinks and pings self-indulgently clonked out to a Casio SK-1 demo beat something. They were awful, so bad that they were upstaged by a moment of ear-splitting feedback in the middle of the set. They were like an exercise in how to put as little effort as possible into music, while still attempting to pass it off as music.

An Amiina fan

To understand the animosity some of us feel towards Amiina, you must stand in our shoes as we converse with a fan. Watching the show, we noticed that the only people who openly enjoyed Amiina's set, besides from the obvious friends-of-the-band, were die-hard, fascist Sigur Rós fans, who have embraced the Krútt movement so fully that anything else just sounds like noise to them. When I snickered contemptuously at Amiina's attempt to use a saw in two of their songs, a concertgoer turned to me with an I-know-better smile on her face.

"You don't like these guys, do you?"
"I'm still making up my mind. You?"
"I like all music," she said, causing me to reflexively clench my fist. "Especially when it's free," she added, grinning conspiratorially.

"Ela played a free show on Thursday. Did you see that?"

"Ela?" she said, looking baffled. "I didn't know about that. What kind of music is it?"
"Punk, punk rock," I said, using a term I hated in order to appeal to the lowest common denominator.

"Huh, that makes sense. Everyone's doing punk rock these days. It just seems so unoriginal, you know?"

I said nothing, simply turning back towards the stage and letting out a long, doleful sigh as Amiina played half-full water glasses and a xylophone whilst meekly mumbling something very squeaky into their microphones.

"Sigur Rós have become a face found on both sides of the 'hip Iceland' coin. If you like Sigur Rós, not only are you chic and cutting edge fashion-wise, but you're also environmentally aware, thereby making you the coolest motherfucker on the planet, and who wouldn't want to claim that title?"

Coollest festival on the planet...with dogs

The wait for Sigur Rós was characterised by people swelling towards the stage in anticipation, but the funny thing was that no one seemed terribly excited, it was as if the fun had already started and Sigur Rós was just a sideshow attraction. Indeed, when people spoke of the Miklatún show, it often seemed as if there had never really been any question as to whether or not they'd go, something that transcended the typical Icelander's love of free stuff.

It was as if everything that has been over-hyped, overrated and generally overdone about Iceland was coming to a high water mark in Miklatún that evening. Sigur Rós were in the middle of a cross-Iceland tour that celebrated Icelandic nature as a threatened treasure, and environmentalists certainly are raising hell about the whole thing. Sigur Rós will also play by the infamous dam construction site in Kárahnjúkar, which means that they're not only flying the flag of a tragically hip and

unbearably fashionable music scene, but also fighting for a nature reserve that may or may not exist in a few years' time.

So in effect, Sigur Rós have become a face found on both sides of the 'hip Iceland' coin. If you like Sigur Rós, not only are you chic and cutting edge fashion-wise, but you're also environmentally aware, thereby making you the coolest motherfucker on the planet, and who wouldn't want to claim that title?

The huge crowd at Miklatún, estimated to have peaked at over 15,000 people, was certainly evidence of that. Easily half of the people there were not there to see a concert. They were taking part in an event. For those not in the know, Icelanders taking part in

an event are somewhat similar to the teachers who supervise senior prom. They stand around watching, smiling politely as they watch everyone. Occasionally, they'll mumble to each other something like, "Oh, isn't this lovely," hoping that by being there and having a good time they'll appear hip and cool and youthful.

People brought their kids. Toddlers, infants, pre-teens... the whole fucking circus came to town. Some people even brought dogs. For the most part, the Sigur Rós fans didn't really mind, what with the kids and the dogs being so cute and all, but friction started to build as the night went on.

Amor Vincit Omnia

Sigur Rós walked onstage dutifully applauded by all in attendance and played a fairly standard show while the sun set behind the decidedly ad-hoc looking stage. Jónsi's characteristic mewl sounded better drifting across the open air than it does within the

confines of the stadiums they usually play in Iceland. The nameless songs of their "()" album were particularly well-received, and it's quite possible that they hit their peak with that album. It finds astonishing purity in its anonymity, and the well-rounded and simple guitar-bass-drums orchestration is much more defining for them as a band than the skittish experimentation of their earlier works and the playful folk of Takk.

But the moment that defined Sunday night at Miklatún came not during one of the nameless songs, but during the several-beat stop in Ágætis Byrjun's Viðrar Vel Til Loftárása. The song had been drifting through its characteristic folk haze for about five minutes or so when everybody in the band stopped playing simultaneously. The bemused snobs who were trying to appear cool and cultured of course knew nothing of Sigur Rós's music, and instantly started clapping, thinking the song to be over. The Sigur Rós-krútt fascists were evidently greatly insulted by this, for they started to shush everybody, putting their fingers to their lips and hissing at anyone seen applauding.

This, I thought, was snobbery taken to its highest limits. A bunch of clueless enthusiasts had come to see a band they knew nothing about and ended up getting drenched with saliva by people who somehow assumed that by being intimately familiar with the band and its songs, they were somehow empowered and allowed to go around shushing people for clapping.

At that moment, I wrote everyone off as idiots. I can't decide which group of people I hold in greater contempt. The only place in the concert area that I found solace (as well as a semblance of intelligence) was under a low tree just to the right of the stage, where some people had taken to lying down and closing their eyes. "We're just enjoying the weather," one of them said, and it was hard to dispute the fact that Sigur Rós had been very lucky in that department; the sun shone warmly as it sunk, and there was no wind.

"Besides, I've always felt this was the best thing to do at Sigur Rós concerts," another said as he lay on a blanket with his eyes closed, slightly drunk. I looked at the blanket next to his, where a young couple lay embracing. Fucking hippies, I thought, stifling a yawn. But maybe they were on to something.

it's free

the REYKJAVÍK GRAPEVINE

INFO

Issue 12, 2006

8 Page Listings Section in Your Pocket



Marathons in the Morning, Culture at Night - Menningarnótt in Reykjavík

Downtown Reykjavík will celebrate its 11th annual Culture Night on Saturday, August 19th. This festival has become an annual event in the capital, always held the Saturday closest to Reykjavík's birthday, the 18th of August, attracting almost one-third of the country's population to the city centre every year.

Mayor of Reykjavík, Vilhjálmur P. Vilhjálmsson opens up the festival together with approximately 3,000 runners in the annual Reykjavík Marathon at Lækjargata, sponsored, this year, by Icelandic bank Glitnir. For 12 hours, the city becomes ultra-vibrant and all ages, as families crowd to celebrate all aspects of expression... and marketing. The exhibitions, short theatre pieces, the open house at Reykjavík Swimming Pool, a food tasting at

Ostabúðin, fashion shows, parades, flea markets, lectures and concerts are just a sampling of the tight schedule that fills the day.

Whether it is a large art gallery, popular fashion shop or a cramped workshop in a small side street, pedestrians can almost be guaranteed to find something to spark the imagination. Add to that full-costumed Vikings marching around the centre, belly dancers shaking their hips while bongo drummers and brass bands keep up the rhythm in the streets, or radio hosts throwing a barbecue for hungry rockers, you truly will experience the whole spectrum the locals have to offer.

At 22:30, Culture Night ends with a big fireworks display out at sea, launched from the cruiser Ægir, which

will be located just off Sæbraut.

Beware, after the last rocket has sparked, the family folks usually rush back to their homes. At that moment, Reykjavík tends to lose all its cultural charm so apparent during the day, as the drunk masses wander around the streets with all the proper horseplay. If you take your time and suck in the entire atmosphere, and don't mind witnessing some rather unpleasant behaviour, Culture Night will be a day to remember and undoubtedly a night unlike any others witnessed in any world capital. Highlights of the schedule can be found in the listings section of Grapevine. SJ



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A. Hansen Restaurant
Steak House & Bar, Vesturgata 4, Hafnarfjörður, tel. 565 1130

Music and nightlife events usually start around 21:00, unless otherwise stated. Pubs close at 01:00 on weekdays and much, much later on weekends. For those just wanting to party, the pubs and clubs don't get crowded until after midnight on weekends, although Thursday is a semi-official night out.
Compiled by Steinunn Jakobsdóttir
listings@grapevine.is

FRIDAY – 11 AUGUST

Alfons X
KAFFIBARINN

Kóngulóarbandið followed by DJ Maggi
HRESSÓ (starts at 22:00)

Svarar Knútur + guests
RÓSENBERG

Peter Andersson in concert
12 TÓNAR (starts at 17:00)

DJ Símon
VEGAMÓT

The Gay Pride Opening Ceremony with Ruth & Vigdís & Queentastic from Osló, Rósa Guðmundsdóttir and Shitting Glitter from LA.
LOFTKASTALINN THEATER

Rockabilly with DJ Curver
BAR 11

DJ Óli and Anna Brá
PRIKIÐ

Roger Hodgson in concert
BROADWAY

SATURDAY – 12 AUGUST

Svarar Knútur + guests
RÓSENBERG

Árni Sveins
KAFFIBARINN

DJ Kári
VEGAMÓT

DJ Andri followed by Disco King Gísli Galdur
PRIKIÐ

The Gay Pride Parade
HLEMMUR (starts at 14:00)

Outdoor concert at Lækjargata with Regína Ósk, Fridrik Ómar, Gabriel, The Nanas, Ruth & Vigdís & Queentastic, Shitting Glitter, Reykjavík! among others.
LÆKJARGATA (starts at 15:15)

The annual Gay Pride Dance with DJ Páll Óskar
NASA

Gulli Ósoma
BAR 11

Touch in concert followed by DJ Georg
HRESSÓ (starts at 22:00)

Morrissey in concert
LAUGARDALSHÖLL

TUESDAY – 15 AUGUST

DJ Ernir
PRIKIÐ

WEDNESDAY – 16 AUGUST

DJ Kvikindi
PRIKIÐ

DJ Palli Maus
VEGAMÓT

Beta and Elín Ellenardætur in concert
RÓSENBERG

DJ Steinunn and Silja
KAFFIBARINN

Hardcore band He Who Corrupts accompanied by Celestine, Gavin Portland and Road Rage
KAFFI HLJÓMALIND (starts at 20:00)

THURSDAY – 17 AUGUST

Grapevine Bad Taste Summer Series: Lada Sport. As Bad Taste just moved to a new and bigger location at Klappastígur 27, there will be an opening celebration as well.
GALLERY LOBSTER OR FAME,
starts at 17:00

Grapevine Bad Taste Summer Series Lada Sport + guests
AMSTERDAM, starts at 21:00

DJ Símon
VEGAMÓT

Hip-hop band Original Melody
KAFFI HLJÓMALIND (starts at 20:00)

DJ Maggi Legó
PRIKIÐ

Andrúm in concert
RÓSENBERG

Hermigervill
KAFFIBARINN

Che Boy Carter in concert
HRESSÓ (starts at 22:00)

FRIDAY – 18 AUGUST

Mimosa play django-jazz
RÓSENBERG

DJ Benni
VEGAMÓT

90s Night with DJ Curver
BAR 11

Touch in concert followed by DJ Johnny
HRESSÓ (starts at 22:00)

Telepathetics release concert
ÞJÓÐLEIKHÚSJALLARINN

DJ Baldur
KAFFIBARINN

DJ Danni Deluxe and Dóri DNA
PRIKIÐ

The one and only Chippendales group entertains women at Broadway
BROADWAY (for tickets visit www.midi.is)

SATURDAY – 19 AUGUST (CULTURE NIGHT)

Summerjazz: Kristjana Stefánsdóttir with Sigurður Flosason quartet
JÓMFRÚIN (starts at 16:00)

Video composition by Ólöf Arnalds
ÞJÓÐMENNINGARHÚS (Third floor)

KK and Ellen
KLAMBRATÚN (13:45 and 16:00)

Live music, exhibitions and workshops at Hafnarhúsið
HAFNARHÚSIÐ, TRYGGVAGATA

Concerts organised by Landsbanki and Gallery Lobster or Fame. Cappybara, Benny Crespo's Gang, Reykjavík!, Jan Mayen, Dikta, Jakobínarína, Skátar, Hairdoctor, Bogomil Font with Flís and Jeff Who?
LANDSBANKI, LAUGAVEGUR 77 (from 14:00-18:00)

Concerts organised by Landsbanki. Gunni and Felix, Iceland Dance Company, Guitar Islandico, Baggalútur, Mezzoforte, Benni Hemm Hemm among many others.
LANDSBANKI, AUSTURSTRÆTI (from 18:00-22:00)

College concert programme at Iðnó. Remúkkulaði, Le Poulet de Romance, Premenningasambandið, Fjölnir, Hressó/Fresh, The Neighbours, Thugz on Parole among others.
IÐNÓ (starts at 15:00)

Concerts promoted by Grandmother

Records
KAFFI HLJÓMALIND (starts at 13:00)

Opera festival at Klambratún
KLAMBRATÚN (starts at 20:00)

Fræ and Sometime in concert
LAUGAVEGUR 27 (starts at 21:00)

Fræbblarnir and Megasukk in concert
VIÐ TJÖRNINA, TEMPLARASUND 3
Troubadours Gotti and Eisi followed by DJ Johnny
HRESSÓ (starts at 19:00)

Barbeque and concerts with Brain Police, Lights on the Highway and Dr Mister and Mister Handsome
DILLON (from 17:00-22:00)

Mimosa play django-jazz
RÓSENBERG

Páll Óskar and Monica in concert
LISTASAFN EINARS JÓNSSONAR, NJÁLSGATA

A mix of musicians at Ingólfstorg. Among performances are techno-band Stefán, Andrúm, Hjálpræðisherinn, Hugskýki and Gospel Invasion Group.
INGÓLFSTORG (starts at 16:00)

Troubadour Kristján
ONI, LAUGAVEGUR 12 (starts at 16:00)

Sálin in concert
NASA

Concerts in the yard behind Prikió with Dr. Mister and Mister Handsome, Hairdoctor, Truck Load of Steel and more followed by DJ Andri and Gísli Galdur inside.
PRIKIÐ

DJ Benni and co.
KAFFIBARINN

Gulli Ósoma
BAR 11

Gullfoss og Geysir DJ-duo
VEGAMÓT

TUESDAY – 22 AUGUST

DJ Ernir
PRIKIÐ

WEDNESDAY – 23 AUGUST

DJ Kocoon
PRIKIÐ

DJ Baldur
KAFFIBARINN

THURSDAY – 24 AUGUST

Grapevine Bad Taste Summer Series: Pants Yell!
GALLERY LOBSTER OR FAME,

starts at 17:00

Grapevine Bad Taste Summer Series: Pants Yell + guests
AMSTERDAM, starts at 21:00

DJ Jón Atli
KAFFIBARINN

Che Boy Carter in concert
HRESSÓ (starts at 22:00)

Voxfox quartet with band
RÓSENBERG

DJ Anna Brá
PRIKIÐ

FRIDAY – 25 AUGUST

Franz and Kristó live followed by DJ Kári
PRIKIÐ

Árni Sveins
KAFFIBARINN

Misery Loves Company
RÓSENBERG

DJ Palli Maus
BAR 11

Mammút in concert
12 TÓNAR (starts at 17:00)

Hressó Garden Party
HRESSÓ (starts at 22:00)

Pants Yell! from Boston in concert. Also playing are Dýrdín, The Foghorns and The Way Down
AMSTERDAM

SATURDAY – 26 AUGUST

Summerjazz: Final concert in the summer jazz series with KK, Sigurður Flosason, Eyþór Gunnarsson and Valdimar Kolbeinn Sigurjónsson
JÓMFRÚIN (starts at 16:00)

Alfons X
KAFFIBARINN

Sessý and Sjönni followed by DJ Maggi
HRESSÓ (starts at 22:00)

Skítamóráll in concert
NASA

Misery Loves Company
RÓSENBERG

Release gíg with Benni B-Ruff
PRIKIÐ

Gulli Ósoma
BAR 11



Cafè Rosenberg

Live music Thu-Sat

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Culture Concerts at Landsbankinn

Landsbanki keeps celebrating its longevity by co-sponsoring concerts during Culture Night with Gallery Lobster or Fame. A big stage will be put up in front of the bank at Laugavegur 77 where local bands Cappybara, Benny Crespo's Gang, Reykjavík!, Jan Mayen, Dikta, Jakobínarína, Skátar, Hairdoctor, Bogomil Font with Flís and Jeff Who? will play from 14:00-18:00. The programme then moves to the bank's Austurstræti headquarters where the highlight will be the Mezzoforte concert, in which they'll play with all original members for the first time in 20 years. Landsbanki has sponsored Culture Night from the beginning but whether a giant cake will be served to passers-by has not been confirmed.
Landsbanki, August 19th

He Who Corrupts, Gavin Portland and Road Rage at Hjómáland

The music will be loud at friendly and organic Kaffi Hjómáland on Laugavegur when American heavy metal band He Who Corrupts accompanied by local hardcore and metal rockers in Celestine, Gavin Portland and Road Rage will play a gig on the 16th of August. He Who Corrupts have an upcoming EP release titled Microeconomics, to be released next month, so the concerts stand to be a good warm-up for what's yet to come. The show starts at 20:00.
Kaffi Hjómáland, August 16th

AKUREYRI THEATRICAL COMPANY

Hafnarstræti 57, 600 Akureyri

www.leikfelag.is

Little Shop of Horrors

Extra shows to be set up in Reykjavík at the Icelandic opera in September. Tickets on sale now.

BROADWAY

Ármúla 9

www.broadway.is

Le Sing

A combination of dinner and a show; here the waiters are also the performers.

ICELAND DANCE COMPANY

www.id.is for an up-to-date list of events by the Iceland Dance Company.

ICELANDIC OPERA

Ingólfsstræti

www.opera.is

Closed for the summer

ICELAND SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Phone: +354 562 2255

www.sinfonia.is

Programme begins in the autumn

IÐNÓ

Vonarstræti 3

Best of Light Nights
How Do You Like Iceland?

Iðnó restaurant is offering a special dinner and a show deal.

Between 18:00-20:00 guests can enjoy an Icelandic dinner buffet for 3,800 ISK.

On Mondays and Tuesdays, Iðnó is offering the dinner buffet plus the show Best of

Light Nights at 20:30 for 6,000 ISK. On Wednesdays, dinner and the show How Do You Like Iceland? costs 5,300 ISK.

Ó. JOHNSON & KAABER HÚSIÐ

Setún 8

ART-FART THEATRE FESTIVAL

11.08.2006

Veggmyndir

Veggmyndir, 20:00

Sarent

RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:No

Subject, 22:00

12.08.2006

Íslenska hreyfipróunarsamsteypan

Meyjarheftið, 18:00

ELA

Lebanon is a good place for rebirth, 20:00

B8

Íslenzk fyndni LOL djök, 22:30

13.08.2006

ELA

Lebanon is a good place for rebirth, 18:00

Íslenska hreyfipróunarsamsteypan

Meyjarheftið, 20:00

Brite Theatre

Kjöt, 22:00

15.08.2006

Brite Theatre

Kjöt, 20:00

16.08.2006

Sarent

RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:No

Subject, 18:00

Íslenska hreyfipróunarsamsteypan

Meyjarheftið, 20:00

B8

Íslenzk fyndni LOL djök, 22:00

17.08.2006

Sarent

RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:No

Subject, 20:00

Brite Theatre

Kjöt, 22:00

18.08.2006

Veggmyndir

Veggmyndir, 20:00

B8

Íslenzk fyndni LOL djök, 22:00

ELA

Lebanon is a good place for rebirth, 24:00

20.08.2006

ELA

Lebanon is a good place for rebirth, 20:00

THE NATIONAL THEATRE

Hverfisgata 19

www.leikhusid.is

Closed until August 28

THE REYKJAVÍK CITY THEATRE

Listabraut 3

www.borgarleikhus.is

On the Main Stage

Footloose

Ronia the Robber's Daughter
Who Wants to Find a Million Krónur?

THE SETTLEMENT CENTRE (BORGARNES)

http://landnam.is/tenglar/index_en.html

Mr. Skallagrímsson

Benedikt Erlingsson stars in a funny one-man retelling of the story of Egill Skallagrímsson, the infamous Icelandic Viking.

The final shows are the last Friday, Saturday and Sunday in July at 20:00.

CULTURE NIGHT SATURDAY, AUGUST 19TH

Drekaskógur

Actors aged 9-17 who participated in acting workshops with Ismeda.
Austurbær, Snorrabraut 37

Guy's Night/ Herranótt

Students at the Reykjavík Gymnasium perform.
Iðnó, Vonarstræti 3.

Leftovers/Afgangar

A play about love. Elma Lís Gunnarsdóttir & Stefnir Hallur Stefánsson act.
Austurbær, Snorrabraut 37.

No Exit

Members of the Philosophy and Culture Association of the Akureyri Gymnasium perform Jean-Paul Sartre's classic play, translated into Icelandic by Ásgeir Berg Matthíasson.
Tjarnarbrú

Other House/ Hitt Húsið

Diverse performances by young artists inside, outside and all around the Other House.
Hitt Húsið, Pósthústræti 3-5.

Street Theatre Company Hvítir Mávar

Performing at various locations around town until 18:00.

1 CAFÉ
Café Roma
 Laugavegur 118

Roma, at the far end of the main street Laugavegur, is a deli-type coffee house, offering a variety of breads, soup and tempting cookies, cakes and other sweet things. Their special offers around lunch time are always a bargain.

8 Tíu Dropar
 Laugavegur 27

A very nice, old-fashioned café. It's suburban, as all traditional coffee shops should be, and this place makes you feel warm, both with its atmosphere and the generosity of the coffee refills.

15 Café Victor
 Hafnarstræti 1-3

Spelled with a C rather than the Icelandic K, presumably in an effort to seem more cosmopolitan. This play seems to be working, as the bar has become a hangout for older foreigners. The Viking ship sitting on top of the building might also add to the appeal. The crowd is very mixed, both in origin and age, and so is the music.

22 Þrúvalla
 Austurstræti 22

Þrúvalla is one of the biggest clubs/bars in downtown Reykjavík, situated in one of the more ideal locations for such an institution in the city. It's divided between two floors, although the distinction between the ambience on the top and bottom floors has faded away in recent times.

25 Ölstofan
 Vegamótstígur

Ölstofan is an unpretentious, comfortable and straightforward place to do just that. It's also known as a hangout for the 'intellectual' circles of Reykjavík, as well as some media types, the opposite of intellectual in this country. Music is almost never played at Ölstofan – so you can actually have a conversation.

28 Kaffibrennslan
 Þórunnstræti 9

Café, bistro, restaurant, bar – whatever you want to call it, Kaffibrennslan is a consistently pleasant place to go for snacks and refreshments of whatever variety you happen to crave. They also have the largest selection of beers in Reykjavík. We recommend the Cobra and Staropramen.

31 RESTAURANTS
Krua Thai
 Tryggvagata 14

This authentic Thai restaurant is one of the better bargains in town. We challenge you to find a better meal for the same price anywhere else. They have their menu outside with numbered colour images. Just say the number and eat the food.

34 Argentina
 Barónsstígur 11a

Perennial favourite, Argentina is a fine dining steak house. For whale-enthusiasts, you can also sample the local Minke, or excellent fish. This restaurant has maintained its reputation with three things: perfect cuts of meat, excellent service, and an excellent wine list.

37 Tapas
 Vesturgata 3b

Those with a bit of money and time on their hands would do well to spend an evening or two at Tapas, having course after course of wonderful miniature dishes served to them. Oddly, it's also a great place to get tasty and affordable lobster. If you don't feel like getting up right away afterwards, there's also a lounge.

44 Þejars Bestu
 Tryggvagata

A veritable institution in central Reykjavík, and probably the most consistently successful business the city has seen, Þejars Bestu is actually just a simple hot dog stand. Their menu consists of hot dogs and Coke – and nothing else. You don't have to be a Buddhist to ask them to make you one with everything.

2 Ráðhúskaffi
 City Hall

Ráðhúskaffi, situated inside the Reykjavík City Hall, is a comfortable choice for the view over Tjörninn (the pond). It's especially convenient on Iceland's so-called 'window weather' days – the days that are only beautiful if you stay indoors. Coffee, light snacks, art exhibitions, Internet access, a topographic model of Iceland and municipal politics: all conveniently under the same roof.

9 Kaffitár
 Laugavegur 8

This is the downtown store of one of the country's finest coffee importers, and the quality of the product is as excellent as you would expect. While anything here is good, the speciality coffee drinks are truly remarkable: our favourite, the Azteca, an espresso drink with lime and Tabasco.

16 Vegamót
 Vegamótstígur 4

Vegamót (crossroads) has an appealing lunch menu, they serve brunch during the weekends, and the kitchen is open until 22:00 daily. After that the beat goes on, and you can check the end results in photos published the day after on their website www.vegamat.is. If you like Oliver, try Vegamót and vice versa.

23 Café Cultura
 Hverfisgata 18

The trendy Café Cultura is located in the same building as the Intercultural Centre, and has a distinct international flavour. A good-value menu, friendly service and settings that allow you to either sit down and carry on discussions, or dance the night away.

26 Thorvaldsen
 Austurstræti 8

This place is fancy, and it knows it. Civilian attire is looked down upon, so don't expect to get in wearing hiking boots. DJs play on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Arrive before 12 if you want to avoid the queue.

29 Glaumar
 Tryggvagata 20

Partly a sports bar, Glaumar is also a popular venue for live bands and DJs, but mostly it's just a good place to get drunk and party. They can host private gatherings before midnight on weekdays, and you would be hard pressed to get a better deal on a keg party than here.

32 Tveir Fiskar
 Geirsgata 9

Located right by the harbour, Tveir Fiskar boasts some of the freshest fish in town – they prefer it to still be moving when they buy it. Their menu also dares to be different, and this just might be your only chance to sample the delectable delights of raw dolphin.

35 Vin og Skel
 Laugavegur 55

If you like fresh seafood and are in the mood for something a little different, this cosy but ambitious restaurant just might fit the bill. Shellfish, salmon, squid, lobster and other creatures of the deep predominate the menu here. There is no smoking in the restaurant, but if you want to have a go at sitting outside there are fleece blankets provided.

38 Sægreifinn
 Geirsgata

Places recommended for their local touch tend to instantly lose any element of the exotic, but Sægreifinn (The Sea Baron) is an exception. It's a combination of a fish store and a... well, not exactly a restaurant but a place that serves prepared food, located in a harbour warehouse. Smell of fish, the view over the harbour, an old man that looks exactly like an Icelandic fisherman should. What's not to love?

45 Subway
 Austurstræti

You know exactly what you get when you walk into a Subway restaurant, and their sub sandwiches are always made from fresh ingredients – right in front of your eyes. Reasonably priced and far healthier than most alternatives – provided you show some restraint when you order.

3 Grái Kötturrinn
 Hverfisgata 16a

Grái Kötturrinn (the grey cat) is a cosy place that's especially popular during the morning hours. Their breakfast is legendary, but they tend not to be open later in the day. A great place to nurse a hangover, or just to start the workday.

10 Segafredo
 By Laekjartorg

Italian coffee chain Segafredo seems to be doing brisk business by Laekjartorg, with locals and tourists alike flocking to sip their espressos at the conveniently placed tables outside. The staff are expert baristas, and, even though Iceland is proud of its coffee, nobody quite tops the Segafredo latte.

17 B5
 Bankastræti 5

B5 is a bistro with a Scandinavian focus on the menu. Don't be fooled by the impressive collection of design classics that you see in the window when passing by – it's neither cold nor overly expensive, but rather a cosy place with friendly service.

4 Kaffi Hjómaland
 Laugavegur 21

Despite hosting the occasional rock concert, Kaffi Hjómaland is a peaceful café with perfect windows for people watching and a lot of daylight. It's run by a non-profit organisation and only serves organic & fair-trade products. It's strictly a non-smoking establishment.

11 BARS 'N' BISTROS
Sólón
 Bankastræti 7a

Sólón is a nightclub on Friday and Saturday nights, but during the daytime it's a café/bistro. On weeknights they're a restaurant with a decent menu as well, and an art exhibition on the walls to finish the package.

18 Rósenberg
 Laekjartorg 2

Perhaps the closest thing to a jazz club in town, here old instruments line the walls. People go there for conversation and to listen to music rather than dance. The place tends to have jazz- or blues-type music, and is developing a bluegrass scene.

5 Mokka
 Skólavörðustígur 3a

Kaffi Mokka is one of the oldest cafés in Reykjavík, dating back to the 1950s. Famous for their dark, smoky atmosphere, loyal clientele and some of the best waffles in town.

12 Oliver
 Laugavegur 20a

Oliver is one of the biggest hits in town at the moment. Good news for the early birds: they open at 8 in the morning with an extensive brunch menu. In the evenings they are always crowded – the everlasting queue outside is especially massive late on weekends.

19 Grand Rokk
 Smiðustígur 6

As the Viking-style garden and logo accurately signal, this hardcore chess hangout is no place for the weak. Chess bars are that tough in Iceland. Even if the downstairs atmosphere can feel a bit ominous at times, it's one of the best venues for live music in town. If you speak Icelandic you can also take part in the pub quiz on Fridays at 17:30. Participation is free and the winner walks away with a case of beer!

6 Ömmukaffi
 Austurstræti

The name literally means "grandma's coffee shop", but here you can find people of all ages and all nationalities. It has a very friendly, down-to-earth feel to it. Affordable prices on coffee, cakes and the lunch menu. Try their speciality, the South African latte.

13 Kaffibarinn
 Bergtatastræti 1

Kaffibarinn has a reputation as a hangout for artists and others who think they are hip. Friday and Saturday nights serve as the weekly peaks of claustrophobia, while weekdays and afternoons can be comfortable, if banal.

20 Bar 11
 Laugavegur 11

While the place is only open on the weekends, Bar 11 is a popular rock bar on Laugavegur and one of the main late-night party venues in town. You'll feel the floor jumping every Friday and Saturday, and it's neither you nor an earthquake. Live concerts and a nice foosball table upstairs.

7 Babalú
 Skólavörðustígur 22a

One of the youngest coffeehouses in Reykjavík is also the homiest. Almost like a living room away from home, Babalú keeps it simple, quiet and cosy with coffee and the occasional crêpe.

14 Sirkus
 Klappargata 30

Of absolutely no relation to the trashy culture guide, or trashy TV station that stole its name, Sirkus is worshipped like few other locales in Iceland. Elements of the odd and alternative cultural institution include an upstairs that looks and smells like a bus, a garden, a flea market and a queue on weekend nights that looks never-ending.

21 Hressingarskálinn
 Austurstræti 20

The celebrated site of one of the more famous coffeehouses in Iceland, this bar/café/bistro brings a European flair to the city. That is until about 11, when things get to rockin', and you can see the true character of Reykjavík.

24 Þríkið
 Bankastræti 12

Þríkið has changed noticeably in character in recent years, as it used to be an old-fashioned and traditional downtown coffeehouse. Somehow the younger crowd caught on and transformed the place to its present form: a diner during the day and a rowdy nightclub on weekends. You can also borrow board games there, such as backgammon or chess, and it is a popular breakfast spot early in the morning.

27 Kaffi Amsterdam
 Hafnarstræti 5

Kaffi Amsterdam is a cosy tavern located in the centre of Reykjavík. Known mostly for its rambling late-hour drinking crowd, Amsterdam recently established itself as a fresh new venue for the city's music talent.

30 Dillon
 Laugavegur 30

Legendary Icelandic rockers have been known to DJ at this place from time to time, and Þróstur from Mímus has even tended the bar. You can pretty much guarantee this place will be rocking any time you walk in on a Friday or Saturday night.

33 Hornið
 Hafnarstræti 15

Means "the corner" and the place lives up to its name by... well, being on a corner. This is actually the oldest Italian restaurant in town, celebrating its 27th year, and it always seems to be consistently popular. Excellent quality pizza, pasta and salads – all priced affordably.

36 Tjarnarbakkinn
 Vönnuátræti 3

Tjarnarbakkinn is right above the Íþróttahöll, so it's an ideal place to go before shows, or during if you prefer a more quiet atmosphere. If you sit by the window you get nice views of the pond, and in the summers you can enjoy your meal outside. The lamb comes especially recommended; it's one of those rare traditional Icelandic dishes that aren't an acquired taste.

43 Bernhöftsbakari
 Bergtatastræti 13

The oldest bakery in Reykjavík, founded in 1834. If you are particular about your bread this is about the best place in central Reykjavík to stock up on a variety of freshly baked loaves – they also do a particularly moist and juicy version of the ever popular vinarbráú pastries. You can even call ahead and have your favourite items reserved, if you're afraid someone else might beat you to that last snúður or kleina.

50 Vitabar
 Bergþórsgata 21

Actually a bar, but best known for its hamburgers. A burger with fries for 500 is one of the best meal deals in town, but special mention must go to the Forget-Me-Not blue cheese and garlic extravaganza.



Regarded as a national treasure by enthusiastic curio-shoppers of all ages, visiting tourists often cite Vesturgata store Fríða frænka as a "must-see". Featuring a wide selection of old stuff in varying degrees of kitsch, Fríða frænka offers furniture, clothing, toys and kitchen utensils among other things... including a view of our office. HM Fríða Frænka, Vesturgata 3, 101 Reykjavík



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VIÐ TJÖRNINA

Templarand 3, 101 Reykjavík
 Tel: 551 8666
 E-mail: vidtjornina@simnet.is

41 FAST FOOD
American Style
 Tryggvagata 26

Famous for their burgers and fries, American Style actually serves a variety of American-influenced dishes with a strong local flavour. You get the feeling that you are expected to eat a great deal, so loosen your belt a bit before you dig in.

42 Pizza King
 Hafnarstræti 18

Most people get to know Pizza King after a late-night drinking session leaves them tired and hungry downtown, and it truly is a lifesaver in those situations. The difference between Pizza King and some less savoury fast food options downtown is that you would be happy to go back to eat there while sober, and their special lunch offers make that a very attractive options.

49 Kebabúsið
 Laekjartorg 2

Some of the best fish and chips in town can be found at Kebabúsið, and they obviously have a selection of kebabs as well. The falafel comes recommended, despite being a relatively unappreciated menu item in Iceland, and the beef and lamb pitas are quite good as well.

tvær fiskar

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Stormbreaker

An awkward adolescent British orphan discovers he has certain powers and uses them to tangle in a secret world that adults know little about. No, it's not another Harry Potter installment, it's Stormbreaker, about a 14-year-old spy. And, like Harry Potter and other subliterate silver screen efforts, its based on a best-selling British book. As Jamie Oliver recently demonstrated, British children have been raised on sugar, oil and fried goods. Their literature is to actual fiction as a fried Snickers bar is to a meal. Watch this movie if you thought that your heavy child might at least be good in school, and consider it a wake up call. Yeah, your kids are going to be fat AND dumb. *BC*

THE BREAK UP

Jennifer Aniston and Vince Vaughn star in this romantic comedy. *Sambtón Kringlunni, Háskólabíó, Sambtón Alfabakka, Sambtón Akureyri*

CARS

An animated children's film about anthropomorphic automobiles. *Háskólabíó, Sambtón Alfabakka*

CLICK

Adam Sandler's latest comedic vehicle, telling the story of a man with a remote control that can affect reality itself. *Smárabíó, Laugarásbíó, Regnboginn, Borgarbíó*

THE DA VINCI CODE

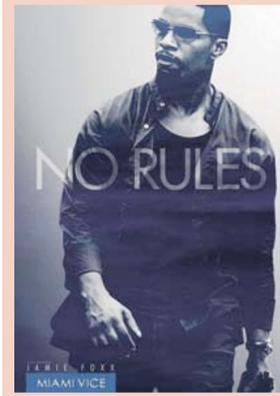
A thriller based on the book of the same name and starring Tom Hanks. *Regnboginn*

HALF LIGHT

Demi Moore in a supernatural thriller where she plays a writer who runs into all kinds of ghosts while on vacation. *Háskólabíó*

THE LONG WEEKEND

Two brothers, one a nerd, the other a playboy, with very different goals in life, spend a weekend together, ending in all kinds of stupidity. *Sambtón Kringlunni, Sambtón Alfabakka*



Miami Vice

As we point out in this very magazine, Colin Farrell has done more harm to civilization than many a totalitarian dictator. Most things he touches turn to crap. However, when he sticks to lighter fare, he sometimes gets by. We can only hope this is the case, despite the many reviews complaining about his curious anti-charisma, spoiled-kid pull on the film. Michael Mann and Jamie Fox gave us Collateral, and they did that despite Tom Cruise, so this effort, with the same director and actor, seems bullet proof. At least it will have an ending, unlike the other blockbuster in the theatres. *BC*

erland, Eva Longoria and Kim Basinger. *Smárabíó, Laugarásbíó, Borgarbíó*

SILENT HILL

A woman searching for her daughter somehow ends up fighting off a huge army of monsters in a deserted town. *Smárabíó, Borgarbíó*

STICK IT

This teen movie about a misfit overcoming adversity and earning acceptance as an equal stars Jeff Bridges as her gym coach. Go figure. *Smárabíó*

STORMBREAKER

Ewan McGregor, Mickey Rourke and Alicia Silverstone together in an adventure film about a teenage super-spy who ends up working for MI6. *Laugarásbíó, Regnboginn*

SUPERMAN RETURNS

The Man of Steel resumes kicking ass after two decades of being a lazy, paralysed bitch. *Sambtón Kringlunni, Háskólabíó, Sambtón Alfabakka, Sambtón Akureyri, Sambtón Keflavík*

ULTRAVIOLET

A crazy quasi-vampire runs around protecting a kid by slicing up monsters with a huge sword. Her motivation? The kid can make her human again. Somehow. *Regnboginn, Smárabíó*

Visit www.kvikmyndir.is for regularly updates on new films and showtimes.

Regnboginn
Hverfisgata 54
101 Reykjavík
Tel. 551-9000

Háskólabíó
Hagatorgi
107 Reykjavík
Tel. 525-5400

Laugarásbíó
Laugarási
104 Reykjavík
Tel. 565-0118

Sambtón
Álfabakka 8
109 Reykjavík
Tel. 575-8900

Kringlubíó
Kringlunni 4-12
103 Reykjavík
Tel. 575-8900

Sambtón Akureyri
Ráðhústorgi
600 Akureyri
Tel. 461-4666

Smárabíó
Smáralind
201 Kópavogur
Tel. 564-0000

Selfossbíó
Eyrarvegur 2
800 Selfoss
Tel. 482-3007

Nýja-Bíó
Hafnargata 33
230 Reykjanesbær
Tel. 421-1170

AMINA GALLERY

Ingólfsstræti 8

Bára Kristinsdóttir exhibits her photographic exhibit titled "my brother's environment".

AURUM

Bankastræti 4

Exhibition by artist Ingibjörg Jónsdóttir.

THE CULTURE HOUSE

Hverfisgata 15

Designer Jóna Björg Jónsdóttir of "jbj design" discusses her pieces in the Icelandic Fashion exhibit.

GALLERÍ FOLD

Rauðarárstígur 14

Back gallery: Exhibition of the works of Þorvaldur Skúlason. Side galleries: Exhibition of the works of Kjartan Guðjónsson.

GALLERÍ SÆVAR KARLS

Exhibition of work that the gallery has sold over the past 18 years.

GEL GALLERY

Hverfisgata 37

Photography exhibit by Ásta Júlía & Haukur M: over 300 photographs, each taken on a different day out of the same apartment window on Laugavegur.

GULLKUNST HELGU

Laugavegur 13

Exhibition of Bergur Thorberg's coffee paintings, titled "Og ég heyrir hjartsláttinn, hef hann með mér inn í minn".

GULLSMIÐJA HANSÍNU JENS

Laugavegur 42

Artist Inga Elín and designer Jóna Björg exhibit their work.

HÓTEL HOLT

Bergstaðstræti 37

Art historian Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson gives tours of the building and discusses its various pieces.

THE NAKED APE

Laugavegur 32

Three young artists exhibit their work accompanied by a DJ.

ÓFEIGUR GULLSMIÐJA

Skólavörðustígur 5

Paintings of Sigurður Örylgsson exhibited in honour of his 60th birthday.

REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM - KJARVALSSTAÐIR

Flóakagata

Special children's programme, including guided tours through the museum's

exhibits as well as an art workshop. Girls' choir of Reykjavík will perform along with a well-known Swedish teen choir. Light refreshments offered. Open until 19:00.

SÍM (ASSOCIATION OF ICELANDIC ARTISTS)

Seljavogur 32
Open house of the artist workspaces. Hulda Hákon, Hulda Stefánsdóttir & Hulda Vilhjálmisdóttir exhibit their work in the main gallery.

THORVALDSEN BAR

Austurstræti 8-10

Arnar Ingí Gylfason guides guests

through the exhibit "Support your local painter".

TRYGGINGAMIÐSTÖÐ

Ádalstræti 6

Photography exhibit titled "Lithuania - 24 hours" taken between 6:00 April 30th and 6:00 April 31st, 2004, the day Lithuania joined the EU.

UNDERGROUND

Veltusund 1

Klængur Gunnarsson's photography exhibition titled "Norður/Norður". Open until 21:00.

WWW.GRAPEVINE.IS
NEWS | BACK ISSUES | PODCASTS | LISTINGS | REVIEWS

The Grapevine lists exhibitions from galleries throughout Iceland. If you would like to be included, free of charge, contact the Grapevine by email at listings@grapevine.is. Compiled by Valgerður Þóroddsdóttir

101 GALLERY

Hverfisgata 18
Thu.-Sat. 14-17 and by appointment

28.07-02.09.06

Serge Comte

THE EINAR JÓNSSON MUSEUM

Eiríksgata
Tue.-Sun. 14-17
www.skulptur.is

Permanent exhibition of the work of sculptor Einar Jónsson

THE CULTURE HOUSE

Hverfisgata 15
Open daily 11-17
www.thjodmenning.is

29.06.06-27.02.07

Icelandic Fashion 2006

Permanent Exhibits

Medieval Manuscripts; The National Museum - as it was; The Library Room

DWARF GALLERY

Grundarárstígur 21
Fri.-Sat. 18-19
<http://tbis.is/birta>

29.07-19.08.06

Bec Stupak

GALLERY 100 DEGREES

Bejarbáls 1
Mon.-Fri. 8:30-16
www.or.is/Forsida/Gallery100

GALLERÍ ANIMA

Ingólfsstræti 8
Thu.- Sat. 12-17

21.07-12.08.06

Árni Þór Árnason and Maríó Múskat

18.08-09.09.06

Bára Kristinsdóttir

GALLERY FOLD

Rauðarárstígur 14-16
Mon.-Fri. 10-18
Sat. 11-16
Sun. 14-16
www.myndlist.is

GALLERÍ SÆVAR KARLS

Bankastræti 7
www.saevarkarl.is

Current exhibition:

Rudolf L. Reiter

GALLERY TURPENTINE

Ingólfsstræti 5
Tue.-Fri. 12-18
Sat. 11-16
www.turpentine.is

28.07-15.08.06

Óli G. Jóhannsson

GEL GALLERÍ

Hverfisgata 37
Mon.-Fri. 10-19
Sat. 10-17

01.08 - ?

Aron Bergman

GERÐUBERG CULTURAL CENTRE

Gerðuberg 3-5

08.14-10.09.06

Sculptures by Guðjón Stefán Kristinsson; Acrylic portraits by Jón Ólafsson; paintings by Ketill Larsen

GYLLINHÆÐ

Laugavegur 23
Thu.-Sun. 14-18

Students from the second year of the Academy

I8 GALLERY

Klapparárstígur 33
Wed.-Fri. 11-17
Sat. and by appointment 13-17
www.i8.is

26.07-26.09.06

Summer exhibition

ICELANDIC LABOUR UNION'S ART GALLERY

Freyjugata 41
Tue.-Sun. 13-17
Free Entrance

KLING & BANG GALLERY

Laugavegur 23
Thu.- Sun. 14-18
Free Entrance
www.tbis.is/klingandbang

CLOSED until 14.10

14.10-05.11.06

Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir & New York artists

LIVING ART MUSEUM

Laugavegur 26
Wed., Fri.-Sun. 13-17
Thu. 13-22
www.nylo.is

12.08-02.09.06

Pétur Már Gunnarsson, Johann Maheut, Toshinari Sato

THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Fríkirkjuvegur
Tues.-Sun. 11-17
Free Entrance
www.listasafn.is

08.07-24.09.06

Landscape and Folklore

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

Suðurgata 41
Open daily 10-17
www.natmus.is/english

Temporary Exhibitions:

Photography from Iceland, 1938

Invisible women in Icelandic art

Archaeological research and Iceland's new view of history

Permanent Exhibitions:

The Making of a Nation

THE NORDIC HOUSE

Sturlugata 5
Tue.-Sun. 12-17
www.nordice.is/english

30.07 - 30.09.06

Ilmur Stefánsdóttir & Steinunn Knútsdóttir

NÆSTI BAR

Ingólfsstræti 1a

Regular exhibitions by local artists

REYKJAVÍK 871 +/- 2 : THE SETTLEMENT EXHIBITION

Ádalstræti 16
Open daily 10-17

REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM

Sigtún
Open daily 10-16
Admission ticket is valid on the same day for all three museums.
www.listasafnreykjavikur.is

09.06-20.08.06

ÁSMUNDUR SVEINSSON SCULPTURE MUSEUM

Sigtún
Open daily 10-16
Admission ticket is valid on the same day for all three museums.
www.listasafnreykjavikur.is

09.06-20.08.06

HAFNARHÚS

Tryggvagata 17
Open daily 10-17

Carnegie Art Awards 2006

10.06.06-07.01.07

The Erró Collection: Graphic Works

KJARVALSSTAÐIR

Flóakagata
Open daily 10-17

08.04-03.12.06

Let's Look at Art: A series of exhibitions especially designed for children

24.06-17.09.06

Summer Exhibition from the Permanent Collection

REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM

Kistubylgur 4
Jun.-Aug. 10-17
www.arbaejaarsafn.is

THE REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Grófarbúsi, Tryggvagata 15, 6th floor
Weekdays 12-19
Sat.-Sun. 13-17

01.06-24.09.06

Photography by Andrés Kolbeinsson

SAFN

Laugavegur 37
Wed.-Fri. 14-18
Sat.-Sun. 14-17
Free Entrance
www.safn.is

12.08-03.09.06



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Phone: 8647335, 5877335, 5812512

Sean Shanahan, Alan Johnston, Ragna Róbertsdóttir

SIGURJÓN ÓLAFSSON MUSEUM

Laugarnestangi 70
Tue.-Sun. 14-17

Permanent exhibition of the work of sculptor Sigurjón Ólafsson

PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE STREETS OF DOWNTOWN REYKJAVÍK

The Reykjavik Museum of Photography is celebrating its 25th anniversary with a photographic look back at the past century of life in the capital. These retrospectives are on display in Lækjartorg, Austurvöllur and Fógetagarður.

Continues on page 33

DINING, EATING & GRUBBING

Valgerður Þóroddsdóttir on Akureyri Dining Photos by Skari except Friðrik V

BAUTINN

Hafnarstræti 92, 600 Akureyri
Tel.: 462-1818

\$ \$

Bautinn is an Akureyri landmark. In a sprawling bright red house located in the city centre, this restaurant has become, over its 30 or so years in business, a household name. It offers not the best or most professional in Akureyri dining, but rather the most delicious taste of the Akureyri attitude. Bautinn is a restaurant content in its simplicity, where a good meal is as important as a good atmosphere, which it maintains, endearingly enough, on the most minimalist of terms.

Our starters came from the soup and salad

bar that accompanies every entree. The entire production was do-it-yourself, including get-it-yourself silverware, and was a huge hit with the majority of the restaurant, nearly full on this Thursday evening. Clear coconut curry vegetable soup and a very salty cream leek soup started us well, though, while the selection at the salad bar was sufficient, or that is to say, quite good, it was uninspired, and left us eager for something less average.

Our main courses, grilled salmon with mango sauce and grilled Minke whale, arrived quickly, followed by the ever-present grin of our waitress. Both dishes arrived with the same faux-professional look, sprinkled excessively with parsley, but turned out to be masterfully prepared. The salmon was expertly grilled, and the natural flavours of the fish were un-suppressed, giving it a fresh taste and aroma. The fish was accompanied by a creamy almost

sweet butter sauce, subtly offsetting its light flavour. The whale was equally well prepared, the pieces we were served were expertly chosen, both in size and consistency, and completely without the oily taste that often accompanies such a dish.

Dessert seemed like an unnecessary fourth course, but we swallowed our pride, and but-toned our trousers and ordered a chocolate torte with whipped cream, to share. The torte was good, but the coffee was better, and I wasn't terribly disappointed. It seemed that in this mediocre torte, Bautinn was making its purpose clear. Maybe parts of it are a bit cheesy, but when it comes down to it, Bautinn just wants to be a small-town restaurant. Forget the "pre" and "post" dishes... Bautinn has plenty of kokkteilsósa on-hand, and isn't embarrassed to whip it out, which means that, for better or for worse, this is Akureyri's place.



NÆTURSALAN

Strandgata 6, 600 Akureyri
Tel.: 462-4020

\$

If you want the full 360 on Akureyri dining, you must pay a visit to Nætursalan. Preferably between the hours of 00:00-05:00 on a weekend. Preferably when you're drunk.

During the normal hours of the day, an Akureyri local will undoubtedly swear off the place for anything more elaborate than a standard issue hot dog and bottle of Coca-Cola, but there is a special time, during the aforementioned hours of the night, when Nætursalan rules supreme. This is a time when a 500 ISK hamburger and a brown

paper sack full of French fries represents the finest in Akureyri dining. It may not be a proud time, hell, it may not be a time that you will remember the next morning, but it is a time when one place is always there for you. Or at least, there for you until really, really late.

Without a doubt the joint's crown jewel is the Akureyringur. I must admit that long before I had the pleasure of encountering it, I had heard legend of what can only be called a stroke of dining genius. The Akureyringur makes use of two key observations about late-night dining: 1) you're probably haven't eaten for between six and eight hours, and 2) your taste buds are probably slightly paralysed. Thus, the sandwich, in all its glutinous excess, kills two drunk birds with one stone.

While I can't say for sure that the sandwich originated at the Nætursalan, I assume

it was invented in Akureyri, considering its pseudonym. It is likely that the name comes from its indulgent employment of kokkteilsósa, an Icelandic delicacy consisting of mayonnaise blended together with ketchup in a very elusive ratio, that citizens of Akureyri, especially, are said to enjoy. In that case, it is entirely possible that the sandwich was dubbed by a bitter citizen of Reykjavik, trying to pass off blame for his own gluttony. Regardless of its true origin, it is clear that the sandwich draws inspiration from Henry David Thoreau who, in Walden, suggested that in all things in life, we "simplify, simplify".

Oh, and by the way, the Akureyringur is a grilled ham and cheese sandwich, with French fries and globs and globs of kokkteilsósa in the middle. Don't flinch before you try it.

seemed to enjoy serving as much as we enjoyed consuming.

The main courses were a seafood gratin with cheese in bianco sauce and an oven-baked rack of lamb with fondan potato in an herb broth. The gratin was a happy mingling of four or five seafood samples in a slightly sweet broth that kept the dish warm and gave it a honey overtone. The lamb, an elegant spin on the classic meat-and-potatoes, melted in your mouth, perfectly done. Just... perfect.

Dessert came in the form of a warm chocolate pudding with raspberry sauce, and local farmhouse ice cream from Holtsei in Eyjafjörður, presented and prepared with as much glamour as any of the main dishes. At the end of the meal, I could barely walk out. I just wanted to go back to my castle and take a long nap.



FRÍÐRIK V

Strandgata 7, 600 Akureyri
Tel.: 461-5775

\$ \$ \$

Fríðrik Val Karlsson is a man who keeps his friends close, and his food closer. The 36-year-old chef, an Akureyri native, founded the restaurant with his wife Arnrun on his 31st birthday, and it has since been his professional playground. The name, of course, is wordplay, touching on the fact that the chef's name is Fríðrik, and this is his fifth restaurant. The pun truly outdoes itself with the fact that Frederik V was the King of Denmark-Norway between 1746-1766, because at Fríðrik V (the restaurant), you can eat like a king.

For starters we ordered cream of lobster and shrimp soup with parmesan and avocado oil and some monkfish carpaccio with arugula and grana padano cheese. For the wait, Arnrun, our waitress, brought over a basket of bread, deliciously soft, and an equally palatable homemade tapenade, made of black and green olives, sundried tomatoes and herbs in olive oil. Then the starters came; the former, served with a ceramic spoon to "offset the flavour", was whipped but had an almost bulky flavour until I discovered the fresh shrimp on the bottom, which gave the dish a lighter tone. The carpaccio absolutely outdid it, though. Its cold fresh taste was so pure that it was almost ethereal.

To keep our attention, the Fríðrik family brought out another surprise for the wait for the main course, a rhubarb sorbet in a wine glass topped with Pop Rocks, that Arnrun

WE RECOMMEND

BEZT Í HEIMI

Frúin í Hamburg



Vintage Shopping with Irony

BY VALGERÐUR ÞÓRODDSDÓTTIR

"Frúin í Hamburg" is a fantastic riddle: What did you do with the unprecedented sum of money the lady of Hamburg gave you yesterday? The plot is as follows: answer this question, without resorting to the banned words: "black", "white", "yes", and "no", until one of us gets bored or falls asleep. If you are six years old and in an impossibly long and boring car trip, this could and will provide you with about 20 minutes of entertainment. Þorbjörg Halldórsdóttir and Guðrún Jónsdóttir, owners and founders of the second-hand shop Frúin í Hamburg, have kept up this game for about three years now.

The plot there is as follows: this is reality, and a mysterious Fräulein did not give you millions of dollars to spend as you please (because if she did you wouldn't be here, you'd probably be at the yacht store) and you want to spend your hard-earned cash on something pretty fucking cool.

And so, you visit Frúin í Hamburg for a little bit of irony and some of the best vintage and antique shopping in Iceland. Read sub-plot: vintage is very cool.

Since it opened in early June 2003, Frúin has been a favourite with the young as with the old in town. The vintage clothing store Spútnik, whose venues were originally confined to Reykjavik, occupies half of the store while an enormous and diverse collection of antiques spans the rest of the small space. The antiques in the store range greatly in function, price and

especially frivolity. In a single room, you can find not only a range of furniture including desks, chairs, lamps and pianos, but also old perfumes, sunglasses, a giant ceramic Jesus head, spinning globes, cookie boxes, radios, typewriters, fondue pots, vases, postcards, playing cards, and a variety of hats, jackets, dresses, shoes, slips, tops, handbags and swimsuits that span the styles and designs of the last six decades at least.

Owners Halldórsdóttir and Jónsdóttir work not only in the store, behind the counter helping and often haggling with customers, but also outside (in the real world), scoping for antiques in houses around town, as well as travelling to and collecting at foreign markets. Often, the most interesting and strange small trinkets in the store were brought in by the townspeople themselves.

Having the advantage of a small town where traditions die hard and memories die harder, Frúin has not only been cashing in on the nostalgia of a time past for its own sake, but has managed to bring back this northern town's unique spirit of youth, giving the seemingly intangible everyday ideas of the past a rare chance at perpetuity. And so everybody wins. It feels just like a million dollars.

In your face, Lady of Hamburg.

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A Boat with Sails and All

BY GERÐUR KRISTNÝ

The bakery had mixed up the order, so in the middle of the coffee table sat a chocolate cake bearing the iced inscription: ARON SNÆR 6 TODAY. The gaudy letters promised toffees by the kilo, huge gifts and grandmother's footsteps. Although it didn't quite fit the bill, Mum had taken the cake anyway. My dad was called Gunnar Pálsson and had reached the age of 68. It wasn't his birthday; it was his funeral. He had been boxed up in a dark hole with dirt shovelled on top.

Mum coped like the heroine she had been described as in the obituaries. You'd have been forgiven for thinking some of them were about her, so full-some were the descriptions of dear Magdalena who stood like a rock at her husband's side during his illness. There was no mention of the violent fits of sobbing or torpor of numb indifference, which was more often than not the effect of the drugs her doctor was so kind as to slip her. Sometimes she had the same dull expression I remembered from when I was a teenager. Then I looked away. Mum was wearing a new, dark-blue dress, and I had chosen a vermilion lipstick to match it. She held her head high; she had got a friend to help her put a dark-brown rinse in her hair, and she was bustling around the apartment.

Both living and dining room were full of people. Dad's friends and work colleagues and Mum's relatives had come to pay us their respects. No one from the East. I made a circuit of the house to be sure, squeezing apologetically between the guests, some of whom smiled kindly at me and praised the coffee as if I had been responsible for the plantation it came from. Maybe the people were dead. I don't know why I expected to see them. My father's family hadn't exactly overwhelmed our household. To tell the truth, I'd never met any of them. But I'd always assumed they would attend Dad's funeral, perhaps seven or eight of them, sipping their coffee, soberly dressed and grave of face, talking among themselves about people and places the rest of us didn't know.

My sister Gubba and I tried to do our bit by keeping the coffee flowing. Her white shirt had quickly become spattered all over with coffee stains and she had changed into a horror of Mum's, at least 20 years old, a green satin blouse with a ridiculous bit on the front that dangled to and fro. No doubt she herself thought it was OK. She's never known how to dress. Unless grief had undermined her sense of taste.

Gubba had hardly stopped snivelling since the vicar called Dad "the man with the heart of gold". I pictured how the massive golden heart must have weighed Dad down, sinking ever closer to his stomach tumour. I'd managed to keep my composure, but I had a paper handkerchief in my sleeve, just in case. All day, I'd found myself feeling Dad was still here. When I was in the kitchen I thought I heard him in the living room, and when I was there I thought I heard his voice from the dining room. A few of his old school friends stood there, clustered together, and I had the strong impression that if they separated I would surely see Dad in the chair under the horse painting by Jóhann Briem, where he always sat to read the papers. When I entered the dining room a little later, some woman was sitting there, picking at her teeth with her fingernails.

Gunnar Birnir, Gubba's son, soon to be 8, was in his room, and didn't answer when I knocked on his door. When I opened the door he was lying on the bed in his best clothes with his headphones plugged into Gubba's old record player. He took them off when he noticed me.

"Abba. The Winner Takes It All," he said, as if I'd asked. I bent down by the bed and stroked his hair. He'd been crying.

"Don't you want some cake, love?"

"No," said Gunnar Birnir and jerked his head away. I withdrew my hand, and kissed him on the forehead before leaving the room.

He had kept to himself since Dad died. Dad had totally changed when Gunnar Birnir was born. It was extraordinary. All of a sudden he saw reason to come home from work in the middle of the day to be with the boy, something that would have been completely unthinkable when Gubba and I were small.

A momentary silence fell on the guests whenever Gubba popped into the room, red-eyed in the green horror, to serve them more coffee. The women unconsciously tilted their heads as she filled their cups and whispered: "Thank you, dear, you're doing wonderfully." The men muttered something too, but indistinctly.

Eiríkur Eyjólf, who had run the legal practise jointly with Dad until he fell ill, finally spoke up: "Are your studies going well, dear?"

"Oh, yes, they're going fine," mumbled Gubba.

"And you've got a year to go?"

My sister nodded.

"Just as long as she continues with her studies," said Mum, brushing a cake crumb from the corner of her mouth. For some reason the wedding band on her skinny ring finger seemed more noticeable than before.

For a moment I thought she was getting at me for never having completed my BA dissertation. I was about to answer, took a deep breath and was composing a retort in my mind, something about it not making any difference to my pay packet, when I realised I shouldn't. Abandoned cake dishes lay on an occasional table. I took them into the kitchen, before I could make a fool of myself. But I did see Eiríkur nodding politely at Mum's reply. Both his sons, once Mohawk-crested dropouts, were now lawyers and ran a law firm together on Suðurlandsbraut. They hadn't put a foot wrong since they gave up the glue-sniffing at 15.

Dark-suited elderly men and composed women politely sipped their coffee and nibbled slices of the Smarties-decorated cake. To begin with the conversation had been about what a special man Dad had been and how well he had coped with his illness, but then the discussion turned to politics, pay negotiations and other things that the grey-haired brigade like to discuss when they got together.

Their wives chatted about the hint of cinnamon in the coffee, whispered words of comfort to Mum, and offered now and then to help Gubba and me in the kitchen. I declined the offer. Their pastel suits didn't exactly imply that they had attended in order to get roped into the washing up or coffee-making. Dad had done them the favour of dying in spring, so they could turn up to the funeral in pale-yellow and pink suits. Black doesn't suit older people. It emphasises their wrinkles.

We were all relieved when the guests finally showed signs of leaving. Gubba handed the men their coats and the women their furs. A whole mink farm disappeared out into the cold spring night. Eiríkur left last. I held out his coat for him. It was only then that I noticed how he had aged. He tried to put the hand in which he was holding his hat into the sleeve and it seemed to take him a moment or two to work out what the problem was. Finally, he took the hat in his other hand but then tried to push that one into the sleeve.

"Oh, when did things suddenly get so complicated?" he said in a low voice, smiling in embarrassment.

"There, it's all right," I said, taking his hat and laying it on a chair while he put on the thick, black coat. The moment it was on he became the person I knew again, a dignified, elderly man.

Eiríkur turned, frowned and said: "Oddfrjóður, dear, your father was a good man," just as if someone had been claiming otherwise.

I was about to say something, but suddenly I couldn't speak a word. It was as if he saw how I felt, because before I knew it he had seized me in his arms and crushed me against him. There was obviously still strength in the old dog. I could hardly breathe. A faint scent of fabric conditioner and pungent, old-fashioned aftershave filled my senses. It occurred to me what a difficult day it must have been for him.

He and Dad had worked side by side for nearly 40 years. They had met or talked on the phone almost every single day. Eiríkur had known my Dad far better and longer than I had.

"If you need anything, dear, you can always come to me," Eiríkur whispered.

When he let me go at last I saw a tear glint in the corner of his eye. I was choked up. It's horrible seeing old people cry. Somehow you expect that all the years they've put behind them ought to have toughened them up.

In the kitchen Gubba had already begun washing up. The evening light entered through the kitchen window, the blouse casting a pale green hue on her face. "Why did they never get a dishwasher?" she grumbled when I appeared.

I picked up a dishcloth and began to dry. It was years since we had washed up together and I'd forgotten how heavy-handed my sister was. But I soon remembered when the water began to splash over my best clothes. I had to wait for my chance to reach out for the wet plates on the draining board so as not to get a tidal wave sloshed over me or take a direct hit from the washing-up brush. The silence was rather oppressive. I was relieved when Mum came and started putting the dishes away.

"There's a very unhappy little boy out there somewhere," she said absently, holding a saucer from the Danish coffee service that she and Dad had been given as a wedding present. "Poor little Aron Snær."

The above is an excerpt from Gerður Snær's 2004, Halldór Laxness Award-winning novel A Boat with Sails and All. Translated by Victoria Cribb and Anna Yates

Nýhil Poetry in the Grapevine:

Örvar Þóreyjarsón Smárason

Probably better known for his works as a musician, mum member and co-founder Örvar Þóreyjarsón-Smárason (b. 1977) is also a poet/author. He recently published his first book of poetry, *Gamall þrjótur, nýjir tímar* ("Old villain, new times") as a part of Nýhil's Nordic Literature series. It was preceded by the (in some cases) critically acclaimed novella *Úfin*, *strokin* ("Ruffled, stroked"), released in 2005 and described as a detective boy novel updated for modern times.

The accompanying poems, drawn from Örvar's poetry debut, were self-translated from Icelandic and are representative of both his favoured topics (seemingly a sort of small town nostalgia) and style of writing. *HM*

allar saumakerlingar
eru horfnar
úr þorpínu

nýjir tímar
ætla þeim aðra hnappa

væri ég örlítið yngri
myndi ég hrekja nútímann
í burtu með naglaspítu
eða priki
eða kekjkjöttum hrákslummum

og ég gæti elskað
þessar saumakerlingar
einsog þær eiga skilið
að vera elskaðar

þegar ég var herbergisþerna
var ég sendur með pensil og fötu
til að mála yfir mannþef
í rúmfötum

þegar ég var herbergisþerna
óskaði ég þess heitast
að vera pakkað inn í sturtuhengi
eins og bleiku kjötfarsi

þegar ég var herbergisþerna
fór ég að grenja

þegar ég var herbergisþerna
litu gestir á mig einsog ég væri skrælingi
dubbaður upp í korselett og pils
og það var rétt hjá þeim
og satt
ég var skrælingi í pils
þegar ég var herbergisþerna

ég elska þig með fjaðrir
með hófa

ég elska þig með brjóst
með hófa
með fjaðrir sem skrifa
slefandi lesblind
ert þú
með hófa með brjóst
með fjaðrir sem skrifa

og ég heyrir í þér úr fjarska
það hvín í holunum í höfði þínu
þegar þú ríður gobbedi
slefandi lesblind með brjóst
og fjaðrir sem skrifa.

all the seamstresses
are lost
from the village

the new new times
require them to button
other buttons

if I were a bit younger
I would drive the new new times
out of town
with a nailboard
or a pointy stick
or a lumpy wad of spit

and I could love them
the way these seamstresses
deserve to be loved

in the days when I was a hotel maid
they handed me a brush and a bucket
and sent me to paint over
the smell of human folks
in bed linen

in the days when I was a hotel maid
my only wish
was to be packed in a shower curtain
like pink ham piggy meat

in the days when I was a hotel maid
I did weep like a lady's purse

in the days when I was a hotel maid
the guests looked at me like a 'skrælingi'
dressed up in corselet and a skirt
and they were right
I was a 'skrælingi' in a skirt
in the days when I was a hotel maid

I love you with feathers
with hoofs

I love you with breasts
with hoofs
with feathers that write
dyslexic
are you
with hoofs with breasts
and feathers that write

and I hear you from yonder,
the whistling from the holes
in your head
when you ride giddieup
drooling dyslexic with breasts
and feathers that write



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Midnight Golfing

The beautiful, isolated, illegal side of Iceland's new elite sport

BY STEINUNN JAKOBSDÓTTIR PHOTO BY SKARI

"There are plenty of people who come here late at night after the clubs close, especially in the beginning of summer. Some even arrive at six o'clock in the morning and try to make a quick round before the staff arrives," a woman tells me at a parking lot somewhere in Reykjavík while putting her golf gear into the trunk of her car.

It is almost midnight but the sun is still up. The golf club closed two hours ago, and no one is around except two of my friends and the lady just leaving. As soon as she does, we three become members of the group she was just talking about.

But why be sneaky? Why not just pay the price and enjoy a game with the rest of the crowd?

"The waiting lists are so long that I can't be bothered to apply. Plus, it is so expensive to become a member. Being a student, I just can't afford it," one enthusiastic golfer had told me when asked about the subject.

After doing a little research I found out he had a good point. Golf is without a doubt a posh sport, and, in recent years, it has become so hyped in Iceland that those interested in joining the clubs and practising golf sometimes have to wait up to two years just to become members, although being married to a member can speed up the process. The price to pay for joining is another factor. The fee for one year ranges from around 35,000-55,000 ISK in the capital area plus an extra 50 percent for a special entrance fee the first year. In addition to that you have to buy all the cool gear, clubs, a trolley, gloves and trendy clothing, as jeans and sweatsuits are, of course, not appreciated in this elite company.

But even though the price might strike the regular worker as a little too high, a large

percentage of the population has become infected with the golf virus. Today, a remarkable number of about 20-25,000 people play golf all around the country, and roughly about 15,000 of them are members of a local golf club.

The rest? Well, most of them pay a day fee ranging from 3,000-5,000 ISK per round. And then there are people like us. People who find that ridiculously overpriced and just decide to sneak in when no one is watching and play their round for free. Being a cheapskate or getting a rush out of breaking the law is not the whole explanation for this behaviour though. The main factor is the desire to have the whole course for yourself, free from any hassle or comments from other club members.

"It's just fun to go with a couple of friends once in a while when no one is around. Also, I don't golf so often that it's worth becoming a member. And I like practising at night. It is a special feel to be able to golf long after midnight. Start the round on one day and finish it the next. Some of my best rounds I played at that time. No harm done really," another golfer told me. The third one admitted the same thing: "I started sneaking into golf courses a couple of years ago. Then my friends and I drove to various courses on weekends, even with some beer, and had fun for hours. After playing like that for some time I became a member, but I still love going at night in good weather and enjoying the special atmosphere."

All of them agreed on how different it is to play midnight golf in Iceland. Being able to golf until morning without the sun setting is something that the majority of the world's golfers would enjoy. In Iceland there are about 50 golf courses all around the island, some located

right by the sea, others hidden in valleys or next to riverbanks. Although the weather usually isn't ideal, and the summer is short, Iceland is a great place for practising the sport. Almost 24 hours of sunlight in June and July means 24 hours of golfing and this is the reason golfers from all around the world pay high prices just to try the unique experience midnight golfing so close to the Arctic Circle provides.

The courses in Reykjavík and the neighbouring area are quite remarkable. The Hafnarfjörður course has the panoramic view over the sea on one side and the aluminium smelter on the other. At Seltjarnarnes, I couldn't hear any noise at all, except for a few terns flying around. The hustle of the city was far away at the course I chose as my victim (and the location will remain secret), although it was only minutes away from a traffic-filled street. It was immediately apparent why people stay awake and drive to hidden places to play golf after hours.

After our friendly woman had left the parking lot, my friends and I headed out to play. The weather was unusually good and the peace and quiet just amazing.

"Do you think someone will come?" my friend asked as a couple of cars had been driving past us when we were practising our swing. But none seemed to care what we were doing. Our worries of being caught soon vanished. With every hole we finished, our swings got a little bit better. In the end, I could almost hit the ball once in every five attempts. (This was my first time golfing, I should point out.) It being the end of July the sun wasn't as strong as in early summer, so at a little past 1 a.m. we couldn't see the ball anymore, so my first (but certainly not last) golf session ended there.

Not all are as satisfied with this situation. An employee at the GKG golf club was well aware of the situation. "It is quite common that people sneak into the courses. The most traffic was around the Jónsmessa night when the sun was up for 24 hours. Around that time we sometimes spotted 20-30 people playing golf at 2 a.m. when making our routine check. Then we had to approach them and hand them a fine," he said and added that the feedback was often less than pleasant. "A group of people think it is really clever and funny to play around like that, but they don't realise all the effort we have to make just to keep the courses perfect for our members. Those who sneak in are maybe driving around on a Saturday night and decide it would be a great idea to go golfing, but that is just like sneaking into Laugardalsvöllur football field to play a game. Who does that?"

Golf is an elite sport all right, and those paying high prices to practise it don't like those who cheat. Understandably. But those not ready to commit to a whole year or who are forced onto waiting lists to join the club don't have much choice. Some courses don't even allow people to play after 2 p.m. unless they are members and most have day jobs.

It is neither cheap nor easy to become an honest golfer and as the popularity of the sport continues rising, it will almost be necessary to be a club member to even get a tee-time in the future. Will the sneaky golfers be forced to pay tens of thousands to practise their hobby? Maybe. But while there aren't any 24-hour guards or bloodthirsty watchdogs preventing them, a number of kids and workers will be practising illegally in the midnight sun.

>>> cited about the place, their metropolitan affairs these days being limited to visits to the Ísafjörður slot machines when there's nothing else to do.

Although the Filipinos in Flateyri like to stick together (many of them are in fact family), they still consider themselves a part of the community when asked. As Berto told me: "This is our home. We have many Icelandic friends, many Filipino friends and Polish friends. I have a Polish girlfriend in [the neighbouring town of] Suðureyri, she works for Islandssaga [the Suðureyri fish processing plant] and I went to her home in Poland for two months, for vacation." Berto tells me his girlfriend doesn't know a lot of English and that their communication mostly takes place using their limited Icelandic skills or through pointing at words in the dictionary. The three do however disapprovingly tell me that some immigrant workers seclude themselves, stating that many of them like to stay in watching TV after work, being tired and all. They complain about the lack of a place to meet other townfolk after the Vagninn pub closed and get excited when I tell them that it is in the process of being opened again due to the hard work and effort of some of the locals. We talk for a long time, trading jokes, horror stories from the fish-gutting industry and slot-machine tips. They like it here and plan on staying for a long time to come.

Missing nation

And then there is the generation of Flateyri folk now in their twenties and thirties, the one that seems almost entirely missing from the town. This is not limited to Flateyri, of course, most if not all, of Iceland's proud small towns have experienced a huge drain of young people during the past few decades, with young people going off to Reykjavík or even further to seek an education and staying there, whether it be for lack of suitable work in their hometown or other reasons.

Georg Rúnar Ragnarsson, 24, was born and raised in Flateyri, save for a brief stint in Ísafjörður in his pre-teens. He left the town for Reykjavík to pursue further studies as an engineer and mans the Viðey ferry as a summer job.

"Growing up in Flateyri, I didn't really envision ever moving away. I always supposed I'd be a sailor there. All of my role models were. I think Flateyri is probably one of the best places in the world to spend one's youth, tons of kids hanging out, playing unsupervised in the streets, a lot of life in the town and a closeness to work-life that you probably miss out on in places like Reykjavík. Everybody was real close.

"The town is rather drab these days, and that kind of troubles me. I remember it being so vibrant and full of life, even a few years ago. I guess it comes in waves? Kids my age don't come to work there during the summer like they used to. My hope is that Flateyri will once again find its glory... I would very much like to go back, and if I find a suitable job, I probably will. At heart, I am a Flateyringur."

When asked about the immigrant workers, Georg says he has no qualms with them and counts many of them as acquaintances. "You try to be friendly, inviting them to after-parties and such, often they come. I guess some of them keep to themselves, although that is understandable in a way, and maybe some of them are a little afraid?"

Ultimately, Ragnarsson has a positive outlook on the future of Flateyri, telling me that "Flateyri has a bright future ahead of it. There's always someone doing something cool over there, some artists recently bought a house there and are remodelling it, and I hear that Önni [more on him later] is building a professional studio there. Yeah, I think that we'll see people building new houses in Flateyri soon enough."

Halldór Gunnar Pálsson currently works as manager of the Skifan record store on Laugavegur, the main shopping street in Reykjavík. He is 25, born and raised in Flateyri and, like Georg, really loves the town. "Man, Flateyri was the best place to grow up in, at least for a kid like myself. In those days, we had 50-60 kids roaming the streets without parental supervision every night, looking for mischief and often finding it. And the whole town was very lively. You have to understand that in those days, before the tunnel and our joining Ísafjörður, we had a thriving main



street. A post office, bank, bakery, two convenience stores, a video store, a bookstore and pub.

"The town's population counted 500 people back then, and we had a lot of migrant workers from Australia and South Africa who were there just for the thrill of it, as opposed to saving money like I guess some of our current ones are. They went out drinking and spent their money freely, participating in every activity. The immigrants now are busy keeping their families back home fed while the Australians were just young people looking for adventure. Flateyri was a world in and of itself, especially during the winter when communications with the rest of the country were often severed. Driving to Ísafjörður on a whim was not plausible back then, the way it is now the tunnels are here."

I bring up the avalanche – surely that must have been the key factor in the town's changing character.

"I guess the townlife would probably be a lot different had the avalanche never occurred, although there are a lot of towns that share Flateyri's current circumstances without ever having an avalanche. Mentally, it would be different. A lot of people can't envision living there in light of those events and that certainly makes a difference. On the other hand, it really brought us close as a community..."

"In such a small town, you know everyone. It doesn't matter if it was family or not, you know and love everyone. And it really hurt. It really hurt and was a great loss to every Flateyringur. Last year, when ten years had passed since the tragedy occurred, one inevitably got to thinking about it again. Of course it affected us greatly, as did the tunnels and unification to Ísafjörður, although I probably didn't give that much thought at the time.

"I guess the townlife would probably be a lot different had the avalanche never occurred, although there are a lot of towns that share Flateyri's current circumstances without ever having an avalanche. Mentally, it would be different. A lot of people can't envision living there in light of those events and that certainly makes a difference. On the other hand, it really brought us close as a community. There is a special bond between us. Maybe it's best not to speculate."

Pálsson also says that he is quite happy that the town is hosting the number of immigrant workers that it is, even though he would be thankful if they participated more. "I guess we have both. There are Poles there that I have known since I was a teenager who participate greatly, then again some of them

only plan on staying short term to save up some money... If there's 50 foreigners living in the 300-person town of Flateyri who stay to themselves, that of course makes a difference, much the same as if there were 50,000 foreigners in all of Iceland who kept to themselves. I would very much like for some of our guests to participate more in our community and on occasion they do and I think it'll only increase. The kids in the schools learn our language and have Icelandic friends, I think it will all work out in the end."

With all this, I ask him if he, a young native of Flateyri, will return.

"The only reason I ever left was so I could attend the FÍH music school. I am still a citizen of Flateyri, both mentally and legally. And I intend to live there again. There are of course limited job opportunities, I've held nearly every job you can in Flateyri without being in the fishing industry – and I've worked most of the fishing industry jobs too.

brother Önni for instance, he's 29 and lives there with his wife and two baby girls. He makes a living teaching in the Ísafjörður music school, produces records by local musicians and is currently in the process of financing a recording studio in Flateyri. That's enterprise!"

The new locals

But Flateyri is shaped mostly by the experience of the immigrant workers, who drive the economy. Michał Jerzy Kocinski, known to the locals as Mikki, is 20 years old and moved to Flateyri from his native home of Darlowo, Poland (a town slightly larger than Akureyri) at age 11. "I hated it here at first. My mom had been working here. She told me I was visiting for summer vacation and that was nice enough, but in the fall, when I told her I wanted to go home, she said I was already there. That came as a shock.

"I attended the school that fall and it was awful at first. I didn't understand the language at all and since I was the first Polish kid to attend the school, they didn't really know what to do with me. I spent most of the Icelandic classes studying math. I communicated solely in English at first. And the snow and mountains were kind of scary. This was a lot of change for a young man like myself. Then I made some friends and they taught me the language – still do in fact. Always correct me if I misspeak. That's a lot of help. But for me to learn the language, I guess it was a lot like teaching a baby to take its first steps."

Mikki has lived in Flateyri ever since, save for a winter in the Sauðárkrúkur dorm ("I did a lot of partying there...") and really likes it. "I feel good here. I really don't want to go back to Poland, except maybe to vacation. Flateyri is my hometown and I am one of the locals."

An immigrant who came so soon after the avalanche and who has watched the town recover, Mikki has a much more optimistic view than those of us who knew the town before the avalanche. "Man, Flateyri has gotten a lot cooler since I first came here. Vagninn is opening again, that's awesome; the community centre was refurbished this winter and looks really great. New floors, activities, it really is something. In my opinion, the town is steadily getting better. And I am having a lot of fun here, I know practically everyone in the neighbouring towns and we have a lot of fun driving around and meeting people."

And then Mikki indicates that he truly has become a local. "I'd like to live here, but I plan on maybe moving to Reykjavík this fall, to try and 'make it'. I'd like to rent an apartment, maybe get a job doing some construction. I've worked in the Kambur fish processing plant and am not interested in doing that for a living. Not at all. I am studying to be an engineer and have to complete nine months at sea to get my rights. I might do that soon, but I'd like to take a break and live in Reykjavík for a while first."

LIVE MUSIC REVIEWS

WHO
Belle and Sebastian and Emiliana Torrini

WHERE
Borgarfjörður Eystri

WHEN
July 27th 2006



"We Like Country People"

By Helgi Valur Photos by Leó Stefánsson

Borgarfjörður Eystri is a beautiful place, a small town in the country with a population of about 140. You wouldn't expect culture to erupt from this place. Yet Borgarfjörður has been home to many of Iceland's most prominent artists. Iceland's most famous painter Jóhannes Kjarval, the poet Gyrðir Eliasson, the singer Emiliana Torrini and everybody's favourite - Magni, the Supernova reality television star, all have ties with Borgarfjörður Eystri.

The town also has two pubs, which is a phenomenon considering how small this place is.

Arriving at the much anticipated Emiliana Torrini and Belle and Sebastian concert, which took place in a rusty shed, I expected a showdown between the country and city folk. All of Sirkus (an indie bar in Reykjavík) was there, so it felt like downtown Reykjavík without the cement. John Waters couldn't have written the plot better. We had two parties: one that thinks of music as something to think and talk about, absorb, cherish and to have elite opinions about, and another group that wants to get drunk, get laid and sing songs. I'm not making a judgement on who is right (they probably both are), but you could feel the tension between these two groups.

There would have been a third group, but they didn't show. A bunch of people probably on the lower end of the IQ spectrum had decided to go to Borgarnes, on the other end of Iceland. There are similarities in the names Borgarfjörður Eystri and Borgarfjörður but to say this mistake is justifiable is like saying that importance and impotence are things you could get mixed up. It's nice to be important but it sucks being impotent.

I walked into the shed, which resembled an Amish barn on the inside. It had been beautifully decorated with windows from the old church. Lights adorned the windows, making the barn warm in the cosy sense

of the word. Everything was beautiful except for the disco ball hanging from the ceiling, but even that decoration was actually fitting for the atmosphere.

The crowd looked like they graduated from MH, went to art school and partied at Sirkus and were not accustomed to shaving their pubic hair (most Icelanders are, by the way). Of course, I'm generalising, but it is clear that the band that epitomises indie is going to draw an indie crowd. Soon 1,000 people, almost ten times the population of the town, filled the barn. The concert promoter, Rockstar: Supernova Magni's brother, walked onstage and introduced a cameraman. He announced that this was a video he was going to send to his brother and we should all scream "Áfram Magni" or "Go Magni". I couldn't help but think that Salvador Dalí would approve of the surreal nature of this moment. There I was in the middle of nowhere in Cannery Row waiting for the world's most prominent indie/underground band, screaming "Áfram Magni" for the American bubblegum show Rockstar while people of all ages were there for reasons of music, fun, heritage or just along for the ride. It seemed surreal yet comfortable.

Emiliana walked onstage and the crowd went wild. She seemed shy as she whispered, "You're all wonderful." She talked about how Belle and Sebastian loved this place and that they couldn't stop smiling. Though warmly received, Emiliana was maybe too soft for the drunkenness of the crowd. People had been drinking all day, and it was apparent that for inbreeds this was their "Þjóðhátíð." The crowd overwhelmed her, and, eventually, Emiliana got sick of being cute and told the retards to shut the fuck up. Then she gently told them they could go out and talk and then come back inside. This was an excellent suggestion. And the next time somebody tried to act up an army of shushers quieted them down.

Emiliana is an impeccable singer and her songs are pretty good (at least when she sings them). Some people are sick of her being cute and fail to see her dynamics as a singer. I am one of them, but I believe she hasn't decided on her future sound. Emiliana has

always changed through time and that's what makes her so great. If you want dynamics just wait a while. She'll deliver.

Next up were the legendary Belle and Sebastian. In the minds of many people, including me, Belle and Sebastian is a band that can be mentioned in the same paragraph as Led Zeppelin, The Beatles and The Doors. If you know an arty girl who went to MH and parties at Sirkus, chances are she has a few Belle and Sebastian CDs in her collection.

Stuart Murdoch, the singer of Belle, had become a real local favourite because he played football with the hometown team against Egilsstaðir. The home team lost but apparently Stuart had a killer game in the defence.

Belle and Sebastian took their time starting the show but people didn't mind drinking like ecstasy addicts on weekends. Belle and Sebastian's music possesses a cheerfulness that really cheers. Stuart's voice is in my opinion perfect. They blend happy music with melancholy melodies. But on this evening there was just joy. I couldn't help but smile as I thought of the local who left before Belle and Sebastian announcing he was going to another bar.

The crowd sang along and even sat down for one song, but some took their enthusiasm too far, singing anthems in between songs. While I cursed those rednecks in my mind, Stuart announced that he likes country people. I couldn't help but disagree. Belle played for over two hours and didn't show any signs of fatigue, nor did the crowd that had been standing for four hours. They ended with "The Boy with the Arab Strap," pissing me off because I had been waiting for "Dylan in the Movies" the whole time. I asked the band after the show why they didn't play "Dylan in the Movies." They rightly answered, "We've got a lot of songs." They have a lot of albums and lot of songs, most of them great. So how could I complain? For me this weekend of Sigur Rós and Emiliana and Belle and Sebastian is the best weekend of my life and will shine as a guiding light to which all future experiences will be compared.



The Whale Watching Centre offers daily whale watching tours on Faxaflói bay. These tours include a free visit to The Whale Exhibition Room, a sightseeing around Puffin island* and other natural wonders – all at a convenient distance from Reykjavík!

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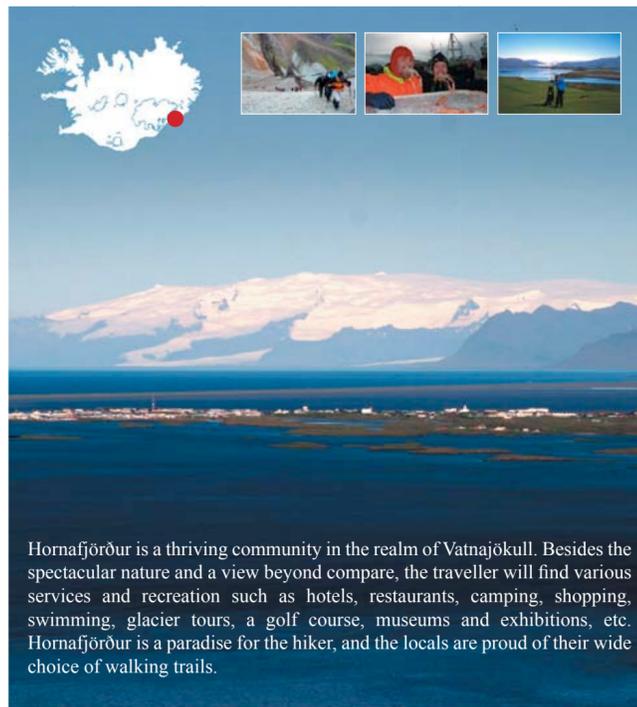


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The Glacier Exhibition in Höfn was reopened after significant renovations in June 2005. The aim of the Exhibition is to communicate knowledge in various ways about the country's nature as well as offering tourists interesting recreation all year around. The Exhibition is open on weekdays from October to April. From the beginning of May until the end of September it's open every day. Apart from regular opening hours the Exhibition can be opened on request.



Inside Reykjavík

The Grapevine Guide

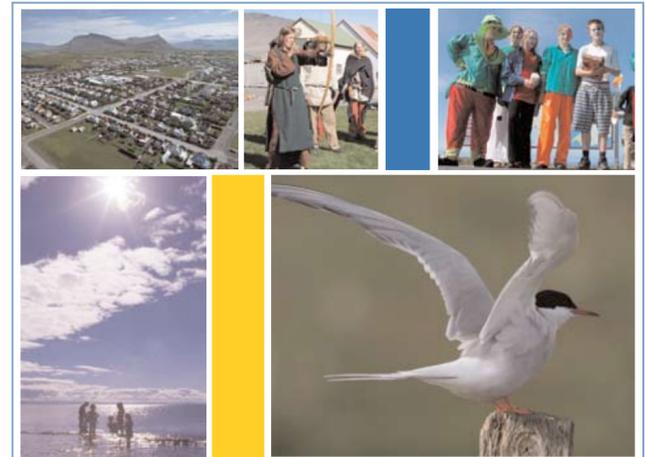


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The Akranes Tourist Information Centre
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REVIEWS
LIVE MUSIC

WHO

Television, Throwing Muses, Mugison, Hjálmar, Eberg, Jeff Who?, Ghostigital and others

WHERE

NASA

WHEN

July 4th-6th
2006



No frills reviews of the festival for homebodies

By Hildur Friðriksdóttir Photos by Jói Kjartans

Innipúkinn is an annual music festival for the colourful characters who decide, for some odd reason, to stay in the capital while the rest of the nation scatters to various places around the country. This year the biggest foreign bands were Television and Throwing Muses, both bands having been big a number of years ago; last year the festival boasted Jonathan Richman, Cat Power, Blonde Redhead and The Raveonettes. The slightly less impressive foreign line-up this year had an obvious effect on attendance.

Before the festival started at NASA on Friday, a few bands played a pre-gig at 12 Tónar record store. Three of them would later perform at Innipúkinn:

The Foghorns, Eberg and Jomi Massage. I came too late for The Foghorns, who played quickly and ran for an early start time at Innipúkinn. Jomi Massage had come all the way from a land far away, a magical land, namely Denmark. This tough rock chick was much like the Viking version of Skunk Anansie's Skin, with her rough edges and often heart aching melodies. Her band covered Björk's Unravel, making the song even sadder than the original. It's always nice hearing Björk covers well done, but this was only average and forgettable.

Eberg performs playful and experimental pop music written by Einar Tönsberg. He's a solo artist, but this weekend he brought a drummer with him and the charming and talented cellist and vocalist, Bird. When they teamed up live it surpassed the studio recordings of his songs. They looked cute playing, and to maximise the cuteness they even covered a more poppy version of the old 1806 hit Twinkle Twinkle. Eberg was pleasing for the eye and ear.

Opening Innipúkinn at six to a near empty house

was Dr. Gunni's job. There hasn't been a single Innipúkinn without them so it was only suitable that they started it all. Their gig went by quicker than you could say "!!!"

The same went for Benny Crespo's Gang, a good live band, and The Foghorns, a blues band with entertaining lyrics. Despite the time being too short, it didn't really matter since the crowd was still somewhat limited.

The next band, Ég, were like the Red Hot Chili Peppers of Iceland. They're probably most known for their hit Eiður Smári Guðjohnsen, about the local hero footballer. Ég are more upbeat and danceable live than in the album versions, which is a good quality because they can surely make the crowd go wild. They concluded with The Who's My Generation, or, as more Icelanders seem to know it, "the second song Magni performed on Rock Star: Supernova."

Next, Jan Mayen returned after having released their debut album in 2004 (it now costs 700 ISK at Skifan) with a handful of new material. They played a bit of it, and it sounded like they will have a pretty tight album on their hands this year.

Jomi Massage did well at Innipúkinn as at the pre-gig in 12 Tónar. Their second to last song was so intense that before starting the last one the singer had to lie down onstage to catch her breath.

I was excited to see the infamous Jakobínarína, who won Músiktilraunir 2005 (Battle of the Bands), onstage again. They always get strong reviews – love or hate affairs – but recently, Iceland has been in love with them. Their reviews have been positive, a bit too positive in my opinion. Still, I hoped I would finally discover Jakobínarína's greatness. The Jakobínarína show was delayed a bit after one of their guitars broke and they needed a new one hastily. That problem and a few technical difficulties led to Jakobínarína's time getting cut in half, leaving them room for four songs, and leaving me still confused over their supposed greatness.

Television was definitely the most anticipated band of the festival. These New York rockers were probably the main reason for most people being there that night. They were one of the biggest critical successes in the 70s, most famous for their excellent album Marquee Moon. From the start, technical problems plagued them. The feedback made singer, Tom Verlaine, a bit annoyed. His microphone, when it wasn't screeching, was barely audible. Technical problems were not the main concern of the evening, though. The main issue was Television's dreadful performance.

It seemed like they were relying on the strength of the songs and not paying attention to the otherwise dull performance. The only audience enjoying the show were the few middle-aged male groupies standing at the front waiting to hear the songs they had heard when they were decades younger. These audience members were responsible for asking Television for an encore, the shortest and worst encore in Icelandic history. Sadly, Television sound much better on record than live. And their CD is more exciting to watch than they are.

The next band, Jeff Who?, did not suffer from this problem. Jeff Who? were a great close to the Friday night set, being the best of the evening and a big relief after the horror that was Television's performance. They bombarded the crowd with new songs. The new material was impressive, but with Jeff Who? being more of a live band the record might not reflect this. Highlights were a great cover of ELO's Don't Bring Me Down and their latest single, The Golden Age, which has been playing non-stop at near every single radio station in Iceland in recent weeks.

The Saturday line-up was average. Weapons opened the night with their White Stripes-like music. In fact, the singer looks like Jack White without the artistic red, white and black clothing. They were followed by Morðingjarnir, who are at the top of the Iceland



dic punk scene today. An elderly woman remarked, "That man can't last for long, the way he's singing." Later, the same woman shouted at them, "Please have the courtesy to introduce (their songs) before playing them" and the husky singer wearing a shirt saying "feitur" (fat) did as she requested.

I had looked forward to seeing Hermigervill, an electronic musician, for a while now, being a complete sucker for good electronic melodies. The set started well but as it went on the songs somehow got cheesy and tedious. Donna Mess followed, and she was an interesting character. She entered the stage wearing a full bodysuit, with holes for her mouth and eyes. Singing uncomfortable and psychedelic songs with lyrics about her double dildo, she ended the show with topless girls dancing in flashing lights and left many a person's mouth agape.

Solex, a Dutch solo artist who samples old standards while singing Cyndi Lauper-ish vocals over the top started well but as the show went on their poppy and experimental songs got stretched and hardly memorable.

Eberg, who had been extremely enjoyable at the pre-gig on Friday, was a huge letdown for those who had been there, because the set list and performance was identical to the one the day before. There is nothing more annoying than a band with no versatility between live gigs whatsoever.

It was obvious as soon as they hit the stage that Boston rockers Throwing Muses would not be a letdown. In the crowd a balding man wearing a Throwing Muses shirt from the 1980s was spotted who had travelled all the way from London to see them. He was such a huge fan that it almost made him look cool. Their not being asked for an encore was very surprising, judging by their excellent performance.

Their follow-up, Lára, was much like Ragnheiður Gröndal, an Icelandic folk singer who belongs at weddings, family get-togethers and fundraisers at grade schools and old folks' homes. She was so uninteresting that the concert guests turned their backs on her near the end, tired of being lulled to sleep. It took Hjálmar, Iceland's celebrated reggae band, a while to fix the damage done by Lára. Eventually, though, the people



wearing woollen shirts came streaming in, fitting into Hjálmar's fashion statements of beards and plenty of hair. It was the longest set of the weekend. They played all their greatest hits until the sun came up.

Koja opened the last day of the festival. They needed more practise, co-ordination and harmony. It was like every member was playing his own song. Nortón, on the other hand, were brilliant. Their guitar player was overseas, but that problem was solved by bringing in a recording of him on video. They were so good that if they don't get big then they'll have to settle for a cult following of some sort. They're a bit like Hot Chip in the way they play their keyboards and in how lively they are. The trombone gave them a unique quality, but the guitar player not being there that night was a problem. It was too quiet.

Skakkamanage were average, rather dull, but two Spanish men in the audience went crazy for them, thought they were the best of the night and were shouting about how they had to get signed in Spain.

Mr. Silla & Mongoose were finishing their first song before I noticed their Coco Rosie-like music. This particular performance was the only one in the festival where people would come to the centre of the room and sit down by the stage to enjoy the music. They covered an almost unrecognisable version of Destiny's Child's Lose My Breath, better than Destiny's Child could ever make it.

Mammút will be the next great Icelandic success if they keep playing this well. It's unbelievable how Jakobínarína have had more local press than them, when Mammút put on such a better live show. Sadly, like Jakobínarína, the set list was too short, and they left the crowd wanting for more.

Ghostigital are one of the artist bands in Iceland. The music itself is very unusual, in that it sounds completely chaotic and random; in fact, a lot of their political lyrics are made up on the spot. Einar Örn is the most annoying aspect of the band. His blurted out lyrics are hard to understand

besides occasional random politicians' names. The music can be good most of the time but it was just too loud overall. The perfect gig for Ghostigital must have been the Náttúra concert (for protesting against building dams in Iceland and destroying the landscape) last January, where the rules were that the more political propaganda you played the better. Einar Örn's son playing the electric trumpet is definitely the best aspect of their live act.

Speaker Bite Me was the third and last time I saw the singer of Jomi Massage, Signe Hóirup Wille-Jørgensen perform. Speaker Bite Me were definitely better than Jomi. Their powerful instrumentation and vocals rocked the house and a cover of Pink Floyd's Wish You Were Here was much better than any version of it I have heard (and that song has been covered countless times). Its haunting chorus and drastic changes from the original were breathtaking. Speaker Bite Me were like the treasure that you find at the end of the rainbow. The rest of their show went smoothly, only improving if anything, they had become the highlight of the weekend and were in fact the best foreign act of the festival, slightly ahead of Throwing Muses.

Iceland's homeboy, Mugison, recently made the decision to stop playing around with a laptop and guitar by himself and join with rhythm geniuses Guðni Finns and Arnar Geir. The change was definitely for the better, and Arnar, the new drummer, is an especially welcome addition to one of Iceland's favourite exports. Mugison had fantastic contact with the audience.

A somewhat calmer act was Ampop, a band that recently turned a lot more pop than ambient. It would have been nice if they had played a bit longer and taken a few steps aside from the studio versions of their songs. The singer Biggi's white suit was a bit unflattering, but all in all, they were pleasant.

Baggalútur were a great end to the long weekend, making the mostly rock and electronic festival into a massive barn dance for the small portion of people still maintaining consciousness.

NAKED TAPE

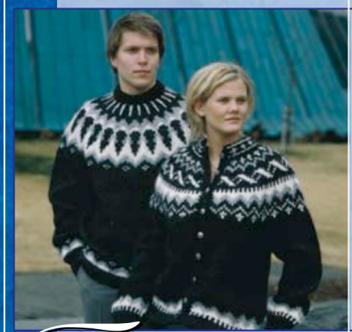
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RECREATION



Look Like a Local

A guide to Reykjavík gyms

BY ERIK DAVIDEK PHOTO BY SKARI

I woke up last Sunday completely hung over, again. Between catching up with old friends and meeting a few new ones, my first month in Iceland has been spent pouring expensive liquids down my throat. Add to this mess the fact that I really haven't been working (writing is more like an excuse to get away from the kids for an hour), and my days are left free to avoid exercise and nurse my hangovers with loaded hot dogs and ice cream. I figure that my caloric intake in the last month could have powered me through the Tour de France. Unfortunately, I don't own a bike. Lately, the look on my wife's face has got me thinking that my gut is starting to become a bit more "creepy" than "cute."

I suppose this shouldn't be a big deal. After all, I'm thirty-one years old, I've been married for eight years, and I have two kids. Hell, in America, I would be looked at with suspicion and mild disgust if I were in really great shape at this stage of my life. Where I'm from, obesity is an indication that your mother really likes you.

In Iceland, however, if you are a "chunky junky," it might be hard to find a date. According to the Nordic Council of Ministers, only about 12 percent of the population is considered obese, compared to roughly 30 percent of all Americans. Where's the love, Mama?!

Before I left the States, I had developed a respectable workout routine. Three mornings a week, I would get up early and hit the gym of the school where I taught... sculpt the guns. On two or three of my off days, I would run five kilometres along the shore of Lake Michigan. It had become so habitual that I almost thought it was fun. After a year of this absurdity, I had managed to throw out all of my pants with elastic in the waist, and get my wife pregnant (the two actions being directly related, I am convinced).

But now it's all slipping away. One month in a country that contains fewer obese people than my high school swim team, and I've somehow managed to ooze my way back into looking like a "Real American." Action must be taken. In an effort to keep my wife at least mildly interested in me physically, I visited some of the health clubs in the area. I figured there had to be at least one that I wouldn't hate going to. This is what I found...

"All prices quoted by employees. I get the feeling that there is always a bit of wheedling-and-dealing to be done, so you may be able to do better."

World Class, Sundlaugavegur 30
Holy crap! This place is more like an aromatic airport than a health club. Just walking from end-to-end made me sweat, so... mission accomplished. Facilities include childcare, a health spa, hair salon, restaurant, massage clinic, meeting rooms, swimming pool access, and I'm sure I spotted a time-travel machine in one of the corners.
Best place to go: If you are an obnoxious ass, or if you want to be constantly reminded that you are not the best looking or richest guy in town.
Prices: 1,300 ISK per day, 47,500 ISK per year.

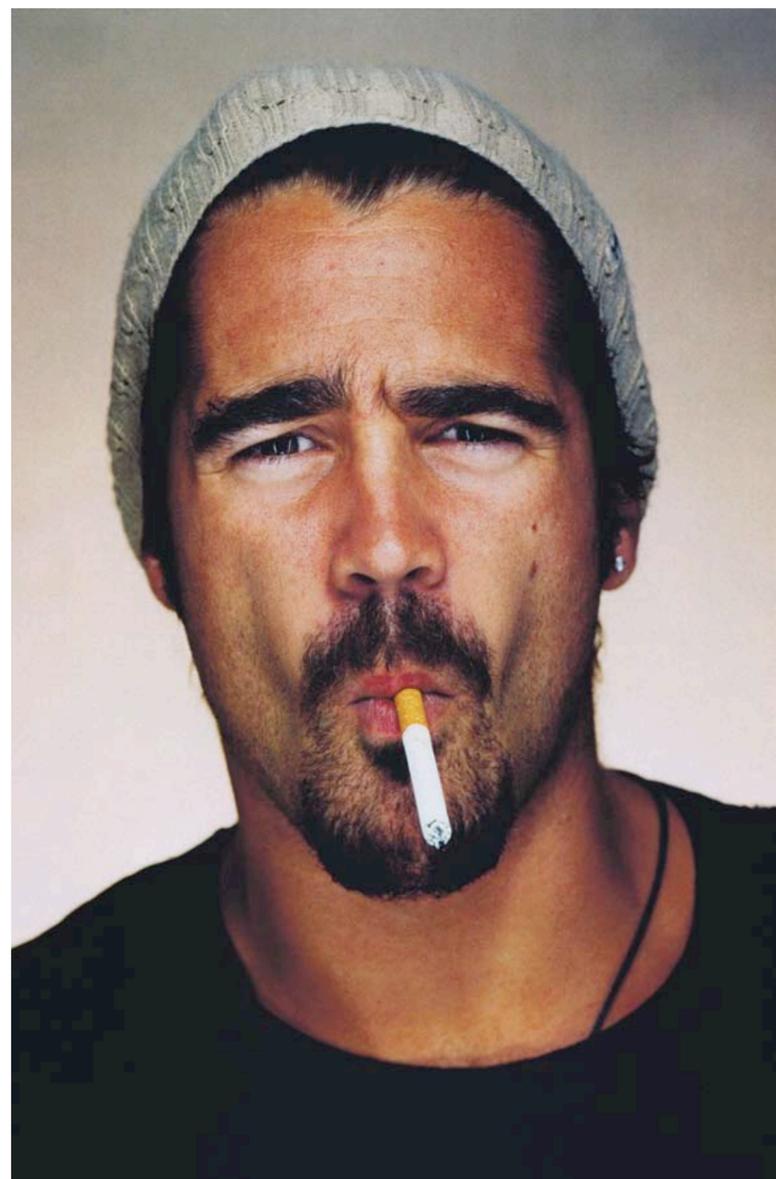
Hreyfing, Faxafeni 14
Looking around, you get the feeling that this place could really kick your ass. It's crammed full of machines, free weights, and there's even a place to hang from the ceiling. A gym-rat's gym.
Best place to go: To feel like part of a warm, loving family... that could swirl you over its head and body slam your ass.
Prices: 6-day free trial, 59,400 ISK per year.

Árbæjarþrek, Fylkisvegur 6
This is a clean, basic gym, with enough machines and weights to satisfy all but the craziest steroid freak. Judging by the fact that I have never seen more than five people there at one time, the idea of an efficient gym must not have caught on here yet.
Best place to go: If you just want to get in and out without the frills, like a date with Carmen Electra.
Prices: 700 ISK per day, 34,800 ISK per year.

Líkamsrækt Spa, Hagatorg (Inside the Radisson SAS)
With a Jacuzzi, hair salon, and full service spa packed into the basement of the hotel, there is little room left for fitness equipment. Like World Class but one-tenth the size and twice the price.
Best place to go: If you happen to be staying at the hotel and you don't have a car, bike, horse, wheelchair, feet or any other means to go somewhere else.
Prices: 1,800 ISK per day, 78,000 ISK per year.

Veggspor, Stórhöfði 17
The squash player's dream gym (if that's really what squash players dream about). There is a purposeful weight room housed in a pleasant facility with two small basketball courts.
Best place to go: If you're looking for an efficient health club and you like the sound of balls hitting the wall.
Prices: 900 ISK per day, 35,600 ISK per year.

FILM



451 Degrees of Colin Farrell

From Tom Cruise's wingman to the incarnation of Bradbury's fireman

BY BART CAMERON

At some point, years from now, scholars will look back in wonder at the cataclysmic effects of one Colin Farrell. How did one cocky Irishman manage to get his hands on so much of the best of Western culture? And how was he able to so completely obliterate said culture?

Please, examine the record. This week, Farrell brings his icky-uncle-we-wish-would-move-back-in-with-the-toothless-woman charm to Miami Vice, the show that brought the auteur into television. With Jamie Foxx and Michael Mann directing, the movie offered the one chance we had this summer of actual enjoyment. Even Tom Cruise couldn't ruin a Michael Mann-Jamie Foxx pairing.

Michael Mann simply doesn't have a chance against the destructive powers of Colin Farrell. So far, he has managed to perform critically panned, box office disasters from the following directors: Oliver Stone, Terrence Malick and Steven Spielberg, only managing to put together decent performances for the most Hollywood of directors, Joel Schumacher, in the watchable Tigerland, and the droning Phone Booth, which may or may not have been an episode of NYPD Blue.

Not that a ruined summer is anything to complain about. Farrell has ruined history at large with two performances so bad that history professors worldwide have simply given up their respective subjects: you can no longer learn about Alexander the Great,

because students laugh when they hear the name, and you can no longer teach about the Virginia colonies in America, because students fall into seizures when they recall the boredom of New World.

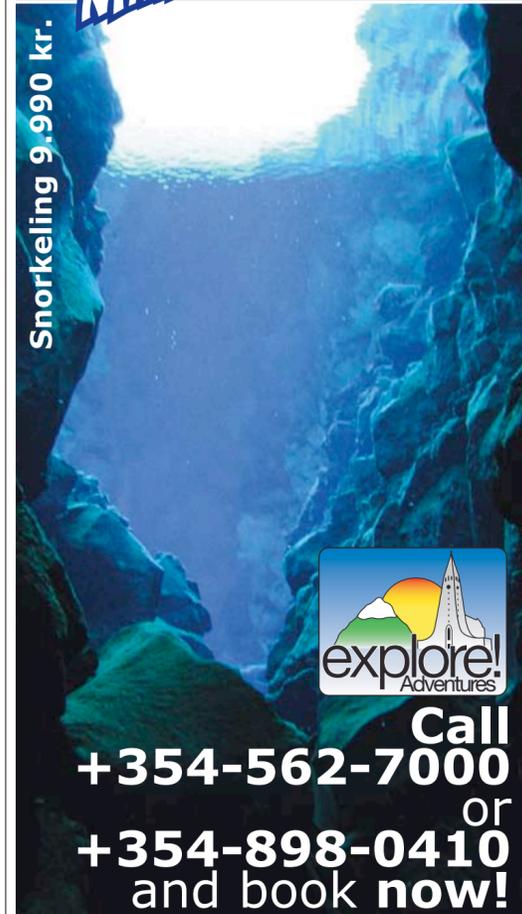
Fine, who cares about history and film? We're a street paper. We count on a different type of literacy. Which brings us to the most painful of Farrell's attacks on Western culture, his neutering of American fictional icons. Starting with the most brutal, Farrell was cast as Arturo Bandini, John Fante's fictional persona, the character who inspired Charles Bukowski's fiction. For a casual reader to see even five seconds of Ask the Dust, the melodramatic take on a great comedic work, is to lose the ability to feel joy — something like watching your dog killed in front of you.

Such is the case with Farrell's other triumphs in trashing, with Tom Cruise's help, Philip K. Dick's story Minority Report, Michael Cunningham's seeping novel A Home at the End of the World, and even Frank Miller's comic writing in Daredevil, a landmark in style before Affleck and Farrell got to it.

As you go to the movies, and the gnawing disappointment turns your stomach when you try to make a film selection, understand you are justified in not allowing Mr. Farrell's grating persona to burn away a cultural icon you hold dear. Ray Bradbury warned us the day would come, and it has, the best of culture is being cremated. And Colin Farrell is the fireman.



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Hafnarborg is the art museum of Hafnarfjörður, an old town in the lava just south of Reykjavík. The exhibition is open from 11 to 17 every day except Tuesday and 11 to 21 Thursdays. To get there from Reykjavík, take bus S1 which stops just a few metres from our door.

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"That's Not Arrogance; It's Ambition"

A night out at Rex

BY GUNNAR HRAFN JÓNSSON PHOTO BY SKARI

"I love the amount of personal space you get here, and the good company. They don't let just anybody in here, you know." I would hear that sentence, or at least those exact sentiments, from several people over the next few hours. We're sitting in a large, open room full of faux gold and rich people. Peppy music is banging away somewhere in the back, but the noise level is low enough to allow relaxed conversation. This is Rex, probably the fanciest place to party in the country.

"What's your favourite Icelandic film of all time?" says the young man who just sat down at the table with me and the photographer, seemingly at random. He receives murmurs mentioning 101 Reykjavík, Útlaginn and Sódóma Reykjavík. "Exactly, Sódóma Reykjavík. A whole film about losing the remote control to your television, awesome. I'm a filmmaker by the way, and I'm going to make the best damned Icelandic film of all time. That's not arrogance; it's ambition."

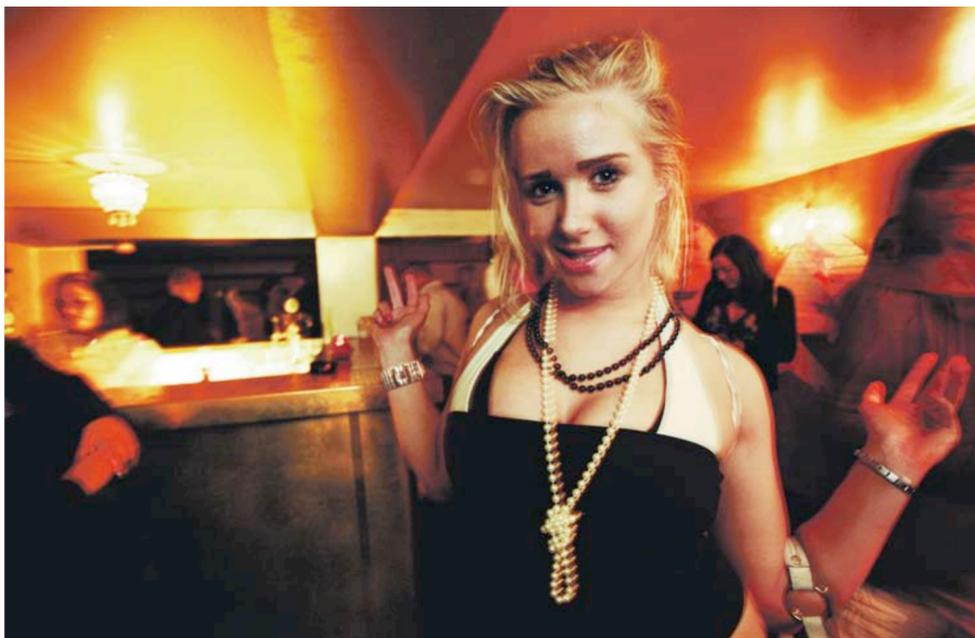
Ambition is something that doesn't seem to be in short supply amongst Rex's clientele. Bankers, CEOs, doctors and models abound. Expensive clothes, gold chains and cigars are the order of the day. People are thoroughly looked over at the door before the bouncers decide if they will fit the ambiance, and over the course of the evening we spot several arty looking types being turned away for having scarves, hats or unkempt hair. Oh, and don't even try to approach Rex if you're wearing tennis shoes – the shoes are absolutely vital.

Despite the strict dress code we're occasionally spotting older, less attractive individuals that seem to flout all the rules and still get in. These are the people whose bank accounts could run a small Central American republic for a decade, and tonight none of them seem to be capable of smiling in the least. That particular group comes here to mingle and make contacts, it seems, rather than to party.

Another highly visible minority at Rex are the foreigners, mainly tourists, who walk in off the street without knowing anything about the place. As we had been warned about systematic racism from doormen at some of the fancier places in Reykjavík, it comes as a deeply pleasant surprise to see people of all ethnicities mingling here as well. When we ask the regulars about who comes here, it also becomes clear that non-Icelanders are an important part of the clientele – especially during the summer.

As the evening progresses it becomes clear that this is a quiet night for Rex, which appears to be missing some of its regulars.

"I'm not sure what the problem is. I know it's been a while since payday, but that's usually not a factor here. These guys don't exactly run out, you know?" We've moved downstairs, where there is a kind of chill-out area, and are talking to a truly stunning young bartender with a mischievous smile. She's not the only attraction at the bar, though; it seems every last one of the staff at Rex are impossibly beautiful people. If you saw this scene in a Hollywood movie you'd roll back your eyes at the lack of realism: "Come on, bartenders don't really look like THAT!"



Professional Size

Speaking of beauty, not long after we walk down the stairs my companion is mobbed by pretty blonde girls wearing pink butterfly wings. Confused and startled, I back off and watch the spectacle of all these tipsy girls lining up for sexy photo poses. A professional-sized camera is clearly the ultimate babe magnet. After the most provocative 'model' finally tires of pulling and pushing her clothes and assets to and fro, the shutterbug leans over and whispers: "Dude, this is so wrong. That's

upstairs leads us to investigate. The scene we find up there is very different from the one we left just 30 minutes ago, as the place has suddenly filled up and gotten much livelier. People are going wild on the dance floor and laughing loudly at their tables, but there's something very un-Icelandic about the whole vibe. You see, no one is visibly drunk. Everyone is tipsy, sure, but at this point it's almost five a.m. and this must be the only bar in downtown Reykjavík that isn't currently playing host to something reminiscent of

pleasant surprise in the bathroom. While the bathroom itself is predictably posh and clean, it's the addition of a glass holder inside the stalls that is the crowning touch. It could be an anti-date-rape measure, since you never have to lose sight of your drink. It could be a posh status symbol for folks that don't want to put their glass down on any surface commonly available inside a bathroom stall. Hell, it could even be an ashtray that just looks perfect for a glass after five Mojitos and a beer – but it's there and it serves its glorious purpose with style. Whatever it may be.

It's now after six a.m. and the atmosphere has changed subtly. Older, single people (notably, a lot of women) seem to be on the prowl. One male patron in his twenties nudges me as a heavily modified woman in her sixties walks past: "That's a GILF, man!" If you are familiar with the term MILF you can probably guess his intentions from the context.

My teetotaler of a photographer has been hijacked by his girlfriend who needed a ride home, but Rex is starting to feel increasingly comfortable. For the amount of money that must be floating around the dance floor in people's pockets – everyone seems remarkably laid back. Perhaps they know they are amongst friends. Something one of the bargirls told me on my way out could lend support to that theory: "You know what? I'll bet anything your jacket is still up there and untouched. The only time anyone reported anything missing here, it turned up half an hour later when someone realised they had taken the wrong coat by mistake. We haven't had a single theft here – ever." If that isn't enough to convince you Rex is a very different place from most late night hangouts in Reykjavík, nothing is.

a scene out of the Lost Weekend. On the contrary, the atmosphere is downright civil. Until, that is, my loyal shutterbug gets briefly accosted by angry patrons on the dance floor, who object to having their picture taken. But this eases up soon enough.

The drink of the night is the Mojito, and at this late hour the bar girls downstairs confess that their hands are starting to ache from overuse of the mortar they use to crush up the ice, mint leaves and sugar. "About half the orders tonight seem to be for Mojitos, I thank God for every beer order I get at this point," says one. I sheepishly look down at my Mojito, which just happens to be one of the best I've had in Iceland, and decide to switch to beer.

When time came for the inevitable... release of said refreshments, there was a

"It seems every last one of the staff at Rex are impossibly beautiful people. If you saw this scene in a Hollywood movie you'd roll back your eyes at the lack of realism: 'Come on, bartenders don't really look like THAT!'"

my friend's little sister! But, hey, don't put this in the article." He has to learn somehow.

Heading back to the warm embrace of the lower floor bar for another cocktail, I come upon two lovely girls dancing and gyrating their hips as they serve drinks and giggle. One of them gives a customer a sly wink as she takes a tiny sip from the Mojito she just made for him. The reason for their friendly behaviour soon becomes apparent: they're getting tips. Really, really good tips. "We get a lot of foreigners in here, but they've all been told that you don't tip in Iceland. It's the locals, the regulars, who like to give us a little extra – sometimes we even walk away with more in tips than regular wages!"

As hard as it is to tear yourself away from the never-ending hospitality of the flirty bargirls, the increasing volume of the music



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How to drive in Iceland

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A relatively large percentage of foreign tourists in Iceland travel around the country by car. Conditions in Iceland are in many ways unusual, and often quite unlike that which foreign drivers are accustomed. It is therefore very important to find out how to drive in this country. We know that the landscapes are beautiful, which naturally draws the attention of driver away from the road. But in order to reach your destination safely, you must keep your full attention on driving.

This article is intended to point out the main dangers when driving in Iceland, especially the unusual ones that may come as a complete surprise to foreign drivers.

What are the speed limits?

The speed limit in urban areas is usually 50 km/hr. Speed limit signs are usually not posted unless it is other than 50 km/hr. The speed limit is often 60 km/hr on thruways, but in residential areas it is usually only 30 km/hr. The main rule on highways is that gravel roads have a speed limit of 80 km/hr, and paved roads 90 km/hr. Signs indicate if other speed limits apply.

Gravel roads, blind hills & blind curves

A common place for accidents to occur on urban roads is where a paved road suddenly changes to gravel. The main reason is that drivers do not reduce speed before the changeover to gravel, and consequently lose control. Loose gravel on road shoulders has also caused a great number of accidents. When driving on gravel roads—which are often quite narrow—it is important to show caution when approaching another car coming from the opposite direction by moving as far to the right as is safely possible.



Blind hills—where lanes are not separate—can be very dangerous, and should be approached with caution. There are also many blind curves in Iceland that test a driver's skill.

Single-lane bridges

There are many single-lane bridges on the Ring Road. The actual rule is that the car closer to the bridge has the right-of-way. However, it is wise to stop and assess the situation, i.e. attempt to see what the other driver plans to do. This sign indicates that a single-lane bridge is ahead.



Livestock on the road

In Iceland, you can expect livestock to be on or alongside the road. It is usually sheep, but sometimes horses and even cows can be in your path. This is common all over the country, and can be very dangerous. Sometimes a sheep is on one side of the road and her lambs

on the other side. Under these conditions—which are common—it is a good rule to expect the lambs or the sheep to run to the other side.

Seatbelts are required by law

In Iceland, drivers and passengers are required by law to wear seatbelts, regardless of the type of vehicle or where they are seated. Investigations of fatal accidents in recent years have shown that a large majority of those who died did not have their seatbelts fastened. Wearing seatbelts is especially important because of the nature of accidents in Iceland: many of them involve vehicles driving off the road and rolling over. In such accidents, seatbelts often mean the difference between life and death. It should be noted that children must either wear seatbelts, or be in car safety seats, depending on their age and maturity.

Necessary to bear in mind

It is against the law to operate a vehicle in Iceland after having consumed alcohol, and the punishment for violating this law is rather stiff.

Iceland requires that vehicle headlights be on at all times, day and night, when driving.

It is strictly forbidden to drive off-road. Such driving results in serious damage to sensitive vegetation, which may take nature decades to repair.

Foreign travellers requiring information regarding road and driving conditions should visit the Public Road Administration's website at www.vegagerdin.is

It should be noted that the Road Traffic Directorate has produced a video for foreign drivers, which covers all the points that have been mentioned here. The video can be viewed on the Directorate's website, www.us.is (under the English version).



ROAD TRAFFIC DIRECTORATE

TRAVEL

Outside Reykjavík

Hornstrandir



The Lonesome Traveller: Hornstrandir

Sheer cliffs and high water in the most remote corner of Iceland

BY FABRIZIO FRASCAROLI PHOTOS BY FABRIZIO FRASCAROLI

Tourist-tailored representations of the country – so focused as they are in selling glaciers, hot springs and volcanoes – often tend to neglect the sea as a central element of a travel experience in Iceland. Peculiar and quite unfair: after all, the sea is a dominant part of the Icelandic landscape, and it is the place where Icelanders have found the core of a pioneering national identity in the course of their history and upon which they have built their wealth over the last century. And – it cannot be denied – it is where the land meets the ocean that Iceland can still offer some of the most awe-inspiring instances of its beauty. Take Hornstrandir, for example, a place beloved, respected, almost feared by Icelanders, and yet unknown and largely ignored by the main tourist flows.

Located in the northernmost appendix of the Westfjords, Hornstrandir is a claw-shaped peninsula attached to the rest of the country by a thin 6 km isthmus. Whereas the Westfjords are usually considered as Iceland's least reachable area and – in virtue of their beauty – the country's best kept secret, Hornstrandir constitutes the region's most inaccessible and remote location and its hidden treasure. A cruel and still irresistibly charming land, facing the Greenland Sea, homeland of tales of trolls, elves and witchcraft – the Icelandic witch-hunt (yes, there was an Icelandic witch-hunt) struck hardest here. Hosting a small and scattered community until the 1950s (“enduring people who feared nothing” in the words of a fisherman I had the pleasure to share a cup of coffee with), Hornstrandir was eventually deserted by its inhabitants, tired of the isolation and hardships the location imposed on them. In 1975, it was turned into a privately owned nature reserve and today it represents one of the main wild

areas in Iceland, offering a display of flora and fauna among the richest in the country. A rather convincing confirmation of the natural value of the place seems to be provided by the number of people who come here to carry out fieldwork in the context of environmental science.

Hornstrandir greets the visitor with no facilities whatsoever: you will find no roads, no hotels, no organised campsites, nor even toilets. The amount of comfort you will be able to enjoy – from food to toilet paper – is basically what you carry with you. Your GSM phone will not help you communicate with the outside world once in Hornstrandir. And you won't get far by car; walking remains the only possible way to move within the region, while travelling by sea is surely the best option for approaching the peninsula. All the major bays are well served from Ísafjörður, with daily trips running: the boat takes you to the coast, where the captain says, “Enjoy your stay and good luck.” You watch it leaving and know that you are left there alone – or perhaps in the casual company of few other visitors – until the time for pick-up comes.

It goes without saying that walking in Hornstrandir's solitude is a most exhilarating experience – one which Icelanders in particular approach with some sense of awe, as a sort of hiking initiation.

Open ocean, plastic bags

I am sailing to Hornvík today, at the northeastern corner of the region – the most popular destination for visitors, they tell me. I boarded at 9:00 on Monday morning, after a night spent at Ísafjörður campsite and a cosy breakfast in the adjacent Hotel Edda. It is an about three-hour trip to get there. Of the 20 passengers

on the boat – most are Icelanders, though there are several tourists on a day tour. The atmosphere onboard is electric with apparently everyone enjoying the trip, charged with excitement and expectation. Until a cute and innocent-looking little girl starts it all. We have reached open sea by now; the ocean is not particularly rough today, but we are facing an ominous headwind. The young girl does not handle our first wave collision well. The first plastic bag – provided in timely fashion by the only crew member – makes its appearance. It won't be the last one: the chain reaction is irresistible, and in a short while a good half of the passengers is nailed to their seats, helplessly struggling against the contagious sea-sickness. The rest of the trip will be a neverending via crucis for some, an inebriating run on the waves for others. A few people are even out on the deck, boozing around under the splashes – they are clearly having a good time. “If you feel something strange going on in your stomach, look to the horizon!” my seat-neighbour suggests, a biologist from the

area three years ago, so I have picked a slightly different itinerary this time: my plan is to walk southwards from Hornvík, towards Hrafnfjörður and finally to Dalbær in the southwest, where a road (a real road!) will take me back to the populated world.

There is no dock in Horn (the final destination of our boat trip) so we have to jump onto a dinghy to land. A thick veil of mist is hiding the vastness of the landscape at our arrival (thick fogs are unfortunately common here), the south-easterly wind is blowing harshly and the temperature feels rather cold (less than 10°, I suppose), but at least the weather is dry: we are at not even 100 km from the Arctic Circle here, so the bargain is acceptable, even in summertime.

The weather is dry, but the soil certainly isn't: it recently rained and the pouring water has left the terrain soggy. My steps often sink deep into the muddy ground, and it is a matter of a mere couple of hours before I feel the humidity finding its way inside my boots.

The cliffs of Hornvík are a renowned wonder in

“The cliffs of Hornvík are a renowned wonder in Iceland (for some, the most spectacular view Iceland has to offer): sheer walls covered in green moss and perpetually confronting the ocean.”

University of Iceland with some years as a fisherman behind him. I gladly follow the advice and feel thankful to be among those able to enjoy this two-hour experience.

Fortunately, sailing to Hornvík is not the only option to reach the shores of Hornstrandir. Going to Hesteyri or even Aðalvík, for example, offers a much more sheltered passage: you never enter the open ocean and, unless you hit adverse weather conditions, you should be able to avoid that kind of tormenting sickness.

The northern part of the peninsula is probably the best place to start in approaching the region. The large majority of the yearly visitors used to roam between Aðalvík, Hælavík and Hornvík: paths there are more clearly marked and easier to follow and the locations you cross simply magnificent. I already walked the northern

Iceland (for some, the most spectacular view Iceland has to offer): sheer walls covered in green moss and perpetually confronting the ocean. From the top, it is well above 100 metres of vertical fall towards the water: not the dream-place for those who do not enjoy heights. These cliffs are one of the most populated nesting locations for birdlife in Europe. Given that, today, the visual range is reduced to only a few meters, I decide that a visit to the bay's rocky edge would be a pointless effort: I will walk due south.

During the first day, the trail leads me from bay to bay all the way down to Smiðjuvík. It is a continuous walk on high, sheer cliffs, towering above the roaring water underneath. At least for the first half of the route, the path is clear and easy to follow. I have the

>>> CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

TRAVEL

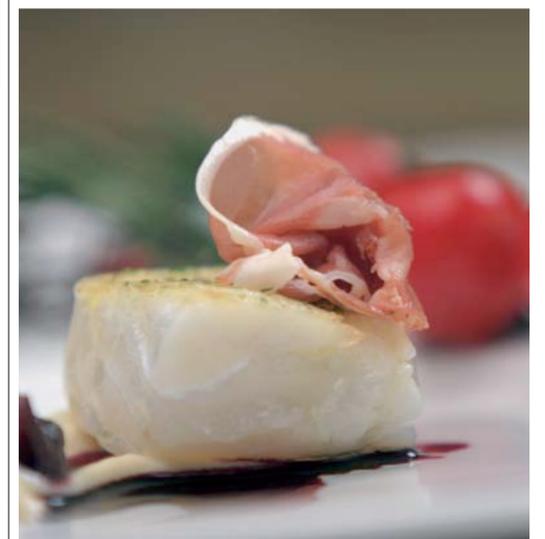
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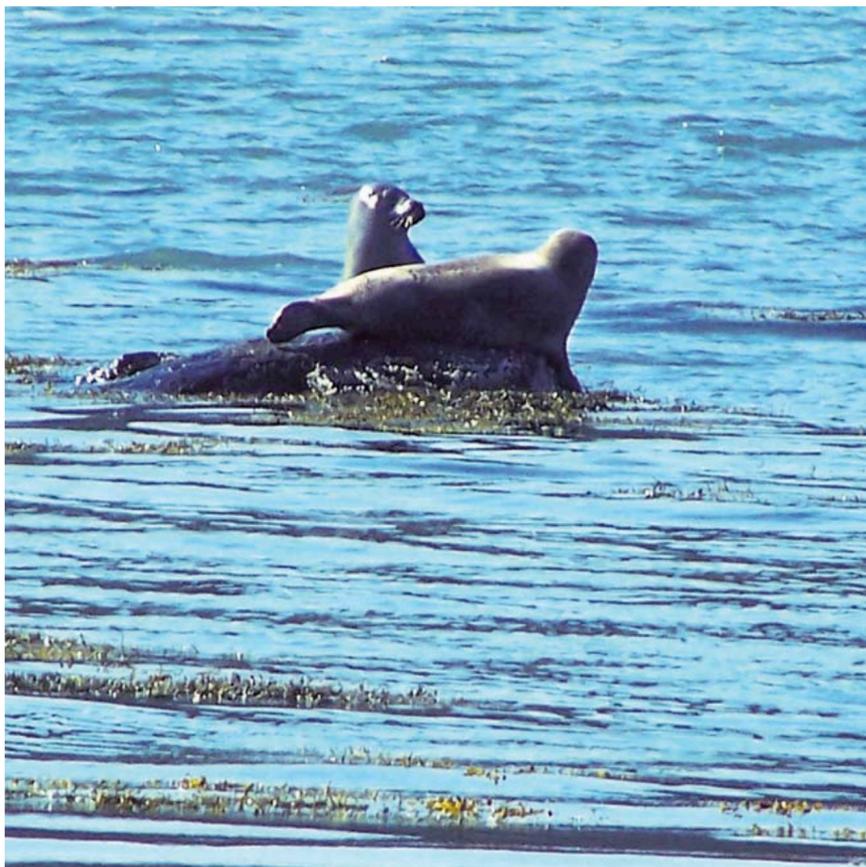
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flow of blood surfaces through the water around my left foot. With the blood, so goes my sense of adventure, and I feel as miserable as never before during this trip.

When I get up on my fourth and last day of trekking, clouds have grown thick in the sky again. It is dark, but very still and dry. The temperature feels extremely mild and the air charged with humidity: it will be a very sweaty day.

Besides hosting some of the country's richest and most diverse sub-arctic flora and fauna, Hornstrandir is also homeland – and this is no plus – to numerous colonies of the most annoying species of flies and mosquitoes you will ever know in Iceland. They are the villain of the day: they start following me from the moment I set out at 9:30 with no intention of leaving me in peace when the trail starts climbing up towards the 600m ASL of the Dynjandisskarð pass. It is a tiring climb. Few people a year employ this route and there is no path to really follow: just sporadic footprints every now and then. The cloud of mosquitoes floating around me as I move is killing my nerves. If anyone could be a spectator, surely they would find rather comic the image of me grunting horrible curses and twirling my trekking poles in a quixotic fight against the flying beasts, while dragging my tired legs up the slopes.

At 400m ASL the snow makes its appearance. And in this case it is a mostly welcome sight, as its arrival finally sets me free from the evil flying creatures' siege. For several kilometres the trail keeps at an altitude between 400 and 600m ASL. It is an endless stretch of stones and snowfields, the only dull part of my trip. The visibility conditions certainly don't help: it is not foggy, but the Westfjords at the horizon – which could make a glorious view from up here – are completely clad in haze.

The arrival to Dalbær early in the afternoon, after a hike of 68 km altogether, marks my return to "civilisation". But it is a purely formal way of seeing it: there is no one around, only a couple of houses, a desert guesthouse and campsite, and a church. And the road is nothing more than a thin and dusty stripe of gravel winding southwards. The traffic is far from intense: I count two cars in about six hours. I will enjoy a warm shower tonight. Then tomorrow the issue will be how to get away from here with no buses scheduled and so few cars driving by.

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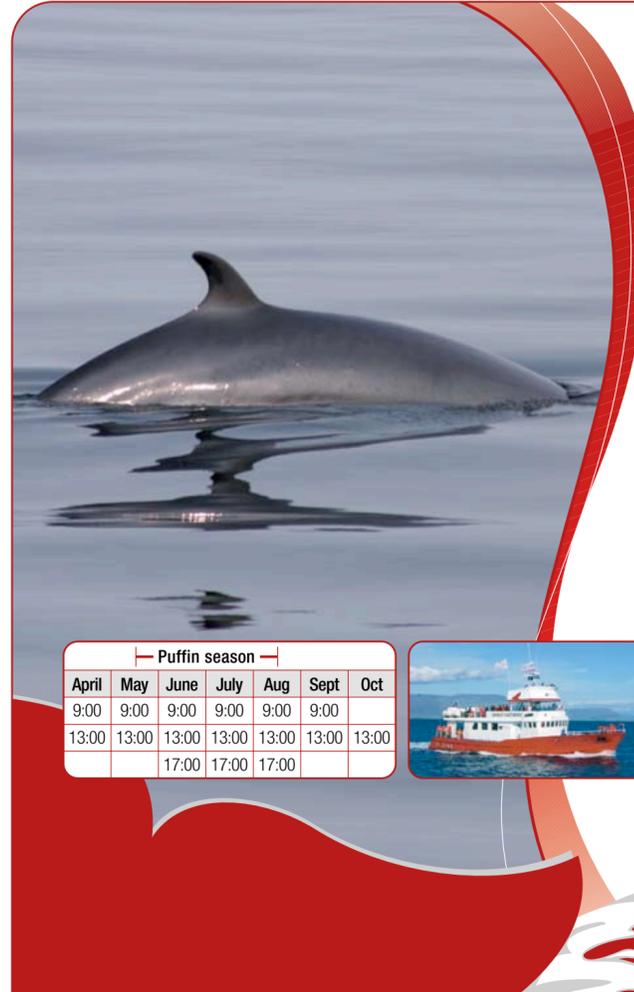


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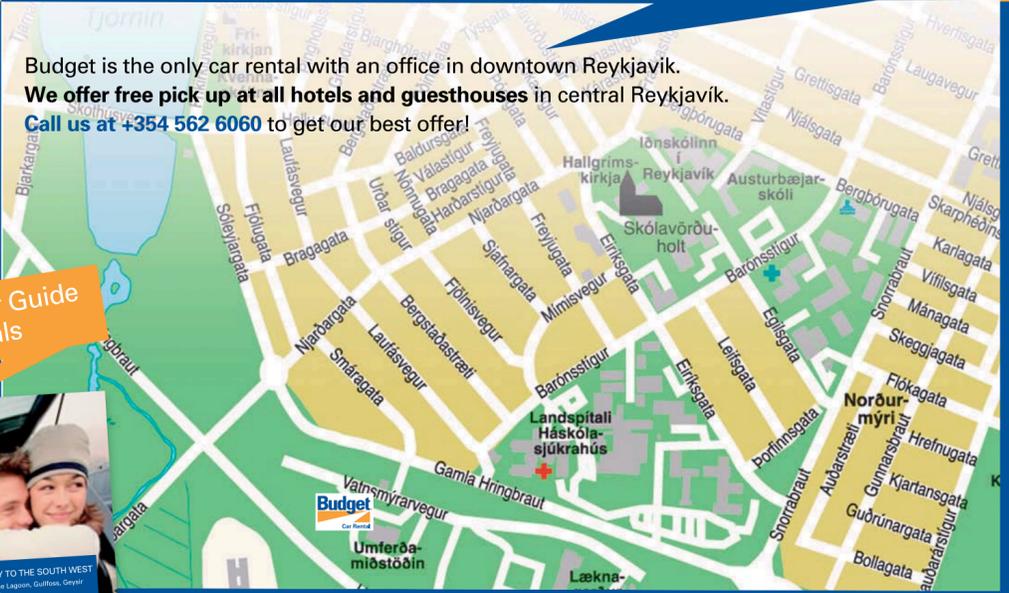
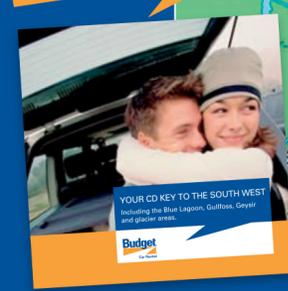


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Dyrhólaey: Jagged Death Plunge or Birdwatcher's Paradise

A God's-eye view of birds' biological functions

BY VALGERÐUR ÞÓRODDSDÓTTIR PHOTO BY SKARI

Driving towards Dyrhólaey from the west, the first thing you notice about the colossal rock mass is the bird shit. All around the "door", splotches of droppings visible from a kilometre away effectively outline the cliff's outcrops, where the fulmar, sea hen, razorbill, puffin and seagull have standing, sitting and shitting room. Yet even here on the top of its neighbouring precipice, there was not a single bird to be found.

To get to Dyrhólaey, we had driven up a winding rock road onto the mainland, an enormous mountain bordering the ocean. There we found a lighthouse and a flattened patch of grass, which served as a makeshift parking lot for the dozen or so rental cars and tourist buses eager to visit the adjoining peninsula. The edge of this cliff mainland provided an incredible panorama, a preamble to the view from Dyrhólaey: The coastline stretching west, Mýrdal-sjökull to the north and the bright blue North Atlantic Ocean reaching impossibly far towards the southern horizon. Looking east, I saw for the first time Dyrhólaey looming in its entirety. Below it, the cliffs cast an ominous shadow that, from time to time, swallowed the eider ducks and ducklings splashing in the water below its gate.

The headland is thought to have been created from an underwater volcanic eruption late in the ice age. Stretching off the country's south

coast, the promontory has a giant circular gap in the centre of its base from which it draws its name, meaning literally "door hill island".

From a few hundred metres away, the cliffs of Dyrhólaey looked nothing less than deadly. Rising a full 120 metres out of the ocean, the steep rock stretched daringly out into a peninsula, shunning the grassy mainland, and, somehow, the bright rays of the sun.

As I drew nearer, following a dirt path towards the cliff, the horizontal landscape slowly began to lose its gloomy vibe. I saw that the mainland connects to the skinny peninsula in a broad embrace, the grass spilling over onto it and the rounded lava formations that constitute its rock floor. The space on the top of the peninsula was broad and bright, and soft moss, covering much of the brown rock, stood in stark contrast to the jagged rocks hanging just below.

In a surreal way, this place was peaceful. In fact, in the span of ten minutes, I had managed to forget all about the deadly drop that awaited me over the ever-near edge and the fact that a few metres below my feet there was a giant hole.

I half-crawled over to the edge of the cliff to peek at the drop-off. Below me the rock curved into a concave bulge, then plunged in a perfectly vertical line downwards. The ocean below, a lighter shade of blue from up here, looked enormous. I threw a rock as hard as I could



against the wind, and, steadily plummeting, it quickly escaped my eye and earshot before even coming close to the water. Looking to my right, I caught sight of my first Dyrhólaey bird. About ten metres down was a small shelf of rock, where the sun, touching nothing else, cast a warm spotlight on a fulmar nestling next to a small bouquet of white flowers growing out of the side of the cliff. For a moment, looking at that bird, I found the cliffs of Dyrhólaey charming... a very short moment, before I remembered that I had neither

wings nor superhuman powers, and that being shit-free was not enough to qualify something as cute. This was, after all, still a jagged death plunge. I inched my way towards safer ground, and sat down on the strangely comforting, and soft, dirt.

A few metres ahead of me flew a seagull, resting heavily against the wind. He was soaring, yet he was directly in my line of vision. I realised that perhaps this was a cool thing. That there, with that obnoxious little bird, the humbly named "rat of the sea", flew the bizarre thrill of this giant rock. I wasn't

looking up towards the sky to see birds, I was looking down. I was the sky. As the bird passed, I noticed a small white chunk dropping from its nether region. Fighting the wind, it dropped straight down, splattering majestically on the rock mass a hundred feet down. Suddenly, this seemed like a good place to be.

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“A year after the avalanches, in 1996, the tunnel to Ísafjörður was formally opened, cutting what was once a very unstable and often blocked route between the places in half, thereby redefining the whole area as one zone of employment. That same year, the towns were united. One of the effects of this whole process was that most of the smaller towns’ commerce moved to Ísafjörður - people vote with their feet and understandably opt to shop at the cheaper Bónus store rather than their local Kaupfélag,”

Ísafjörðarbær mayor Halldór Halldorsson on the collapse of the once lively Flateyri.
Page 21.

“Easily half of the people there were not there to see a concert. They were taking part in an event. For those not in the know, Icelanders taking part in an event are somewhat similar to the teachers who supervise senior prom. They stand around watching, smiling politely as they watch everyone.”

Sindri Eldon on Sigur Rós’s Miklatún concert.
Page 24.

“Where I’m from, obesity is an indication that your mother really likes you. In Iceland, however, if you are a “chunky junky,” it might be hard to find a date. According to the Nordic Council of Ministers, only about 12 percent of the population is considered obese, compared to roughly 30 percent of all Americans.”

Erik Davidek on gym culture.
Page 44.

“It seems every last one of the staff at Rex are impossibly beautiful people. If you saw this scene in a Hollywood movie you’d roll back your eyes at the lack of realism: ‘Come on, bartenders don’t really look like THAT!’”

Gunnar Hrafn Jónsson on the nightclub Rex.
Page 46.

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