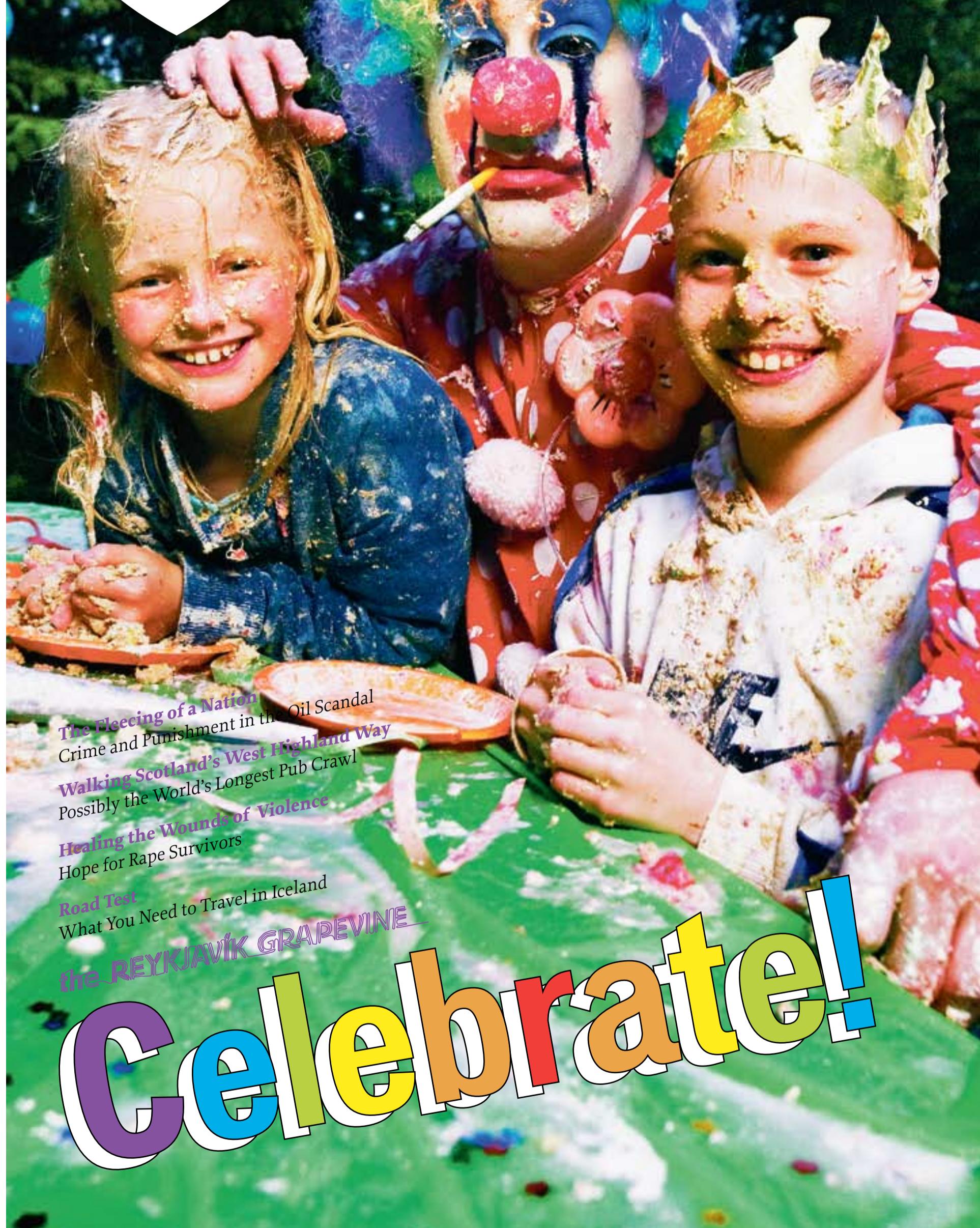




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# the REYKJAVÍK GRAPEVINE

ISSUE SEVEN: JUNE 10 - JUNE 23, 2005

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Cover Photo by: Gúndi  
Hair & Makeup: Sóley Ástudóttir  
Thanks to: Oddvar the clown and the jolly bunch  
Printed by: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja ehf.  
# of copies: 30,101

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## LETTERS

Complaints, criticism, suggestions, praise, money, anything at all: Contact letters@grapevine.is or send your mail to: The Reykjavík Grapevine, Hafnarstræti 15, 101 Reykjavík.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I live in India -- thousands of miles away from Iceland's shores. Tonight there was a special Oprah Winfrey show in which she interviewed an actress from my country named Aishwarya Rai. She was followed by a beautiful lady from your country named Svanhildur Valsdottir - who presented some delicacies from your country to Oprah, which she refused to even taste.

I am not from Iceland and have never even been to your wonderful country, but I was happy to learn about your country from this show. But in my mind, Oprah tried to make fun of Iceland. I felt that her approach was condescending. I want the people of Iceland to know that if any of you felt bad about the show -- you have a friend thousands of miles away that shares your feelings.

My country is a land where from ancient times a guest has been treated like a divine being and was the most honoured. I felt that Oprah invited someone to her show and then tried to mock everyone from every country and did not like it when a lady from Belgium used the word 'overrated' in reference to America.

Well, one good thing is that I came to know about your wonderful country and a small aspect of the life of your people.

Regards,

Prashant Solomon  
New Delhi, India

Well said. There are a few things we can learn from this: 1) Oprah Winfrey is not a journalist. She essentially sells the status quo. People should stop watching her programme. 2) Despite extremely circumspect editing and a host who was out to objectify her, Svanhildur was able to connect with viewers from around the world. Which means Svanhildur may have superpowers.

Sir:

Hugleikur is not funny.

When my three friends and I came to Reykjavík at the end of May for our first visit, I was happy to find an English-language local (Grapevine Issue 6), until I turned to page 20 and saw Hugleikur's panel on AIDS. That kind of humour went out in the mid-80s, kids.

For your records: my friends who have died of AIDS were named Robert, Benn, David, Patrick,

Manuel and Julie. While I was reading your paper, one of my friends asked to see it, wanted to page through it. I hoped he would not turn to page 20, but he did. He is warm, kind, frank and has made me laugh more than Hugleikur ever will. He has had the virus that causes AIDS for some years now. When he saw that panel I felt a rush of shame and embarrassment; it had been my idea to come to Iceland. It seems there is nowhere one can get away from it, even in 'liberal', 'cosmopolitan' Reykjavík.

Like I said, Hugleikur is not funny.

Sincerely,  
Joseph Konrad

You make a point. I judged the piece on how many people were laughing, which was not the right thing to do in this case. I apologize.

I think the joke was tasteless. It talked about a fear on a lot of people's minds, (according to the CIA World Factbook, there are 220 Icelanders living with H.I.V./ AIDS,) but it wasn't meant to be hurtful. Perhaps I had rationalized my choice by telling myself the ideal impact of such a joke would be public discussion. I was wrong to rationalize, and I was wrong to run the panel.

Hello Grapevine,

I find your newspaper to be extremely anti-Icelandic in that really your newspaper just seems to point out the negatives of Iceland, so why do you stay there? Honestly? Obviously you will have a biased view on immigration, but how bout looking at it from an Icelandic point of view. We are a small country, with a fragile country, a fragile population, if we accepted some huge influx of immigrants with a totally different culture, background and language what would happen to us and our culture? We are small and thus we must preserve our Nordic culture. Why must we have to be the American melting pot? Do you think thousands of ultra fundamentalist Muslims would

fit well in society here? No, in my opinion. I think it would clash quite a bit with our culture and country. We believe in gay rights, an egalitarian society, immigrants from third world countries just do not belong here. It's not as if we are racist, that we are a hateful people, but we are the last homogenous white society in the world, and we are proud of that, just as I am sure other homogenous societies are in Africa and the Middle East. We have already enough outside influences, why can't we keep our

own? Please, for a change write something POSITIVE about Iceland and our people, instead of pointing out our constant negative sides. We don't mind criticism and I certainly don't tolerate censorship and think we must hide our problems, but for god sakes, give us a break! We're not bombing countries in the far east are we? We're building a freakin' dam for chris'sakes! It would just be nice to see something positive about this great country for a change. What do you say? A deal?

Pétur Kristján Jansson, Reykjavík

Of the many positives I would mention about Iceland: an impressive literary tradition from the sagas of the 13<sup>th</sup> century through Laxness and writers like Sjón today; an outstanding music scene, breathtaking nature, a tolerant society, and the world's oldest parliament, I hadn't thought of plugging "the last homogenous white society in the world." Maybe you should do the promotions for Iceland. You could put blue-eyed blondes on posters and paste them around the... oh wait, that's already been done. Which is odd, because there aren't too many blue-eyed blondes here. Why? Because as historians and your own treasured sagas will point out, Iceland was an extremely diverse society at the time of settlement. And guess what: living on an island in the middle of the richest fishing reserves in the world brings a lot of visitors. Hence a former Prime Minister, Davíð Oddsson, proud of his African ancestor.

But presenting that argument somehow vindicates your belief that homogeneous societies need protection, and it ignores the realities of the last thirty years of Icelandic culture. Iceland wants to be modern. People here want a full economy. This requires a workforce. This requires immigration. We only argue that immigrants, once here, should be treated like human beings.

And here's a note to all you bigots and racists who want to grow up and be just like Mr. Jansson: if you're a citizen of a country that very publicly supports the invasion of Iraq, don't send a letter that excuses all your country's actions by claiming that at least you're not bombing anyone. Then again, arguing that you have a tolerant society and therefore want to be extremely intolerant also is a bad idea.

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## Celebrate!



Bart Cameron, Editor

The last issue of the Grapevine was our most popular issue in the three-year history of the paper, by far. I give much of the credit to the writers, Pórdís Elva Þorvaldsdóttir Bachmann and Paul Nikolov, who again have prominent articles in this issue, especially. But I also have to give an enormous amount of credit to the business community at large who have been buying ads to pay our salaries and have done so without any stipulations or restrictions on our content.

Let me repeat that: none of our sponsors have restricted our content in any way. This has even provided some comic relief, as when, for this article, we discussed an advertiser's services and the advertiser told us he really hoped we wouldn't ridicule him. I asked if he was saying we weren't allowed to, if it would affect the advertising. Nope. Without missing a beat he just said he hoped his services were good.

Freedom from the influence of

advertisers may seem like a small thing, but in my years as a writer, especially working with independent papers, I have never experienced this much freedom.

Just as impressive, the political and public figures we have openly criticized have accepted our criticism, and have made themselves available for interviews so that we might criticize them all the more. (Whether they're listening or considering changing their policy, we doubt, but we're happy to at least get access to material.) For example, we have been extremely critical of the conservative Parliamentarian Bjarni Benediktsson, even joking that Satan, his long-time supporter, sometimes feels Mr. Benediktsson goes too far in his policies.

How has this conservative politician reacted to our criticism? He simply does his job. When we have questions about his policies or views, we email him, and he responds.

So advertisers believe in free speech. The people we criticize believe in free speech. Guess who doesn't? In preparing for this issue, we received demands from two sources claiming to be a part of leftist causes that we print articles directly from their members: that we serve as uncritical mouthpieces for propaganda.

One of the sources that suggested we print propaganda is presented in this issue, with significant reservations on my part. After extended negotiations, we were able to convince a representative for the organization represented to allow the Grapevine to conduct its own interview. It came to Paul Nikolov to interview Olí Páll, who is organizing

a protest of the Kárahnjúkar dam project. With jaw-dropping arrogance, a colleague of Olí Páll required that we submit the interview to make sure we covered what his organization wanted covered, and if the organization felt our tone was wrong, they would pull the article entirely. This same colleague then monitored the interview, interjecting and criticizing our journalist repeatedly over what, due to her interjections, became a three-hour interview.

Read the interview and make your own decisions. Obviously, the Kárahnjúkar dam project poses an enormous environmental risk for what many of us feel is far too little gain. On the other hand, it's hard to feel sympathy for protestors who refuse to have their photo taken and who claim that any member of their own country is above the station of being a labourer.

I wish I could say this is the worst of the conduct we saw for this issue. It wasn't. A similar group contacted us asking if they could conduct an interview with someone they felt was a significant documentary filmmaker, and would we simply give them half a page to run it. We refused, but asked for information on the filmmaker, who turned out to be a fifth-rate conspiracy theorist with a tendency to quote statistics like "63% of Canadians feel the US government was involved in the attacks on 9/11," without naming the pesky details of who took such a survey, what the sample group was, and what the margin of error might be.

When we questioned the journalistic integrity behind making up statistics, we were immediately attacked—obviously we were typical Americans. We were even reminded that Americans bomb places in Asia. We were unable to resolve our

differences.

We went through a period when we felt anger toward these organizations. We thought about the crippling effects these with-us-or-against-us spokespeople would have on environmental and anti-war efforts. What serves the right better than having opposition who come off as thugs? We can only hope that these members on the left, by no means representatives of the moderate left, but representatives of important grass roots elements, listen to criticism and change their unacceptable behaviour.

On an unrelated note, in the last issue, I suggested that, despite the many newspapers and magazines now delivered for free to every home in the country, there is no press in Iceland. In the weeks since that editorial, Fréttablaðið ran a world-class investigative piece on the privatization of the Icelandic banks and the cronyism involved. They have made a solid case against former Prime Minister Davíð Oddsson and active Prime Minister Halldór Ágrímsson. In addition, Morgunblaðið's Lesbók ran a strong piece criticizing President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, formerly a socialist who gained popularity speaking out against worker exploitation, for promoting Iceland's new trade agreement with rampant workers' rights' violators, China. The only thing that dampens my praise is the fact that few supporters of Mr. Oddsson turn to Fréttablaðið for journalism, and few supporters of President Grímsson expect objectivity from Morgunblaðið—both papers seem to have, essentially, been towing the party line. In this case, though, they have been fortunate to have excellent journalists and solid stories to use for their partisan efforts.

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## To the Left, From the Left

Paul F Nikolov  
Journalist & Online Editor

When I saw Jello Biafra speak at Gaukur á Stöng in 2001, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the angry guy who used to bark about problems as lead singer of political punk rock band The Dead Kennedys had become the angry guy who

talked about solutions. He talked a lot about what the average person can do who has to work full time and raise a family, who doesn't have much time to be an activist per se. But the most important thing he brought up is something that I find sorely lacking in the left in Iceland: the ability to communicate with others.

"If you do a lot of shouting and finger-pointing," he said, "you not only alienate yourself, you also prevent people from listening to ideas that they might actually agree with, had you known how to talk to people like human beings."

As plain-as-day obvious as this notion might be to some, it seems to be one lost to some very well-intentioned leftists I've spoken to thus far. In their circles, I find a lot of people getting together and agreeing with each other. Listening to the impassioned declarations can be inspiring, and I agree with them on most of the issues. But for the sake of those ideas someday becoming a

reality, there are a few things I'd like to see the Icelandic left keep in mind when it comes to conveying those ideas to others:

- 1) Sometimes a good idea can come from the right. You might hate Davíð Oddsson with every fibre in your being, but opposing a proposal of his to ensure that no one company can control vast swaths of the media is just stupid. We're supposed to vote for issues, regardless of where they come from. Know when a good idea comes from an unlikely source.

- 2) Learn when to shut up. No matter how right you believe you are, most people don't have the attention span to listen to you prattle on and on about whatever it is you believe so strongly in. Stop every now and then and let a few sentences sink in. It'll greatly increase the chance that they'll remember what you said.

- 3) Ask questions. Everyone's favourite topic of conversation is themselves. Asking why a person thinks the way they do – whether they agree with you or not – not only

makes them feel involved and cared about, they might have an idea or point of view you never thought of before.

- 4) Absolutism is for hacks. Just because someone disagrees with you on something doesn't mean they should be written off as "them." A blanket dismissal of someone for not agreeing with you on one issue might cost you an ally on other issues.

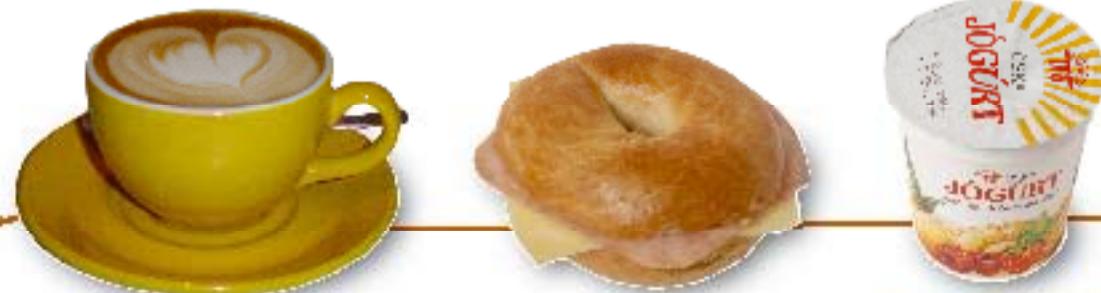
- 5) Your opponents are human beings. As fun and easy as it is to portray your most diehard opponents as unfeeling monsters, in the end it only makes you look like a caricature of a radical activist and will ensure that no one will take you seriously let alone listen to you.

These are just a few of the basics. I believe in most things the left believes in and would like to see those things become reality. But that won't happen if we just sit around agreeing with each other and attack our opponents. Change is brought about through communicating ideas, not barking them.



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## Healing the Wounds of Violence

There are two safe havens for battered women in Reykjavík. One of them is Stígamót (Icelandic Counselling and Information Centre for Survivors of Sexual Violence), and the other is Kvennaathvarfið (Women's Refuge). Heba is a twenty-five year old woman who's worked in both of these places. She is also a rape survivor. Here, Heba tells us what it is like to assistant victims of violence, and how she rebuilt her life after being raped.

Why did you go into this line of work, assisting battered women? It all started three years ago. I am a rape survivor, but I hadn't dealt with my experience and it started catching up with me. It felt like something was holding me back from living my life. I went through interviews with counselors at one of the shelters for two years and things in my life slowly fell back into place; things that had been broken in me as a result of the rapes. I was offered to partake in a counseling program, and upon completing it, I became an assistant counselor in a self-help group for the next three months, and continue to do so today. These types of groups are very important, because they give the victims a chance to reflect themselves in one another, to compare their experiences and seek strength in one another.

This may just be my own gut feeling, but isn't violence against women unbelievably common? Yes, it gives me chills to think that one out of every four women experiences violence at some point in their life.

Does that feel overwhelming in your line of work? Yes, of course. I wish battered women's shelters didn't have to exist, frankly. I find it important to open the eyes of society to how widespread violence against women really is. I find it especially important to make young men more conscious of this problem, since they're in many cases the offenders.

How about your personal life? Do you find it hard to separate the violence you witness in your daily work from your personal life?

No, not really, I am doing this work based on the fact that I am a survivor of violence myself. There were times when I wanted to flush my past down the toilet and forget about it, but now I realize that it is a precious part of me, and it makes me capable of helping other survivors. At the beginning, going over my past felt like picking at an open wound, but I've come further down the path of healing now. There are days when I'm mad at the world, but for the most part, I'm grateful that I get to use my experiences to help others.

Do you ever come home and feel like just burying your head in a pillow? There have been times when I've come home and cried. I'll never get used to hearing women's stories of violence, and if I did, I'd start worrying about myself. On the

other hand, it is very rewarding to witness women who are determined to take better care of themselves. What makes my job worth it are the small miracles that take place, such as when rape victims gather their strength to press charges against their offender, and when victims of violence start allowing themselves to feel the anger they deserve to feel. I've seen cases of overwhelming brutality. At first, I couldn't believe that this type of thing actually goes on in Iceland. It felt like I was watching some surreal movie, but as I said before, in between are triumphant cases that leave me smiling with my heart.

Speaking of moving on, are there cases in which the victim goes home to the offender and continues the vicious cycle? It happens. There are so many things to take into consideration in those cases. The offender may be the sole breadwinner of the family, making it harder for the woman to pick up and leave. Also, the abuser has in many cases convinced the victim that she deserves no better. But in my opinion, most of the women I've worked with find the strength to get out of these destructive relationships. Often, they just need affirmation that they're not crazy, and that they have a right to feel violated. The shelters offer that kind of affirmation.

I was surprised to find how much mental violence goes on in relationships. Many women I work with testify to this. The line is often fine and hard to define. I'd like to see more education on this topic, for example in schools, teaching kids and teenagers how to recognize the symptoms. Mental violence is

primarily about dominance. Some abusers take complete control over their partner's bank accounts, phone use, etc. Many of them hide behind the mask of love, convincing the victim that he's being controlling her life because he loves her. Saying for example, "Oh no, you can't wear that or you can't talk to that person because I love you so much." It's sick.

If you were prime minister for one day, what would you do to lessen the ongoing violence in today's society? First and foremost, I'd like to review the justice system. We recently had a breakfast meeting with ministers including Björn Bjarnason and politician Steingrímur J. Sigfusson, amongst others. We discussed solutions to gender-based violence. It was a very positive meeting, and if the propositions discussed in the meeting go through, the future will be a lot brighter in my line of work.

What were the propositions? For example, to aid and strengthen the Rape Emergency Reception (neyðarmóttaka fyrir nauðganir), making sure that there's always an educated social worker on duty. We also seek to resurrect a project called Karlar til ábyrgðar (Responsible Men), which focused on therapy for the offenders, to help them end their violent behaviour. There are many positive things happening now, both in politics and in the women's movement. I have the feeling it'll be a good year for all of us, if things work out.

What is the first thing you'd like to see happen? I'd like to see more resolutions for offenders as well as victims. I'd also

like to further educate people within the healthcare business, as well as the police, on domestic violence. What is really going on in violent relationships and how can people in these professions better help the victims, I'd like to focus on that.

How about your private life? You have a boyfriend? Yes, I do.

Does your work ever complicate things in your relationship? No, I generally leave my work "at work", but sometimes, certain cases will bring me down and I become sad. My work is completely confidential, so I can't tell my boyfriend any specifics, but he understands that there are days when I come home from work feeling really sad. Thankfully, I can discuss the way I feel without violating the trust of the women I work with. But generally, I do a good job of separating work and play, and my boyfriend is wonderful. He's a feminist himself, and we share the same ideals concerning women's rights, making it a very solid relationship. He actually had some therapy at one of the shelters himself, as a person whose loved one has experienced violence.

There is a program for the victims' partners, too? Absolutely. At first, when we started our relationship, I was still going through some painful things from my past, things I had a hard time talking to him about. That's when the partner-therapy came in very handy, because it made it easier for me to explain my experiences and my healing to him, as he was getting

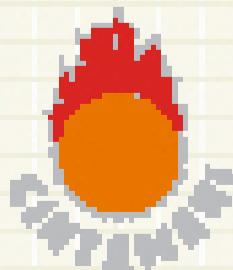


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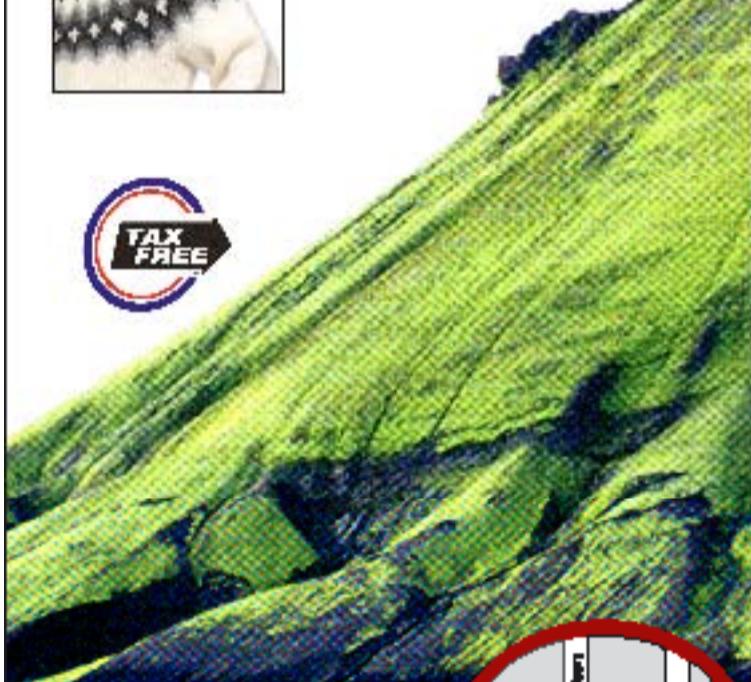
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outside help too.

So women who have been victims of violence in the past, can now get help to explain the consequences to their new partners?

Yes. A lot of people don't understand how much violence in the past can affect the victim's behavior, and how it can complicate relationships when it comes to issues of trust. Many victims experience shame, complicating things even further. When my boyfriend started seeking help to better understand me as a survivor of violence, it gave him more patience, understanding and insight.

I just want to help women. I want to help them feel better about themselves, and when I succeed, it makes me feel better about myself as well. It's a mutually beneficial relationship. I'm constantly learning new things about myself, and I'm sure I'll keep on making discoveries until the day I die. When I lead a self-help group, I usually break the ice by telling the group my own story. In the discussion that follows my story, someone will point something out to me that I never even thought of before. Helping them helps me.

In a way, I think I've put the violence I experienced behind me. The act itself, being raped, is not something that I think about on a daily basis. I don't walk down a street thinking, "I experienced sexual violence". However, I try to stay conscious of the consequences of being raped. I constantly ask myself: How is this affecting my relationships with other people? Am I being controlling, am I being submissive, is this something I'd



Stigamót, the Icelandic Counselling and Information Center for Survivors of Sexual Violence.

normally do or am I acting like this because I was violated?

When you've worked through all the shit inside you and separated it from the rest, you can start molding a new person. I'm constantly trying myself on for size, and finding ways to feel better in my own skin. I realized that I'm OK, and I am allowed to make mistakes and be imperfect. So now, I'm trying to find out who I really am, what kind of clothes I like, what kind of music I like, what kind of person I am. It's a fitting process, just like life itself.

Before I started this work, I had a very skewed view on feminism. Sure, I supported equal wages and

gender equality, but I misunderstood the concepts behind these issues. Modern day society is very sex obsessed, but I never realized that before, I just went with the flow. Then I discovered, "No, this isn't what I want, I don't want to be sexy all the time because I feel like I have to." Don't get me wrong, I celebrate sexy women, but it shouldn't feel like an obligation to be sexy just because I'm a woman. (she adds, with a smile) Being a feminist is sexy too.

By Þórdís Elva Þorvaldsdóttir Bachmann

## Here Comes the Snoop



With an album finally catchy and G-rated enough to be radio friendly, and with an X-rated porn career in full swing, Snoop Dogg is bringing his Rhythm and Gangsta Tour to Iceland on 17 July. How things have changed, as Snoop pointed out in a recent MTV interview, "Last time I came to Europe, they wanted to kick me out. They thought I was a bad guy because I was fighting a legal situation back in America. But as you can see, in the year 2005, the grass is greener on the other side."

Ah yes, "2005" and "side" rhyme. So it must be profound.

Last summer, Iceland welcomed 50 Cent, who provided a mediocre show, but excited the

local hip hop community by giving underrepresented hip hop locals Quarashi and XXX Rottweiler a venue in opening for the American gangsta.

50 Cent went on to become the most money-making hip hopper of 2004, with more than 50 million USD in royalties, merchandising and touring income, according to Rolling Stone. What is more, Fiddy followed his visit to Iceland with a radio-friendly seduction album, The Massacre.

Snoop looks to be on his way to a similar year. His new album, RG: The Masterpiece, gets rid of much of the pesky aggressive tone of his old school releases and presents top

shelf production from Neptunes, with samples from, of all bands, the Bee Gees among others. And Snoop has more marketing moxy than even George Lucas. We at the Grapevine were particularly impressed with the give away, Drop It Like It's Hot ringtone available through MTV.com.

Snoop Dogg, 17 July at Egilshöll. Tickets 5900 ISK. Available from local vendors and through [www.event.is](http://www.event.is).

Drop It Like It's Hot ringtone available for free at [www.mtv.com](http://www.mtv.com).

By Bart Cameron

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## Unsold Whale Meat Piling Up

According to a new report from the Iceland Nature Conservation Association, unsold whale meat is piling up in frozen storage at a cost. Iceland hunted 35 whales in 2003 and 25 whales last summer, and yet the vast majority of the meat remains unsold. Economist Þorsteinn Siglaugsson estimated that "scientific" whaling cost 106 million ISK and pay to the whalers cost 86 to 90 million ISK, putting the total cost of the operation at about 200 million ISK. By his estimates, whale meat would need to be sold at 700 ISK per kilo just to cover costs, yet in the summer of 2003 it was sold for 300 to 350 ISK per kilo. Of about 70 tonnes of whale meat that have been hunted so far, only about 30 tonnes have been sold.

Konráð Eggertsson, a whaler, has called the report

"utter nonsense," adding that scientific whalers are paid much more than commercial whalers, and that scientific whalers shoot any whale they see, some of which aren't fit for human consumption. And while some have contended that whaling is a subsidized industry but that whale watching is profitable, Eggertsson says that he knows many whale-watching businesses that have gone under.

The Icelandic Maritime Institute has already filed for a permit to hunt 39 minke whales this summer. The institute would also like to hunt 100 minke whales next year. Minister of Fisheries Árni Mathiesen told Stöð 2 that they hope to begin hunting larger whales, but that cost is a big factor in such a decision.



### "Pirates" Actually Outside Icelandic Waters

The foreign trawlers which have been called "pirates" by some are actually fishing outside of Icelandic waters. As has been reported in RÚV, dozens of trawlers have been fishing the Reykjaneshryggur, but have been doing so just outside of Icelandic waters. Ships for the Icelandic Coast Guard have approached these ships on a number of occasions and have asked to board, but have been denied.

### Planting Delayed Due to Dry Weather

Tree farmers in the south of Iceland have had to delay planting new, young saplings due to dry weather and night frosts that have damaged some saplings already planted. Sólveig Pálsdóttir told Vísir that she has yet to begin planting trees.

### More Icelandic "Troops" to Afghanistan

Iceland will be sending more people to participate in its "fríðargæslulíðar" (literally, peace corps) in Afghanistan this September. Arnór Sigurjónsson, the office manager for the troops at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told Vísir that, "eight will be sent to northern Afghanistan to work with Norwegians and Finns, and another eight will be sent to western Afghanistan to work with Danes and Lithuanians." Iceland has a one-year obligation in Afghanistan.

### Ómar Ragnarsson Wins Environmental Award

Journalist Ómar Ragnarsson was awarded for his environmentalist efforts recently from ten environmental and conservationist groups with an award of recognition. According to Morgunblaðið, Icelandic president Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson presented the award to Ragnarsson at City Hall. Ómar Ragnarsson is a veteran journalist well known for his book Kárahnjúkur: með og á moti (Kárahnjúkur: for and against) which was later made into a movie.

### The Hunt for Illegals Continues

For the past month, the Confederation of Icelandic Labour Unions (ASÍ), in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Affairs, has been searching for unregistered immigrants working in Iceland. Assistant managing director of ASÍ Halldór Grönvold told Vísir that they have about 40 leads regarding possibly unregistered immigrants working in construction, but no arrests have yet been made. Since the beginning of the year, nine arrests of allegedly unregistered foreigners have been made, with only two employers actually being penalized for hiring them. There are no estimates as to how many unregistered immigrants there might be in Iceland.

### Progressive Blames Progressive for Low Numbers

Progressive MP Dagný Jónsdóttir blames Progressive MP Kristinn H. Gunnarsson for the low support shown in recent surveys. Support for the Progressive Party is currently at 8%. Jónsdóttir told RÚV that while there have been attacks coming from outside the party, the problem comes from within the party itself. Gunnarsson was one of the first Progressives to question Iceland's presence in the "coalition of the willing," and has been an MP for nearly 14 years.

### Scam Company Targets Iceland

Ingvar Guðmundsson, the managing director of xbokhald.is, told Morgunblaðið that he has recently received phone calls from a company called Alliance International which is offering 100% profit on any money transferred into the company's account. Guðmundsson says that the company's approach is to target larger businesses, offering them an "investment opportunity" with a minimum 500,000 USD. More on how this scam works (in Icelandic) can be found at <http://www.xbokhald.is/svik.htm>.

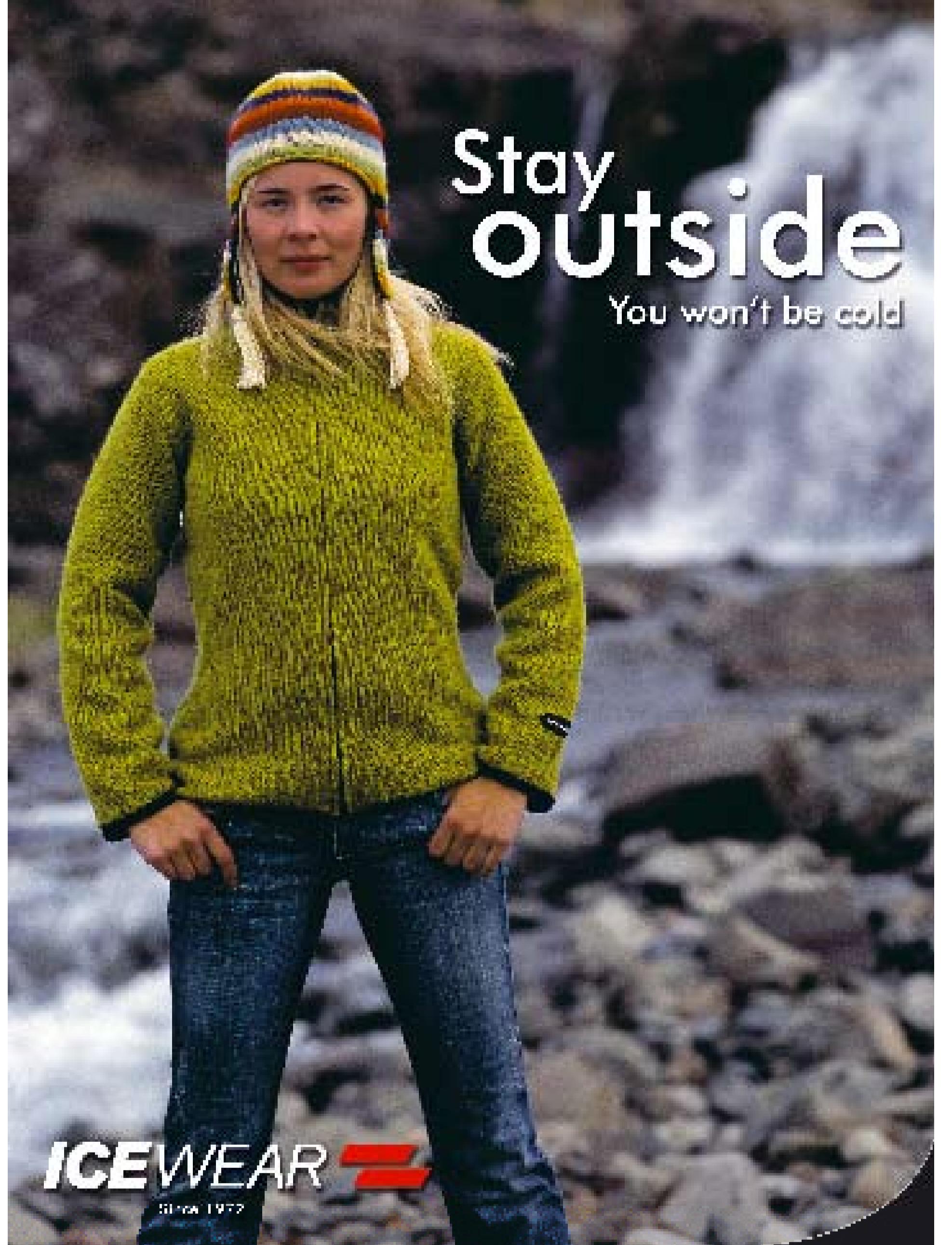
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# So Where Do They Stand On...

## Drilling for Oil?

While Minister of Industry Valgerður Sverrisdóttir stated she hadn't been approached by any foreign companies regarding exploratory drilling for oil in Icelandic territory, Grapevine wondered what the parties thought about this possibility.

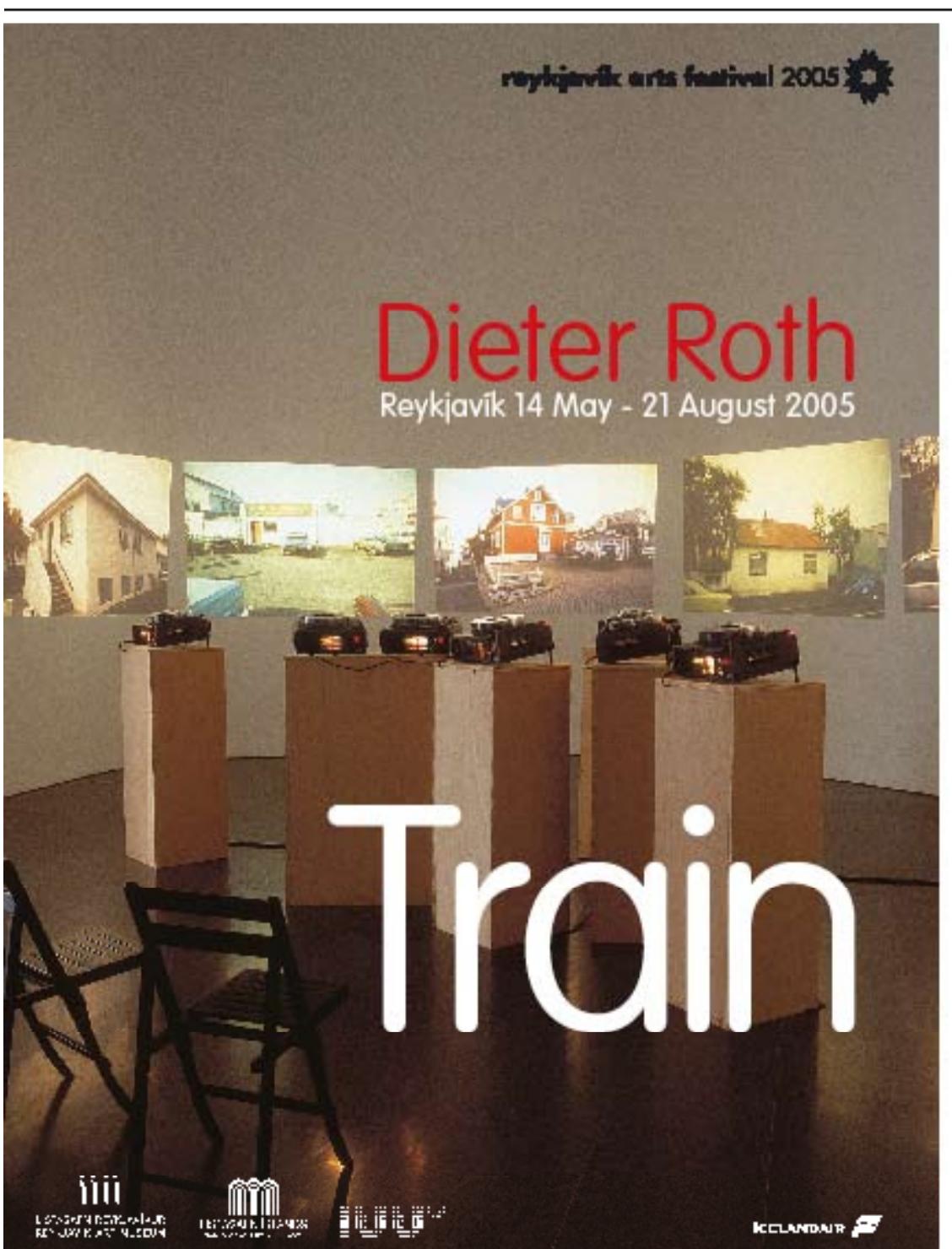
**Leftist-Green Party:** Against "If we carry on being dependent on oil, then the decision is made that the planet will soon not be able to sustain human life. It would be short-sighted to say yes to foreign oil companies." MP Kólbrun Halldórsdóttir.

**Alliance Party:** Supporting "If it's a scientific decision, then we can't be against it. It's something to look into, but would need lots of research." MP Guðrún Ögmundsdóttir.

**Progressive Party:** Supporting Progressive MP and Minister of Industry Valgerður Sverrisdóttir approved a plan during a coalition meeting in April to begin research for oil exploration.

**Liberal Party:** Supporting "We have a positive attitude towards foreign oil companies who want to do exploratory drilling because Iceland can't do it themselves. Other countries have allowed for this, such as the Faroe Islands, and if they find some oil then a deal will be made." Margrét Sverrisdóttir, on behalf of Liberal chairman Guðjón Kristjánsson.

**Independence Party:** Undecided "This hasn't been discussed much within the party. The government has allowed for some research, but we don't know if oil drilling will ever be a reality in Iceland." Haraldur Jóhannesson, assistant to the Minister of Environment.



## Who They Are:



### The Leftist-Green Party (Vinstrihreyfingin-Grænt Framboð)

Guiding principles: Far-left, pro-environmental, anti-NATO, feminist.

Party Chairman: Steingrímur J. Sigfússon

Number of seats: 5

Registered members: about 1,400

Ministers: none

Strange but true: Actually formed from three different parties - The Social Democrats (Alþýðuflokkur), The People's Alliance (Alþýðubandalagið) and The Women's Party (Samtök um kvennalista) – in 1999.

Website: [www.vg.is](http://www.vg.is)

E-mail: [vg@vg.is](mailto:vg@vg.is)

Phone: 552-8872

Address: Pósthólf 175, 121 Reykjavík



### The Alliance Party (Samfylkingin)

Guiding principles: Left-centrist, social-democratic.

Party Chairman: Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir

Number of seats: 20

Registered members: about 20,000

Ministers: none

Strange but true: After winning the vice chairmanship, Águst Ólafur Ágústsson was accused by some of having cheated. He has since been cleared of the charge.

Website: [www.samfylking.is](http://www.samfylking.is)

E-mail: [samfylking@samfylking.is](mailto:samfylking@samfylking.is)

Phone: 551-1660

Address: Hallveigarstígur 1 (2<sup>nd</sup> Floor), Box 160, 101 Reykjavík



### The Progressive Party (Framsóknarflokkurinn)

Guiding principles: Right-centrist; believes in fewer economic and environmental regulations while strengthening the social system.

Party Chairman: Hjálmar Árnason

Number of seats: 12

Registered members: about 10,000

Ministers: Prime Minister Halldór Ásgrímsson, Minister of Social Affairs Árni Magnússon, Minister of Agriculture Guðni Ágústsson, Minister of Health Jón Kristjánsson, Minister of Industry Valgerður Sverrisdóttir

Strange but true: According to the last Gallup poll, public support for the party has dropped by nearly 10% since the last elections.

Website: [www.framsokn.is](http://www.framsokn.is)

E-mail: [framsokn@framsokn.is](mailto:framsokn@framsokn.is)

Phone: 540-4300

Address: Hverfisgata 33 (2<sup>nd</sup> Floor), 101 Reykjavík



### The Liberal Party (Frjálslyndir)

Guiding principles: Right wing, pretty much the same as the Independence Party, with more emphasis on the rights of fishermen.

Party Chairman: Guðjón Kristjánsson

Number of seats: 3

Registered members: about 2,000

Ministers: none

Strange but true: Guðjón Kristjánsson said that he first learned that former Liberal Party MP Gunnar Örygsson was thinking of quitting in May. Örygsson, on the other hand, says he warned he might leave in November.

Website: [www.frjalslyndir.is](http://www.frjalslyndir.is)

E-mail: [xf@xf.is](mailto:xf@xf.is)

Phone: 552-2600

Address: Aðalstræti 9, 101 Reykjavík



### The Independence Party (Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn)

Guiding principles: Right wing, believes in further privatization in all areas of society.

Party Chairman: Davíð Oddsson

Number of seats: 23

Registered members: about 34,000

Ministers: Minister of Fisheries Árni M. Mathiesen, Minister of Justice Björn Bjarnason, Minister of Foreign Affairs Davíð Oddsson, Minister of the Economy Geir H. Haarde, President of Parliament Solveig Pétursdóttir, Minister of the Environment Sigríður A. Þórðardóttir, Minister of Communications Sturla Böðvarsson, Minister of Education Þórgerður Katrín Gunnarsdóttir

Strange but true: The only party to use an animal (the eagle) as a party symbol.

Website: [www.xd.is](http://www.xd.is)

E-mail: [xd@xd.is](mailto:xd@xd.is)

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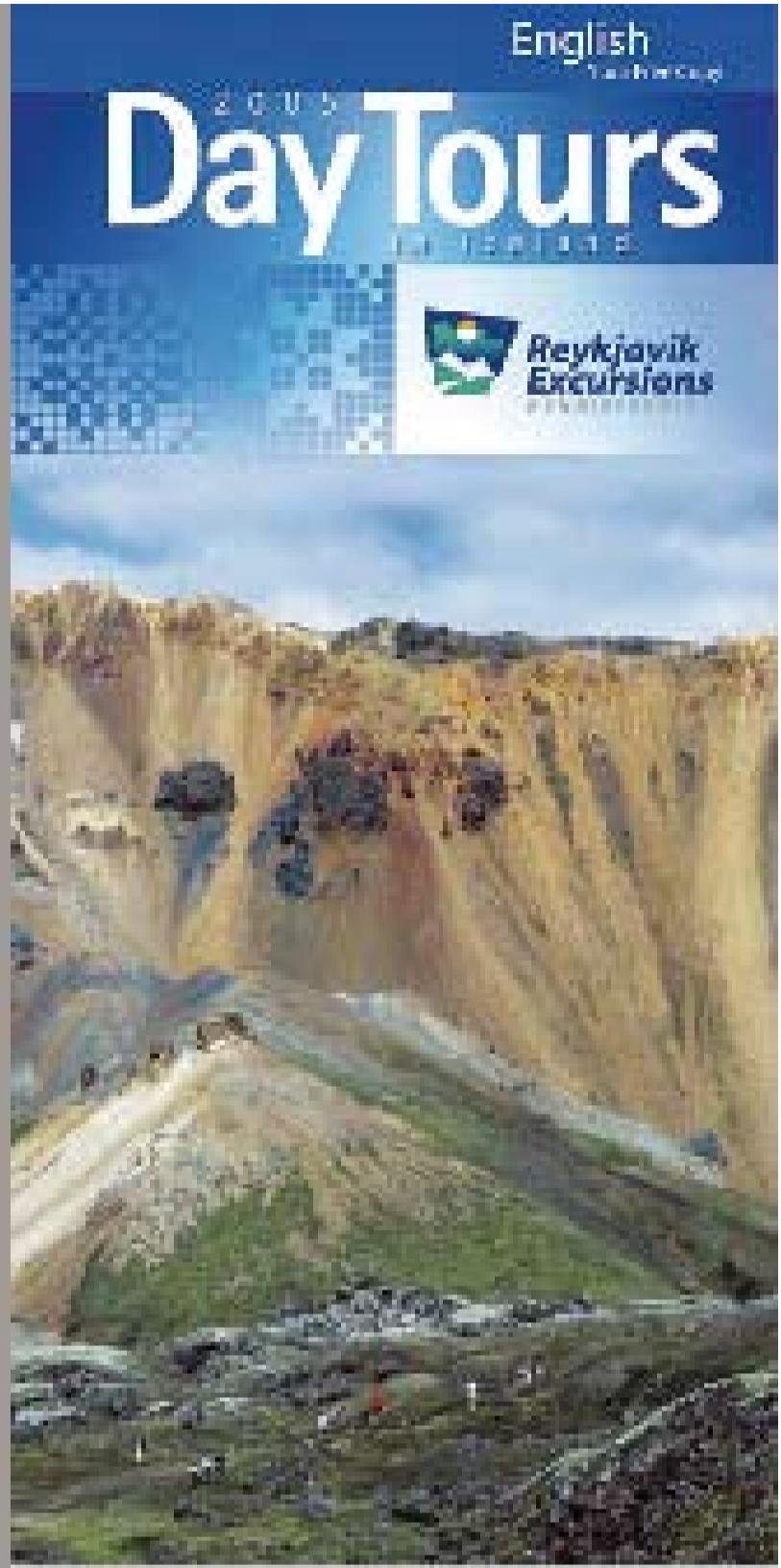
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Víðmyfjörður Ltd., is located in Víð, which is the northernmost village in Iceland, around 180 km. from Reykjavík. The company is one of the oldest and best known knitterwear producer in Iceland. The production is extremely varied, but the largest part involves sewing all kinds of clothing from the Icelandic sheep wool. Víðmyfjörður uses traditional methods with the original colors and national patterns as well as designing and producing clothes that go with the latest fashion trends.

A tourist shop is situated at the factory in Víð, where all its products are sold along with an extensive assortment of souvenirs. Víðmyfjörður also runs a store in the centre of Reykjavík, called VÍÐ-Wool. Whether you are looking for a genuine Icelandic sweater or simply a stylish garment, Víðmyfjörður and VÍÐ-Wool are the places to start and end the search.



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## GRAPEVINE INVESTIGATES



## Here Comes the Flood

Can SavingIceland.org Stop Kárahnjúkar Three Years On?

The Kárahnjúkar dam project is the most volatile environmental matter in Iceland today. Officially launched in 2002, the project entails the building of a hydroelectric dam in Iceland's highlands in order to give power to a future Alcoa aluminium smelter in Reyðarfjörður. Those in favour of the project say it will provide clean energy for a place of employment in the east of Iceland, where jobs are scarce. Those opposed to the project contend that the flooding the dam will create will wipe out a vast expanse of untouched European wilderness – in fact the largest in Europe – while not creating any real economic benefits for Iceland.

Protests against the project so far have mostly been a few peaceful, largely ignored, demonstrations. One group, SavingIceland.org, is appealing to protesters both in Iceland and abroad to come together this summer to take part in a camp that will be situated in one of the areas of the highlands expected to be flooded by the Kárahnjúkar dam.

If the group is successful in even getting the camp occupied – let alone stopping the Kárahnjúkar project – it will be the largest instance of civil disobedience in Iceland's history. With the dam project well underway and the government already in the planning stages to build another such dam in the north of Iceland, Grapevine wanted to find out why this group should choose to focus on Kárahnjúkar. We spoke with Ólafur Páll Sigurðsson, one of the key organizers of the upcoming protest.

There are people who say this project will create much-needed jobs for people in the east of Iceland. How do you respond?

Smári Geirsson [Chairman of the Association of East Iceland Municipalities] said that this project will create 800 jobs, but the figure is actually close to 470. Now it turns out that the majority of the workers that will build the factory will be foreign. And at the dam site 80- to 85% of the workforce are foreigners. They're hiring these foreigners because they want cheap labour, not Icelanders.

I think the jobs he was referring to are supposed to be in the aluminium smelter.

Last autumn, Alcoa once set up a course in the east of Iceland for people who want to learn how to work in an aluminium smelter, and only two Icelanders showed up. Icelanders are sick of working in primary industries. It shows the limited ambition the government has for the Icelandic work force that they

want them to be working in this type of industry. It's beneath them.

Last year, Alcoa announced that if Icelanders don't want to work in the factory, they will hire foreigners. Apart from the temporary satellite jobs the grand job creation scheme for the people of the east is turning out to be empty promises. Also, people are losing their jobs in the fish industry in Reyðarfjörður, and up north and in the west because of the effects of the project on the currency. It's hurting the economy of Iceland.

[According to the Icelandic Directorate of Labour, unemployment in Iceland actually dropped from 3.5% in April 2004 to 2.3% in April 2005.]

Iceland could be the spa of the world, with people leading healthy lives and working in knowledge-based industries instead of being factory slaves.

What is it you're planning on doing? We're doing what we should have done. People went up there two years ago and planted some flags in the ground in front of the bulldozers, because the law says that if you let the Icelandic flag touch the ground, you can be sentenced to up to two years in prison. I guess people didn't have the stamina for direct action.

And how many people are you expecting? Hundreds. Recent polls show that half the Icelandic nation believes the Kárahnjúkar project is a big mistake and only ten percent want

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The Tourist!

By Paul F Nikolov



more heavy industry. Lots of people who write to us are the typical "Íslandsvinir," you know, people who've been here, love this country, and are heartbroken and furious over the environmental damage that this project is doing.

Do you think the police will do anything to stop people from coming into this country, or stop people from going up to the camp? We always have reason to be worried that the government will do stupid things. People have been praying for it. The UN recently criticized Iceland's anti-terrorist legislation, as they said it was open-ended enough to allow for abuse by the government against legitimate protestors, including foreigners. I would hope the government learned something positive from the Falun Gong incident, [wherein courts recently ruled that police had falsely arrested people in 2002 who protested the arrival of the Chinese president].

Tell me what the camp will be like. There will be lots of artists, theatre troupes, and workshops centering on mostly environmental things and culture. We'll be out in the land where people don't have to listen to noise or breathe in dust. It will be an opportunity for them to get to know this land before it's too late. Many environmentalists have never been there. Icelanders are unfortunately lazy when it comes to exploring the highlands. We're going to try to stay there the whole summer,

thirty in the morning, and an e-mail interview with [environmentalist webpage] SavingIceland.org was also put as a small write-up in Morgunblaðið.

That seems odd, considering that both RÚV and Morgunblaðið are known for taking a pro-government position. The Morgunblaðið piece was very small, and was hidden in the back of the paper. It was a very sly way to avoid giving it the space it deserved.

I know that there are many people who've said, "You won't be able to stop this project anyway, so why bother?" People who think like this should think a little bit more about the issue. Kárahnjúkur is only the beginning. There will be more to come, and there will even be dams in protected areas. Is that the future people want? What better place to start than at Kárahnjúkur? You have to start where they start. We will repeat this next summer, and the summer after that, and continue to alert the international community. So, why fight Kárahnjúkur? Because if we can show that we can stop the biggest project, they'll know that we can stop all of them.

How do you think the Icelandic government has reacted to the notion of bringing protestors into the country? Smári Geirsson and some Reykjavík academics said that we would be bringing "the worst criminal element into Iceland," that these people were violent protestors, and they actually used the term "professional protestors," as if there are people making money off of protesting. They've said that they would leave no stone left unturned.

What actually will be your tactics? Well, we're going to have it as fluffy as possible [referring to a more "friendly" form of civil disobedience – "fluffy" – as opposed to "spiky," which is an angrier form of civil disobedience] but of course we can't talk a lot about what we plan on doing.

How can people get in touch with you if they want to participate?

We recommend that they go to our website, [www.savingiceland.org](http://www.savingiceland.org), and get more detailed information on this issue and learn what we're planning on doing and how people can get involved. I want to emphasize that you don't have to be an activist to take part.

The issue of foreigners coming here isn't really the main point. What we're trying to do is bring people out to show how they feel about this. We have to stop this defeatist attitude because we can stop them; we can even stop the Kárahnjúkur dam.

UPDATE: At the time of this writing, Director of the Office of Immigration Hildur Dungal has said that she sees "every reason" to follow the activities of the protestors in the camp in order to prevent vandalism and human injury. Helgi Jansson, proxy for the county council of Seyðisfjörður in east Iceland says that police have been notified of the protestors and will be following their activities closely.



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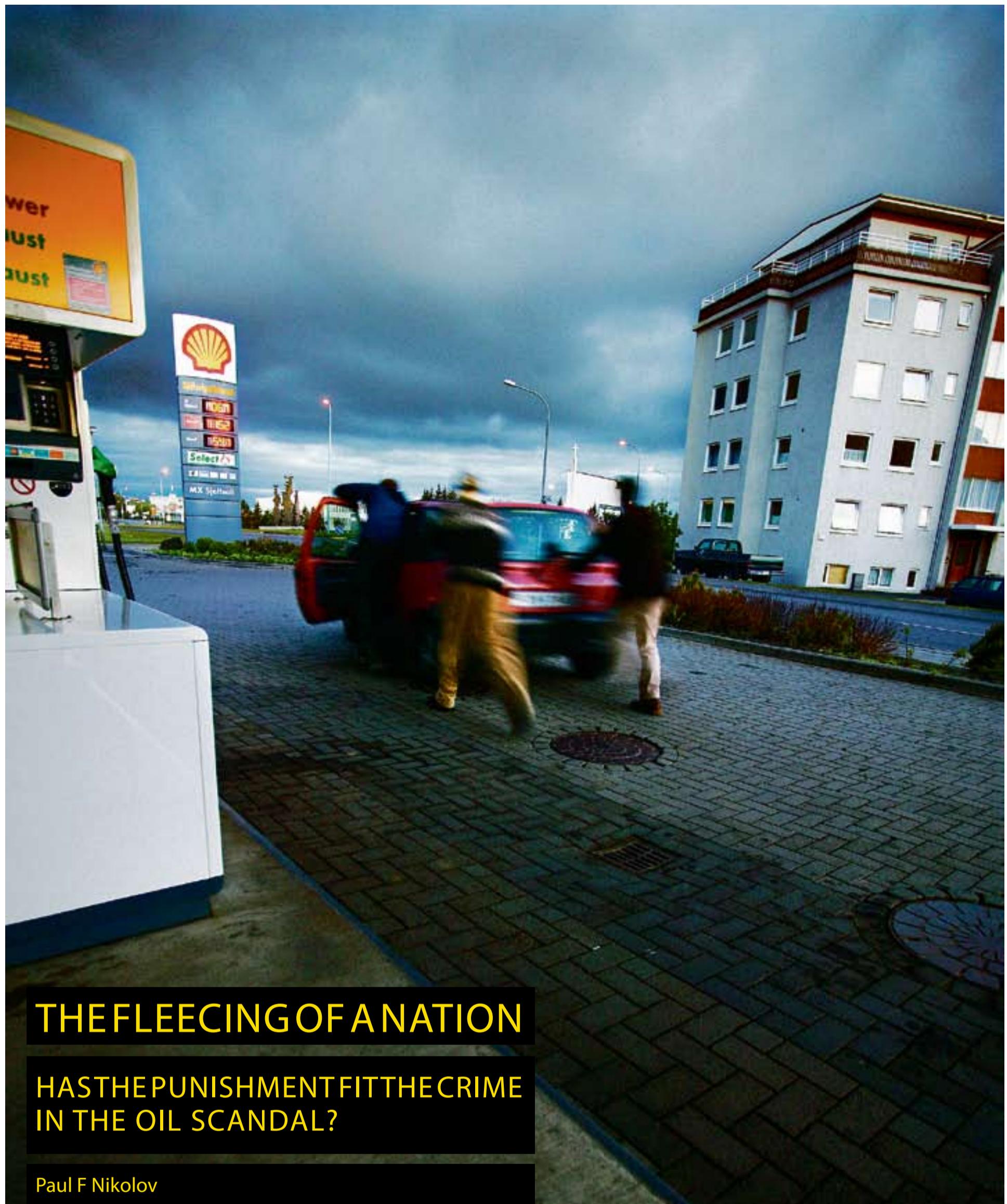
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## THE FLEECING OF A NATION

### HAS THE PUNISHMENT FIT THE CRIME IN THE OIL SCANDAL?

Paul F Nikolov

On December 18, 2001, Icelandic history was made. Early that morning, representatives from the Competition Council arrived at the corporate offices of the oil companies Esso, Ölís and Skeljungur (Shell) and seized what Competition Council lawyer Regin Mogensen told Grapevine was "an enormous amount of files and computer documents" in the hopes of finding evidence of price fixing. What they uncovered were surprisingly frank e-mails, faxes and memos, all outlining in detail how these newly privatized companies conspired to divide up the gas market and raise the price of gasoline over a period of more than nine years.

From at least March 1993 up until the month of the Competition Council's raid, representatives from these three oil companies – sometimes even the CEOs of the oil companies themselves – met on several occasions to discuss how to divide the market among themselves, when to raise gas prices and by how much. Most of the time, these meetings took the form of e-mails between the oil companies' key players. For example, in October 2001, when the litre price of gas at Shell was 300 ISK and 150 ISK at Ölís, Sigrður Sigurðsson, sales manager for Shell, wrote an e-mail to Thomas Möller, the managing marketing director at Ölís, which said in part, "It was whispered to me that you would be the right man to talk to at Ölís to check out whether or not you were willing to raise [the price of your gas] as well."

Möller responded saying he would look into the matter. Two weeks later, the litre price of gas at Ölís went up to 300 ISK.



Fríðriks

## "THEY'RE NORMAL PEOPLE WHO I GUESS JUST ENDED UP IN SOME CIRCLE WHERE THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD DO WHATEVER THEY WANTED." - FRIDRIK ARNKRÍMSSON, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE FEDERATION OF ICELANDIC FISHING VESSEL OWNERS (LÍÚ)

In an even bolder move, in 1996, representatives from the three oil companies wrote up an agreement among them detailing how they would divide the gas market among themselves at nine different locations in the countryside:

**AGREEMENT**  
Olíuverzun Íslands hf. [Ólís], Olíufélagið hf. [Esso] and Skeljungur hf. [Shell] agree to enact the following in order to make the most of the sale of gasoline in the countryside.

Búðardalur: Olís/Shell stop. Esso from now on with one station.  
Mývatn: Olís/Shell stop. Esso from now on with one station.  
Pórshöfn: Olís/Shell stop. Esso from now on with one station.  
Hvolsvöllur: Olís/Shell stop. Esso from now on with one station.  
Seyðisfjörður: Esso stops. Shell from now on with its own new station.  
Neskaupstaður: Esso stops. Olís from now on with one station.  
Eskifjörður: Esso stops. Shell from now on with one station.  
Reyðarfjörður: Esso stops. Olís continues. Shell continues.

The agreement will go into effect before October 1.  
Esso and Shell will not open the sale of gasoline in Grindavík for at least the next five years.

Reykjavík, February 21, 1996.

Yes, competing gas companies were deciding together how to eliminate competing with each other. These are only two examples of nearly 500 that appeared in the Competition Council's report on the matter on January 29 of this year.

What first tipped the Competition

Council off that something was wrong in the price of gas itself. As Mogensen told Grapevine, "There had been talk that something suspicious was going on, but there was nothing conclusive. But gas prices rose at pretty much the same rate and at the same time."

And so the Competition Council petitioned the court to conduct a "dawn raid" of the offices of the oil companies. Not that it caught them off guard; in fact, at least one key player told us he saw it coming. Shell CEO Gunnar Karl Guðmundsson (who was CFO of Shell at the time of the raids) told Grapevine, "Honestly, I wasn't very surprised.

Media coverage of the oil companies had been fierce. Dawn raids had been going on in Europe for years. So we were expecting some sort of investigation and inquiries."

After wading through a sea of files and e-mails, the Competition Council came to the conclusion that the Competition Law had been broken repeatedly by these three companies and that damages were to be paid. Shell was sentenced to pay 450 million ISK; Esso, 490 million ISK; and Olís, a whopping 560 million ISK. All three companies have since paid their fines, but the Competition Council has already awarded "discounts" to Olís and Esso for cooperating with the investigation: Olís' fine was reduced by 20% and Esso's, by 45%. It should also be noted that as of yet, none of the people involved in this scandal have been arrested or convicted for theft.

In addition, the fallout for some of the key players seems to be minimal at best. Einar Benediktsson is still managing director of Olís. Former CEO of Shell Kristinn Björnsson

announced last November that he was "taking a break" from investment bank Straumur – and was quietly re-elected to the board of directors on February 4, 2005.

The most well-recognized player in this conspiracy, former Reykjavík mayor Pórólfur Árnason – who was marketing director of Esso from October 1993 to 1998 – resigned in disgrace from the mayoral office in November 2004 due to the Competition Council's implication of him in the scandal. Yet on May 30 of this year, he was hired as the CEO of the fishery giant Icelandic Group hf.

Still, Mogensen contends that the Competition Council's investigation will serve as a deterrent, citing "bad publicity" as one of the after-effects of the matter.

In this area Mogensen does have a point. A recent study was conducted earlier this year by two students at the University of Iceland, Inga María Ottósdóttir and Lára Inga Sigmundsdóttir, who surveyed a cross section of 160 people on their impressions of the three oil companies involved in the scandal. Of those who responded, 26.88% had a negative impression of Esso; 26.67% had a negative impression of Shell and 26.25% had a negative impression of Olís. By comparison, only 5% had a positive impression of Olís; 3.33% had a positive impression of Esso and 1.67% had a positive impression of Shell. In even sharper contrast, 43.96% of respondents said they had a positive impression of newcomer Atlantsólia, with only 6.04% saying they had a negative impression. What this will translate to in terms of lost business for the conspirators is close

to impossible to gauge, but at least consumers can rest easy knowing that the Competition Council has fined the businesses enough to pay off what was stolen, right?

Unfortunately, no. For starters, while the fines have been paid, all three companies are currently appealing the decision. Understandably so. While the case against the oil companies seems strong, the methods of the prosecution are worrisome. As was pointed out by people involved in this case, The Ministry of Justice, which will oversee this case, administers the police who helped conduct the raids as well as the courts that will try the oil companies. In essence, one man – Minister of Justice Björn Bjarnason – controls both the enforcement and the interpretation of the law.

Guðmundsson told Grapevine he was "prepared to go all the way to the Supreme Court" if necessary. Olís has promised to counter-sue the government for its losses. In the meantime, the fines paid remain on hold. But whether the oil companies win or lose, none of this money will actually go back to the consumer – it will be paid to the state. Individual consumers who want justice will have to take on the oil companies in court and are more or less on their own. Mogensen told the Grapevine that individuals don't have much of a chance of recouping any of the losses that were stolen from them. "You would probably need to have kept every receipt from the past ten years," he told us. "In my opinion, proving your loss would not be easy. You would have to cover all your legal costs, too, and while you could sue to have your costs covered, if you lose, you would have to pay for [the defendant's] legal costs as well as

your own."

Not that the matter is completely hopeless for the average consumer. Consumer advocacy group Neytendasamtök is currently in the process of launching a class action suit against the oil companies on behalf of private consumers. Many formerly loyal customers, shocked and angered over the scandal, have come forward demanding justice. As Neytendasamtök Chairman Jóhannes Gunnarsson told Grapevine, "We've had over one hundred people come to us with their receipts and many more have called. We're filing one case with the courts right now, and if we win that case, then we'll send a letter to the oil companies [asking for a settlement deal]."

Outside of this suit, there are businesses that are going their own way in seeking compensation. Friðrik Árngrímsson, managing director of The Federation of Icelandic Fishing Vessel Owners (LÍÚ), told Grapevine that there are captains who have bought fuel from these companies in the past who are looking to file their own suits against the oil companies, and that LÍÚ might help cover their legal expenses. Árngrímsson said his suspicions about the oil companies arose when he was trying to broker a deal with them to buy oil for less by buying it at sea, and found the oil companies "impossible to do business with." For his own part, Árngrímsson expressed disappointment with the players involved. "I was more saddened than angered when I learned about this," he told Grapevine. "I know [Shell CEO] Gunnar Karl and all these guys and have met with them in person.

# "HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO REMEMBER WHAT I MEANT BY WHAT I SAID TEN YEARS AGO?" - SHELL CEO GUNNAR KARL GUDMUNDSSON (WHO WAS COO OF SHELL AT THE TIME OF THE RAIDS)

They're normal people who I guess just ended up in some circle where they thought they could do whatever they wanted. I think this matter hurts society as a whole. It's just unbelievable the way they've acted." Árngrímsson isn't alone in his disappointment. Government officials from every party have expressed outrage over this scandal. As Progressive Party MP and chairman of the Parliamentary Industry Committee Birkir Jónsson told Grapevine, "During the 1980s, the price of gas was decided by the government, but with the liberalization of the market, we gave companies more freedom. More freedom means more responsibility but unfortunately, these companies didn't follow their duty. This conspiracy is intolerable and this violation of competition will probably disturb the Icelandic market for some time to come."

that a price-fixing conspiracy is still ongoing is not outside of the reasonable realm of possibility, especially when one considers that these companies have legal expenses to cover and that some have had to borrow money in order to cover their fines. But in the meantime, will justice be served?

If anyone is sentenced to any sort of jail time, the law allows for only up to four years in prison. By comparison, a lawyer Grapevine spoke to told us that for corporate embezzlement of about the same amount over the same length of time, the maximum sentence would be five to ten years. For robbing someone on the street, the maximum sentence would be up to sixteen years, regardless of the amount stolen. In either case, there would be no special discounts for cooperating with the investigation.

Guðmundsson told Grapevine that



Frimann

## "HE [GUNNAR KARL GUDMUNDSSON] DOESN'T HAVE TO REMEMBER EXACTLY WHAT HE SAID; THE E-MAILS ARE PRETTY CONCLUSIVE."

- COMPETITION COUNCIL LAWYER REGIN MOGENSEN

Unfortunately for all plaintiffs involved, determining damages is one giant grey area. Not only is the burden of proof on them to produce receipts showing their loyalty to these companies, but their lawyers have to face the mathematical nightmare of determining what the price of gas would have been, had there been no price-fixing conspiracy. Adding insult to injury, Grapevine found signs that the behaviour that caused this scandal in the first place shows no signs of abating.

Since December 2001, gas prices have been steadily rising among the three oil companies at relatively the same rate. While rising global crude oil prices are one explanation for the price hike, it doesn't explain why the prices should rise at nearly the exact same rate, and only among these three oil companies.

Consider the following: the litre price of self-service gasoline among these three oil companies rose by about two ISK in early March. Later in the month, Shell raised the price of its gas again, which was followed by Esso and Ölís both raising the price of their gas, both by 2.7 ISK. When Shell raised the price of its gas again on April 6, Esso matched the price the following day. In total, this brought the price of self-service gasoline for all three oil companies up to about 102.5 ISK each. And yet during this same period, the litre price of self-service gasoline at Atlantsólfía went from 97.2 ISK, which is where it had remained unchanged since December 30, 2004, to 101.2 ISK on April 14.

At the time of this writing, the price of self-service gasoline at Esso is at 110.5 ISK; at Shell, 104.8 ISK and at Ölís, 104.3 ISK. Atlantsólfía is at 103.8 ISK.

Considering the data, the notion

he considers the case "aggravating" and is hoping that the amount of time the investigation has taken will help him win an appeal on the grounds that it's surpassed the statute of limitations. In terms of the evidence against him personally – namely, the recorded documents detailing his communications with Esso and Ölís, he says, "When they were questioning me on certain things, asking what I meant when I said such-and-such – how am I supposed to remember what I meant by what I said ten years ago?"

Mogensen replied to this comment by saying, "Well, I can understand that he doesn't recall everything he said ten years ago, but we have lots of e-mails which very graphically show discussions of prices and such. So he doesn't have to remember exactly what he said; the e-mails are pretty conclusive."

Mogensen seems confident that the courts will rule in the Competition Council's favour. When asked what kind of chances the oil companies have of winning an appeal, he said, "It's impossible to say, but I think the evidence [against them] is solid."

An overturned appeal may come as a relief to Icelandic consumers, and may be of some comfort to those who've already been burned. In addition, both individuals and businesses can take the oil companies to court themselves, however daunting that may be. The final judgement – as well as how effectively authorities will prevent this from happening again – remains to be seen.

Anyone interested in filing their own suit against Esso, Ölís or Shell can contact Neytendasakiðin at 545 1200 or by e-mail at [ns@ns.is](mailto:ns@ns.is).

## So Who Owns SHELL?



### Baugur behind masks.

By Paul F Nikolov

Within the course of our research into the oil scandal, we came across this press release on Shell's website ([www.skeljungur.is](http://www.skeljungur.is)), dated October 25, 2004:

"Hagar hf. has bought all the shares of Skeljungur hf... Baugur Group, Fengur hf. with connected companies and Stoðir hf. each own 24-29% of Hagar hf."

While it would seem as though three separate companies now own Shell, the reality is quite different. According to Stoðir's own website ([www.stodir.is](http://www.stodir.is)), Baugur owns the largest share of Stoðir hf: 49.6%. Fengur hf. is owned by Pálmi Haraldsson and Jóhannes Kristinsson, but Haraldsson also sits on the board of directors of 365 hf. – a Baugur company. On Shell's website, Haraldsson is also listed as the chairman of its board of directors. As all three of these companies are Baugur controlled and all own Hagar hf., Shell is effectively controlled by Baugur.

We called Skeljungur hf to see if they were aware that they were a Baugur company. We spoke with office director Birgitta Sigurðardóttir, who explained that Hagar hf "owns Skeljungur." When asked who owned Hagar, she replied that it was Baugur Group.

"So in other words, Baugur Group owns Skeljungur?" we asked.

She paused for a moment and replied, not sounding entirely certain, "Yeah, I guess so."

The news of Hagar's purchase of Shell wasn't buried in the back pages of a website. Stöð 2 reported on the story the same day it appeared on Shell's website. But when Baugur buys a company, they normally shout it from the rooftops. While we can certainly understand why Baugur media outlets wouldn't go to great lengths to illustrate how Baugur has total ownership of an oil company that was convicted of breaking the law, it took us a total of fifteen minutes to find this information. It's just a shame that any digging needed to be done in the first place.

# "THIS CONSPIRACY IS INTOLERABLE AND THIS VIOLATION OF COMPETITION WILL PROBABLY DISTURB THE ICELANDIC MARKET FOR SOME TIME TO COME." - PROGRESSIVE PARTY MP AND CHAIRMAN OF THE PARLIAMENTARY INDUSTRY COMMITTEE BIRKIR JÓNSSON

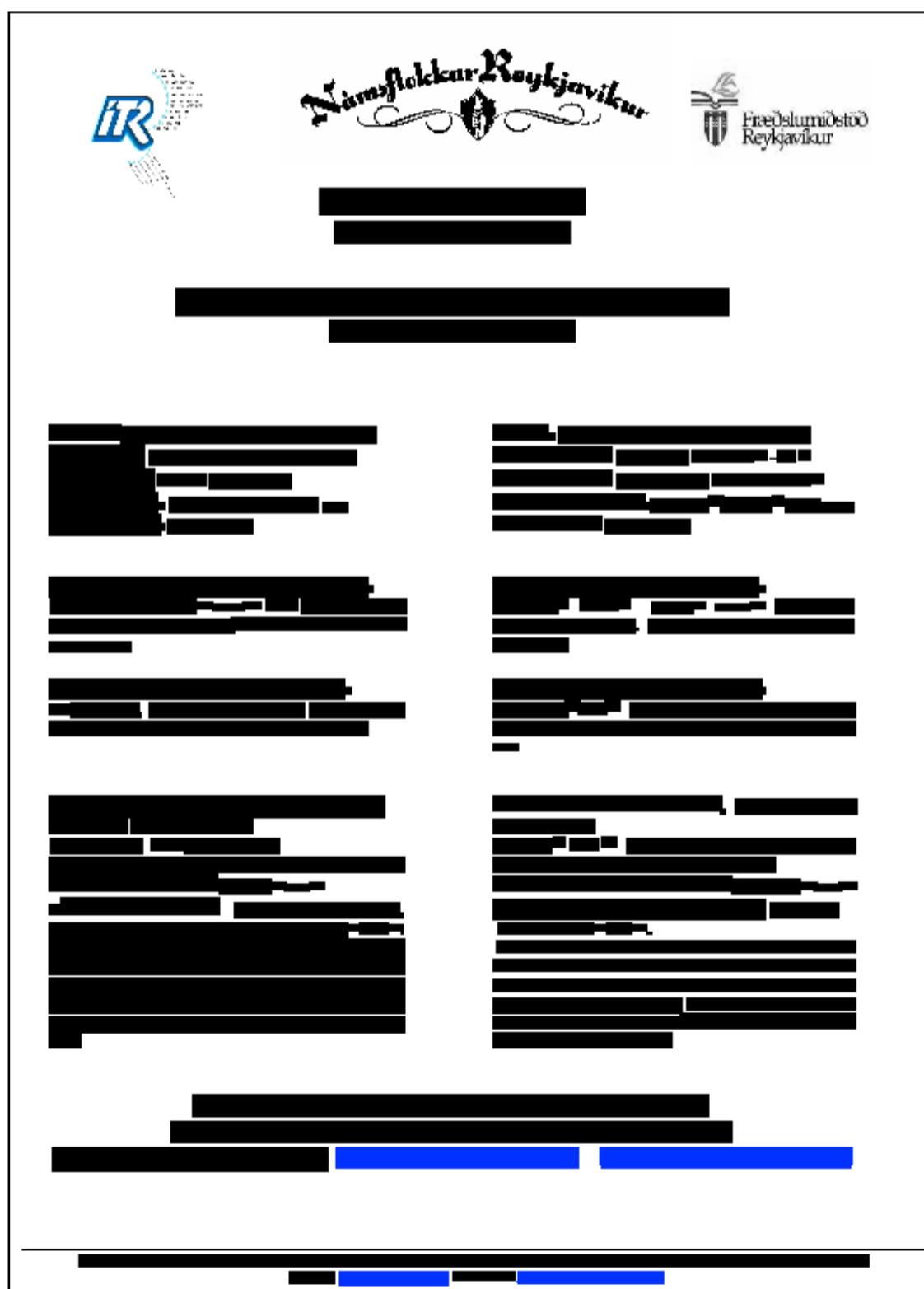
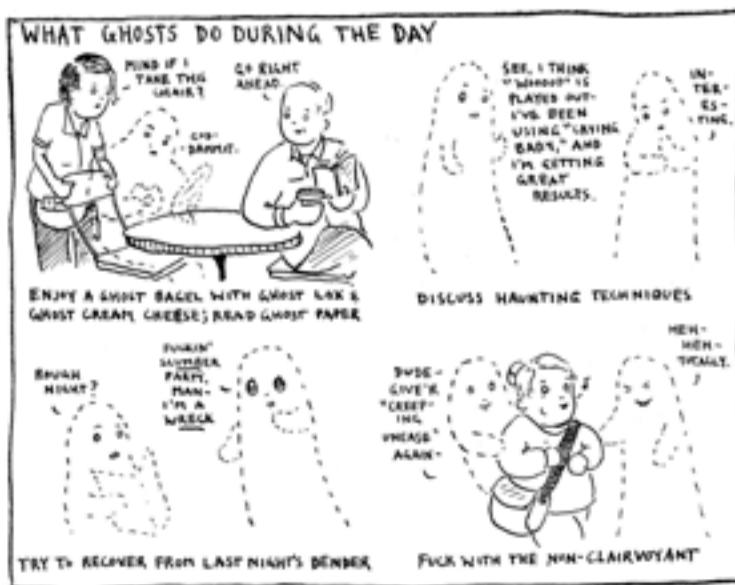
HUGLEIKUR MIGHT BE FUNNY! HE HAS TWO PANELS

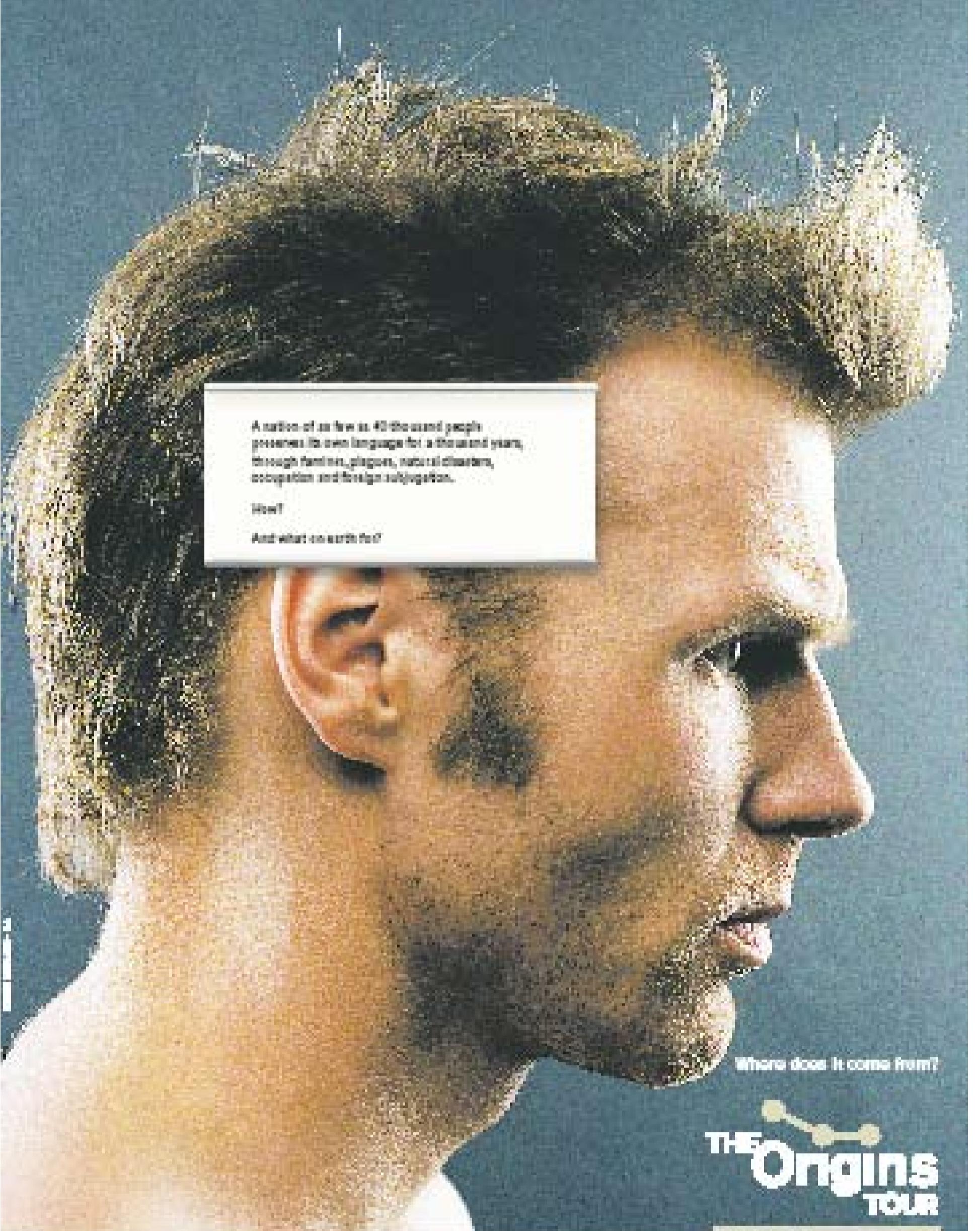


## SIMPLETOONS


*Námsfólkur Reykjavíkur*
  
Fréðslumáðstöð  
Reykjavíkur

## LULU EIGHTBALL





A nation of us few is 40 thousand people  
possesses its own language for a thousand years,  
through famines, plagues, natural disasters,  
occupation and foreign subjugation.

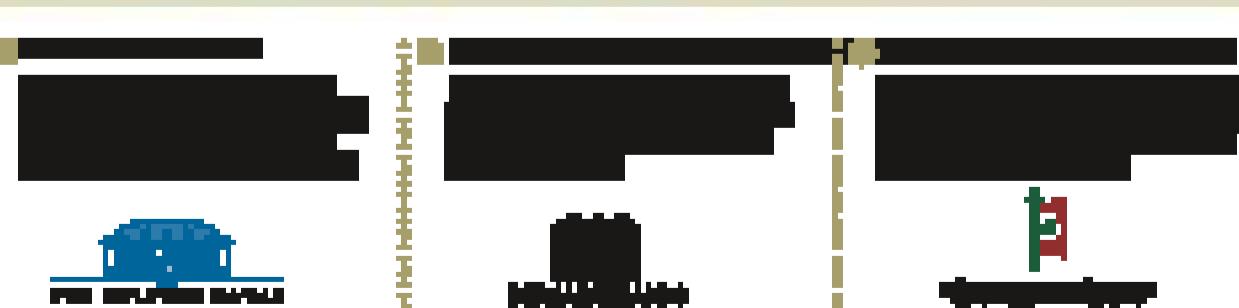
How?

And what on earth do?

Where does it come from?

## THE Origins TOUR

Highgate City Centre





**get a free copy of  
“food for dummies”  
in the next 10-11 convenience store**

**1011**

**mexicans have nachos, we have bitafiskur  
(pieces of dried fish)**

## Celebrate! 61 Glorious Years of Independence

**17 June, 1944.** 17 June is the birthday of Jón Sigurðsson, nicknamed Forseti (President) for his role as the President of the Icelandic Literary Society. Though he died in 1879 without having accomplished home rule, he was so highly redeemed by the country that voters chose to declare independence from Denmark on 17 June, 1944. (In a vote on 24 May, 1944.)

**October 1946.** Iceland grants the US the right to use Keflavík for military as well as commercial planes. US troops begin to be stationed at the base in 1951.

**10 December, 1955.** Halldór Laxness delivers his banquet speech on receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature. He celebrates the nameless authors of the great sagas, and, most of all, the common man, in his speech.

**6 May, 1959.** Icelandic fishing vessels attack British fishing ships in the First Cod War, which extends the Icelandic fishing waters from 4 nautical miles to 12 nautical miles off the shore.

**8 November, 1963.** Surtsey, a new volcanic island, begins to rise above sea level on the southern coast of Iceland.

**1 September, 1972.** Bobby Fischer, American chessmaster, defeats Boris Spassky in the chess match of the century for the World Chess Championship. Fischer refuses to defend his title.

**23 January, 1973.** Eldfell volcano in the Westman Islands causes evacuation of almost 5,000 people from Heimaey in one night.

**29 June, 1980.** Vigdís Finnbogadóttir defeats Gunnlaugur Þorvaldsson 33.8% over 32.3% to take the presidency. She becomes the first elected female head of state in the world, though the presidency is viewed as a ceremonial position.

**September, 1983.** Kukl, a supergroup with singer Björk Guðmundsdóttir releases a single in Iceland. While not Björk's first album, it marks a new beginning for the singer. Björk goes on to earn acclaim worldwide, and continues to support Icelandic art vigorously for the next 22 years.

**11 October, 1986.** President Reagan and Premier Gorbachev meet in Iceland for two days of talks on arms control and human rights.

**1 March, 1989.** Beer legalized. View seen as too progressive for many, and change of government follows soon after. Tourist brochures still tout Beer Day as a national holiday, though the whole fact that beer was outlawed was more of an embarrassment, and the day of legalization is not celebrated intentionally.

**11 February, 1991.** Parliament of Iceland becomes the first NATO member to officially recognize Lithuania.

**27 June, 1996.** Gay marriages legalized in Iceland. In addition to the recognition of same sex marriage, couples in such a union are granted joint custody of the children of either partner. Immediately after law passes, President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson attends two same sex marriages.

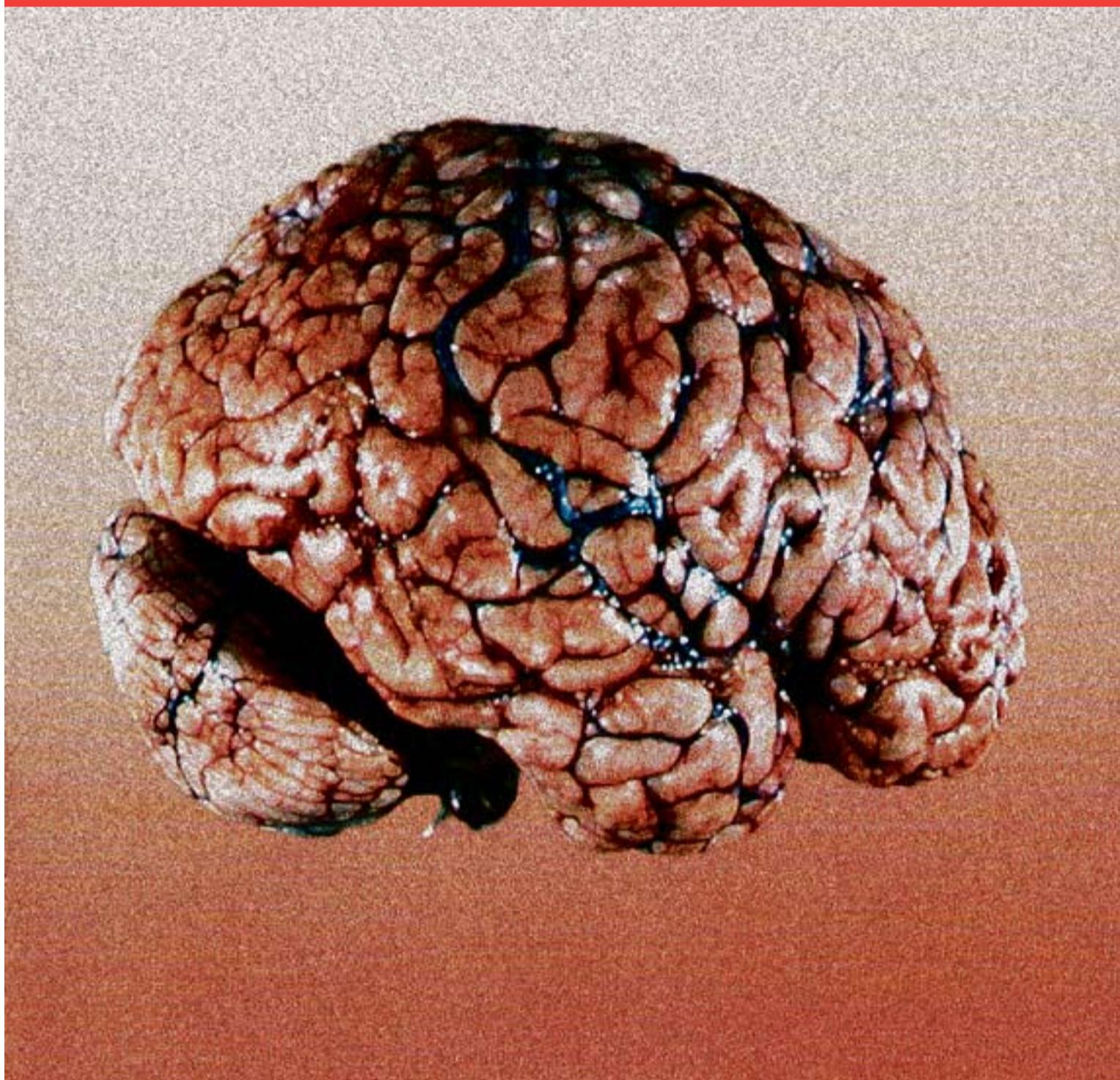
**15 September, 2004.** Davíð Oddsson, considered by many Icelanders to be the architect of the liberalized economy, steps down as prime minister after 13 years in power and is replaced by Halldór Ásgírmsson.

**21 January, 2005.** Political action group Movement for Active Democracy runs a full page ad in the New York Times condemning Iceland's membership in "the coalition of the willing," overwhelmingly ignored by the nation at large.

**22 March, 2005.** Caving in to pressure from the national chess club, the Icelandic government grants former chess world champion Bobby Fischer citizenship. He arrives three days later and summarily disappears from view.

**3 April, 2005.** Haraldur Ólafsson of Akureyri becomes the world champion in fish taxidermy during a competition in Springfield, Illinois.

# GRAPEVINE IN your pocket



## THE INTIMATE CIRCUS

Three major circuses are coming to Iceland this summer, each with its own take on the splendour of the big top, but Cirkus Cirkör has certainly caught our attention. First of all, they have a strong local connection, having collaborated with a local acting troupe for the unique Icelandic production of Romeo and Juliet which earned rave reviews in London and spawned an intensely watchable documentary, Love is in the Air. Secondly, Cirkus Cirkör is less frightening than the other major circuses. There aren't painted clowns, and the organization isn't intimidating; we particularly like their motto "intimate contact with the audience is priority number one."

Cirkus Cirkör is an urban circus, based in Sweden, responsible for a number of major rock style instalments. Their current show is 99% unknown, an essay on the understanding of what makes up the biology of man. By

looking over the videos and talking with their staff, we get the impression that man is made up of extremely attractive, flexible, vibrant people in tight clothing. Which, when handled with the intelligence that this organization seems to possess, isn't bad at all. In fact, this circus could undo the emotional scarring of a certain incident involving a cannon, a clown, and a poodle in Peoria, Illinois in May 1983. I think we all know what I'm talking about.

Cirkus Cirkör, June 14- June 17<sup>th</sup>, Borgarleikhúsíð, Listabraut 3, 103 Reykjavík, 568-8000.

Artwork available at [www.cirkor.se](http://www.cirkor.se)

■ by Bart Cameron

### The Reykjavík Grapevine Info

Arrivals

Information

Apparel

CD / DVD

Events

Lounge

Departures

Open 12 - 22  
Laugavegur 11  
see centerfold for location



Power To  
The Tourist!



Recommended by the  
**Floman Guide to Europe's Best Restaurants**

The Löðurinn House Restaurant has earned its reputation as one of Iceland's best restaurants. Our menu consists of variety of meat and fish dishes, and lobster is our specialty.  
Open daily. Lunch 12:00 - 14:00  
Dinner 16:30 - 20:30



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# GUIDE TO THE CITY CENTER

This pullout has all the information one might need, so for a safer journey, pull it out and put it in your pocket.

## CAFÉS

### 1. Café Roma

Laugavegur 118  
Is the closest thing you'll find to a New York deli in town. A lively cross-section of artists, students and office workers enjoy home-baked panini and great coffee all at low prices.

### 2. Ráðhúskaffi

City Hall  
With a view over the city pond, Ráðhúskaffi is situated inside the City Hall. Coffee and great cakes as you enjoy the view. Free Internet access for customers and, in the lobby of City Hall, you'll find a big 80m<sup>2</sup> model of Iceland.

### 3. Gráí Köttrinn

Hverfisgata 16a  
Gráí Köttrinn is across the street from the National Theatre and is quite small and very popular in the early hours of the day. A good place to start a day the British way, with eggs and bacon and other traditional breakfasts on the menu. The lunch menu is also inviting, but somewhat pricy.

### 4. Café Paris

Austurstræti 14  
Situated in the heart of the city with a view over Austurvöllur, spacious, popular and usually full in the afternoon, Café Paris is international like the city it's named after. In the mornings it is quieter and a hangout for philosophers and artists. Offers light meals and the opportunity to sit outside when the weather is nice.

### 5. Mokka

Skólahóvörðustígur 3a  
An Icelandic tradition since 1958, Mokka is the oldest café in Reykjavík and the first one to make coffee with an espresso machine. The walls are covered with art for sale and, though seats are usually filled by loyal customers, every now and then you'll catch a glimpse of the owners, a really nice and friendly couple in their seventies who have owned the café since its inception.

### 6. Feng Shui

Laugavegur 42b, by Frakkastígur  
Inside the Feng Shui house is a café called "Teahouse of the August Moon". The café just recently opened and they serve organic cakes, biscuits and the largest selection of tea in town. Try the waffle biscuits and have a Kashmir tea latte.

### 7. Svartakaffi

Laugavegur 54  
Read the newspaper, have a cup of coffee, have a philosophical conversation with your cigarette and enjoy the speciality of the house, soup in a bread bowl. Aim high, it's not on the ground floor.

### 8. Tíu Dropar

Laugavegur 27  
A very nice "grandma" style café. It's not that apparent from the street, being in on the bottom floor, but is actually bigger than it looks. They serve traditional treats such as hot chocolate and waffles, but grandma is also known to come up with new delicacies, such as the Snickers cake, and you can even try her latest work in progress.

### 9. Kaffitár

Bankastræti 8  
Expanded and improved, this is the downtown store for one of the country's finest coffee importers. While anything here is good, the speciality coffee drinks are truly remarkable: our favourite, the Azteca, an espresso drink with lime and tabasco.

### 10. Te og Kaffi

Laugavegur 24  
The downtown location for the other big coffee importer (see Kaffitár for the competition), Te og Kaffi boasts the nation's best-trained barista, as proven in a recent competition. Newly situated on the sunnier side of the street, this coffee shop has an ideal angle for people-gazing.

## BARS & BISTRO

### 11. Sólón

Bankastræti 7a  
Named after (in his own opinion, at least), Iceland's greatest man, Sólón is a pretty crowded nightclub on Friday and Saturday nights. It seems to have more lives than one, however, since in the day it's a fairly artsy coffeehouse and in the evening (weeknights) they have a decent krónur, or try the delicious fish and meat mixed sticks.

### 12. Cafè 22

Laugavegur 22  
Has recently undergone a major facelift. The top floor is now dedicated to artist Jón Sæmundur, aka Dead, whose Dead label can be seen on quite a few people these days. Downstairs is a decent bistro (try the Gringo), whereas the middle floor houses a dancefloor. Open until the wee small hours, and a great place for a late night drink for those who want drink along with a less trendy (and perhaps more cool) crowd. Be warned, though, they do charge 500 krónur entrance after 01:30.

### 13. Kaffibarinn

Bergstáðastræti 1  
Kaffibarinn is Cool Reykjavík, or at least tries to be. Reykjavík prides itself on having more artists per capita than any other capital in the world, and the crowd here seems to be trying to prove the point, with musicians, actors and writers ranging from the hopefuls to the world famous. Blur's Damon Albarn owns a share of the bar, probably figur-

ing it was cheaper than buying the director of the film 101 Reindeer in the film.

### 14. Sirkus

Klapprastígur 30  
"Welcome to the Jungle! We open our doors to the public every day, welcome to the party that never ends any time soon. Usually or want to be students of the musicians and other members of the floor, for whatever reason, look no further."

### 15. Nelly's

Bingholtstræti 2  
The cheapest beer in Reykjavík, as well as expats. Troubadours though. In the weekend, large dancefloor on the upper floor.

### 16. Vegamót

Vegamotastígur 4  
Wants to be the inspot to be seen up, flaunt it and enjoy the view there, and the fittest, or at least Kitchen open every day until 22:00. Try the lobster pizza.

### 17. Póstbarinn

Pósthústræti 13  
Situated by Austurvöllur, Póstbarinn treat. It is also one of few restaurants in the city. Live jazz once a week on the menu they have, only 1490ISK.

### 18. Rósenberg

Lækjargata 2  
Perhaps the closest we have to the walls. People go there for dancing. The place tends to players include Outsider leger band Misery Loves Company.

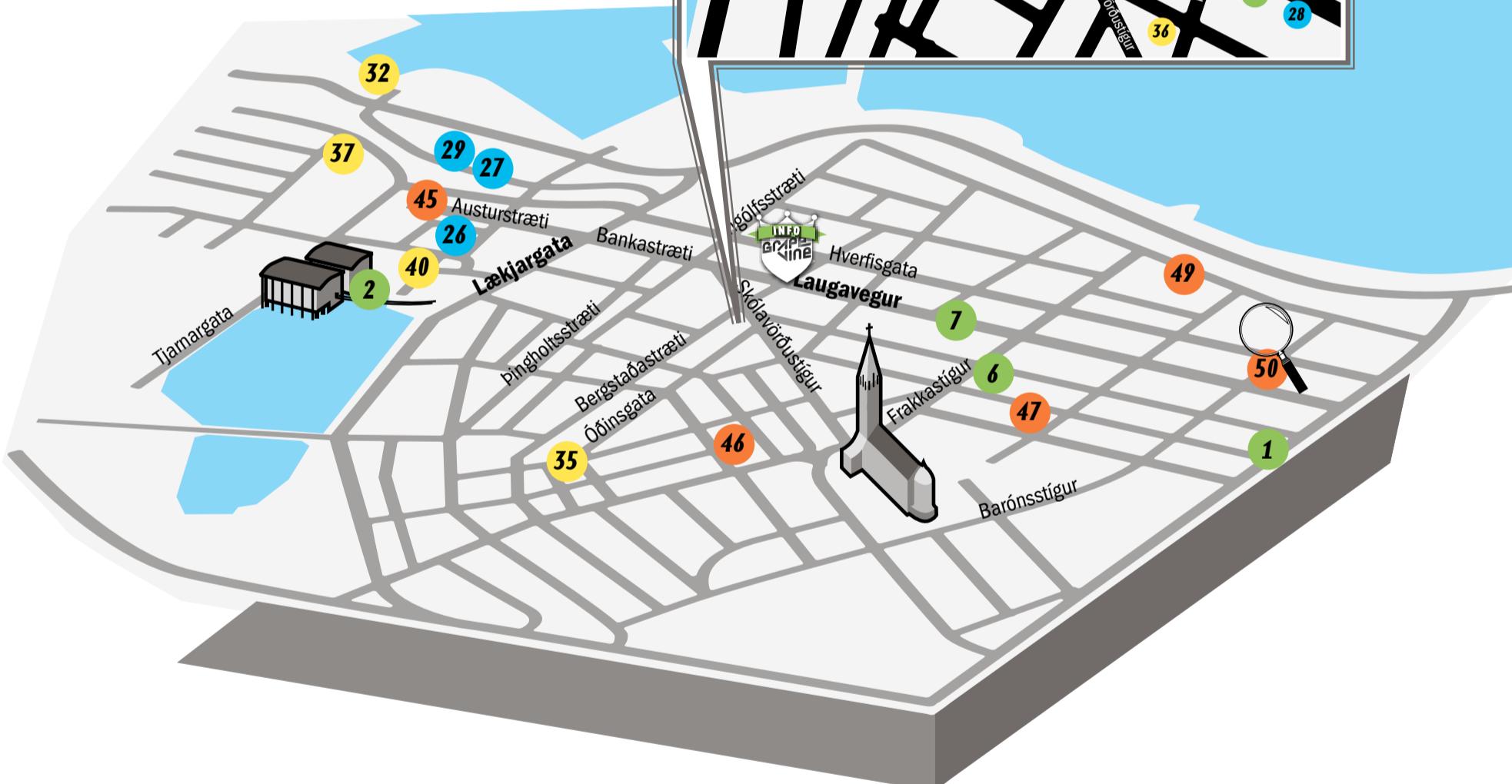
### 19. Grand Rokk

Smíðustígur 6  
A place true to the spirit of rock. Better and lesser known Icelandic three bands a night, four nights or not is up to the bands, but the artists. Grab a beer and rock o-



In keeping with our commitment to better serve both tourists and Icelanders alike, Grapevine is proud to announce that we've opened a new store called the Grapevine Info. Located on Laugavegur 11, Grapevine Info will provide all that anyone will need to know about concerts, nightlife, exhibits and other happenings in Reykjavík and around Iceland, serving as a more in-touch guide to the country than Iceland has ever had. In addition, we'll be selling music, books and clothes at reasonable prices. Come find out about the Iceland the tourist information centres can't – or won't – tell you about.

Laugavegur 11, 101 Reykjavík, Mon.-Sat., 12:00 to 22:00



Globe Restaurants  
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g drinks all the time. Another owner is ykjavík, and the bar figures prominently

chess players, challenging each other and anyone that might wander in here for a game, as every table doubles as a chess board. One of the best places to meet locals for a chat, every night of the week.

#### 20. Bar 11

Laugavegur 11

The rock hangout, be it live music or the riff-heavy jukebox. Many of Iceland's rock bands are regulars. Bands play and/or poetry is recited most Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. A good place to come down on Sundays, with a screening of cult films.

#### 21. Hressingarskálinn (Hressó)

Austurstræti 20

The celebrated site of one of the more famous coffeehouses in Iceland, this bar/ coffeehouse/ restaurant 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.

#### 22. Pravda

Austurstræti 22

Not, sadly, a meeting place for the communist party but somewhere quite far from it. This location, which formerly housed Astró, has long been home to bleached blonde babes and hnakkis. It is perhaps the bar in Reykjavík that comes closest to a nightclub-type atmosphere.

#### 23. Kaffi Kúltur

Hverfisgata 18

For those who grow tired of seeing nothing but palefaces about town, Kaffi Kúltur might be a pleasant diversion. During the day its something of a hangout for the actors from the National Theatre, just across the street, but in the evening it is populated by both new and older Icelanders. They have multi-ethnic food and frequent concerts. Wednesday night is tango night. Anyone can join in, as a free lesson from 8-9 p.m. precedes the tango night itself, and most of the regulars are happy to dance with beginners and visitors.

#### 24. Prikið

Bankastræti 12

Used to be a traditional coffeehouse that has been around longer than any but, after a change of clientele, they now cater to a younger crowd. A diner during the day and a nightclub on weekends. You can also borrow games there, such as backgammon or chess.

#### 25. Rex

Austurstræti 9

A favourite hangout for Kate Winslet look-alikes. Rex is one of the more posh hangouts, dress code is not insisted upon, but you'll find yourself out of place if you're too casual. Also rumoured to be a haunt for generous middle-aged ladies.

#### 26. Thorvaldsen

Austurstræti 8

Posh as the fifth circle of hell. That said, they make a mean Mojito. DJs on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Arrive before 12 if you want to avoid the queue. Theme nights during the week, wine and cheese on Wednesdays, Finlandia nights on Fridays and Sunday roast on, well, Sundays. Civilian attire is looked down upon.

#### 27. Gaukur á Stöng

Tryggvagata 22

Iceland's oldest bar is now in its early twenties. During the day it's a pool pub and on weekday evenings there are live rock concerts by a mix of mainstream and underground bands. On weekends there is usually a lot of action with cover bands playing everything from Britney to the Beatles. Admission is sometimes between 500-1000 weekends, but usually its free.

#### 28. Dillon

Laugavegur 30

From the I've-just-been-to-hell-and-boy-am-I-pissed art on the walls, to the hard rock on the speakers and steady-flowing whiskey at the bar, Dillon is vying for the aggressive crowd. Now with two floors, though, many nights it also provides decent seating for merely modest partying.

#### 29. Glaumbar

Tryggvagata 20

One of the few proper sport bars in Reykjavík, so you can go and watch whatever game happens to be on the TV screens. The establishment is basically based around the bar, so you won't have to go a long way for a drink. Open until five, and has a reputation for late night partying

#### 30. Litli ljótí andarunginn

by Lækjargata 6B

Named after the HC Andersen fairy tale, The Ugly Duckling. The Duckling is one of the very best places for a quiet night, when even on Saturday nights you can hear what your partner is saying. They have recently expanded the place with additional room for seating, and have food at lunchtime.

## RESTAURANTS

#### 31. La Primavera

Austurstræti 9

Everybody laughed when we discovered a contemporary restaurant that has its most notable influences from northern Italian cooking but using local Icelandic produce. The unique menu that results from this combination features homemade pastas, risotto, gnocchi, polenta and a wide variety of the freshest vegetables, fish, poultry, meat and game. The menu, the atmosphere and a comprehensive, exclusively Italian wine list has made La Primavera a favourite among the locals. They laugh no more!!

#### 32. Tveir fiskar

Geirsgata 9

Seafood restaurant, although they also do land-based animals. At lunchtime you can have a three-course meal for 2300, which isn't too bad, all things considered. The chef has been awarded the Medal of the Order of the White Rose by the President of Finland.

#### 33. Hornið

Hafnarstræti 15

Means "the corner" and the place lives up to its name. This is actually the oldest Italian restaurant in town, celebrating its 25th year, which says something about the scene here before then. Excellent quality pizza, pasta and salads and yet remaining one of the more affordable ones. Try the calzone.

#### 34. Humarhúsíð

Amtmannstígur 1

One of the oldest restaurants in the country, this fine dining establishment is known for its humar (lobster), but also for an impressive cognac lounge, and for intimate dining.

#### 35. 3 Frakkar

Baldursgata 14

This is a restaurant that cannot be ignored. A very small place with an atmosphere. Here you may enjoy the house specialities of Icelandic traditional dishes prepared in the good, old-fashioned manner, including catfish, shark, and whale steaks. And of course much more. If you're lucky, Chef Úlfar Eysteinsson, the owner, may be present regaling the clientele with wild whaling tales. Don't forget to ask Chef Úlfar for dark Icelandic pumpernickel bread with pure Icelandic butter, and don't forget to make a reservation!

#### 36. Pasta Basta

Klaparstígur 38

An affordable Italian place, the pasta is in generous portions and the salad with grilled chicken is a good light option. The garden is nice, with a glass ceiling protecting punters from the wind and the rain at all times of year. Upstairs, the Blue Bar offers a more bar type atmosphere.

#### 37. Tapas

Vesturgata 3b

For those with a bit of money and time on their hands, the evening is well spent at Tapas, where you can while away the evening having course after course of wonderful miniature dishes served. Recommended is the garlic-fried lobster and lamb in apricot sauce. If you don't feel like getting up right away afterwards, there's also a lounge to lounge in, and the paintings there are worth a look.

#### 38. Jómfrúin

Lækjargata 4

In this global age, it can be hard to find good smørrebrød even in Copenhagen. Never fear: out here in the colonies you can still find first smørrebrød at Jómfrúin. They even import their own eel directly from Denmark to make one of Scandinavia's delicacies.

#### 39. Shalimar

Austurstræti 4

Prides itself on being the northernmost Indian restaurant in the world. How it affects the food, we don't know as there are no comparisons in town. The daily special, comprised of two dishes on your plate, goes for roughly 1000ISK. But we recommend the Chicken Tikka Masala, known to be highly addictive. And if the curry gets to you, they have a self-service ice cream cone machine.

#### 40. Tjarnarbakkinn (Iónó)

Vonarstræti 3

Above the Iónó theatre, so it's a good place to go before shows, or during if you prefer a more quiet atmosphere. If you sit by the window you get a nice view of the pond. It's not a bad place to try one of Iceland's culinary specialities, the lamb steak, one of those rare traditional treats that does not come as a shock to the uninitiated.

## FAST FOOD

#### 41. Nonnabiti

Hafnarstræti 11

The owner is a miser who charges additionally for everything, but this is almost certainly the best junk food in the Greater Reykjavík area. The subs are great, none of that Subway commitment to healthy living, and they probably contribute significantly to the ever-increasing "size" of the nation. They also serve burgers and sandwiches, and have lunchtime offers.

#### 42. Pizza King

Hafnarstræti 18

Yes, you can go here late at night and grab the best pizza in town, but it is also to the best lunch specials, and food so good you'd eat it sober, something you can't say for most food in Reykjavík. Call in advance if you're going during the day.

#### 43. Purple Onion

Hafnarstræti 18

Stepping up Reykjavík's diversity a notch, the Purple Onion serves up Eastern European and Indian food fast. If you are as uncultured as we are, just smile and say you're hungry, and they'll give you something nice for under 1000 ISK.

#### 44. Bæjarins bestu

Tryggvagata

They claim to have the best hot dogs in town, and for once the product lives up to the hype. Ask for one with everything, and you'll get a dog in a bun with ketchup, mustard, remoulade (don't ask), fried and raw onion. The standard Icelandic hot dog, only somehow it tastes better.

#### 45. Hlölli

By Ingólfstorg

Where Nonni used to work before he went solo, due to creative differences no doubt. They have a somewhat larger selection of subs than Nonni, and they also have smaller sizes for kids and weight watchers. Brave souls might want to try the Gúmmí-Bátur (rubber boat), which might seem like an oversized relative of the ever-present pulsa.

#### 46. Eldsmíðjan

Bragagata 38a

Oven-baked pizzas simply don't get much better than this. It is slightly more expensive than other pizzerias, but well worth it. A wide selection of toppings, including that sorely missed pizza delight, snails. You can also turn the chef loose and let him decide what goes on it - you'll rarely be disappointed. Take away, order delivery, or eat in at the cosy restaurant upstairs. The paintings are worth a peek as well.

#### 47. Vitabar

Bergþórugata 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. The Viking beer always feels particularly cold and refreshing here.

#### 48. First Vegetarian (Á næstu grósum)

Laugavegur 20b

Used to be called One Woman Restaurant, as there was always the same woman working there. Has new owners and a larger staff, but the theme is still vegetarian, with one vegan and one wheat-free dish always on offer. The only vegetarian restaurant licensed to carry beer and wine. Remains on the right side of the 1000 krónur bill at lunchtime, slips slightly over in the evening.

#### 49. Dominos Pizza

Laugavegur 81

Situated a bit from the immediate centre but close to Hlemmur bus-stop. Bagels, wraps and coffee that might make you feel better in the morning than the more hardcore fast foods further down the street.

#### 50. Reykjavík Bagel Company

Laugavegur 81

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## Shopping



## The Cintamani Road Test

We've been looking at the ads the last few months, we've seen Icelanders walking around in the gear. When Paul and I realized that we had to tour the whole country and visit somewhere around a dozen key sites for upcoming issues in only four days, we thought this would be the opportunity to test the gear we've always wondered about.

If you show up in Iceland with just street clothes, what can you buy to make a trip around the Ring Road, with hiking, whale watching and various mayhem more comfortable, we asked the people at Cintamani.

"First, take a look at pants. We have something called a wet wind," our assistant at Cintamani told us. He handed us some moderately lightweight wind and rain blocking pants, and then matched them with an outer shell jacket. We then picked up some lightweight fleece.

Great stuff, but, as we openly worried, it all felt a little lightweight.

"For the highlands, this is too light, but for the Ring Road, this will be excellent," he told us.

We tried to pretend like we hadn't said anything about cold, as we realized we were coming off a little weak.

### The Test

First thing to say about Cintamani's magic pants and outer shells, if Iceland ever gets their own version of The Sopranos, the mafia will be sporting these clothes. They feel like a cross between pajamas and jogging gear, even when walking in high wind and light rain. During a one-hour hike, we were laughing about this, in fact. As the trip went on, we did our best to test the crap out of the pants and gear. In our most absurd moment, Paul and I spent seven hours on a rubber boat in the open ocean dressed only in Cintamani summer gear. Having done this, I can say Cintamani summer gear is NOT good for open ocean travel for longer than five hours.

Beyond that, for hiking, driving and something Paul labelled g-money-glacier-pimpin', we swear by these pants, shells and lightweight fleece.

You can stop by the Cintamani warehouse, as we did, and get personal assistance in clothing yourself for a trip, or you can pick the clothes up on the Internet and at many large sporting clothes shops in the country.

Cintamani, Austurhrauni 3, 210 Garðabær, 533-3800, [www.cintamani.is](http://www.cintamani.is).

by Bart Cameron

## GRAPEVINE'S PURCHASES THAT JUSTIFY EXISTENCE

**1** Used books Mál og Menning might be the biggest bookstore in the country, but that doesn't mean that you'll always pay top dollar. There are frequent clearance sales where you can buy paperbacks from all genres, generally all priced under 1000 ISK each. Keep your eyes open for tables full of books stacked in no particular order. Mál og Menning. Laugavegur 18, 9:00-22:00 weekdays, 10:00-22:00 weekends.

**2** Fruit! Fruit is usually pretty expensive in Iceland but 10-11 offers generous portions of grapes, melon, or a fresh fruit mix for 299 ISK. Now you have no excuse for that bad case of scurvy that's been alienating you from your roommates. 10-11, locations around the country.

**3** Nicotine Depending on which country or state you live in, you might normally need a doctor's prescription to buy cigarette alternatives. But in Iceland, you can buy nicotine gum, the patch, nicotine pills and even the nicotine inhaler (which we must warn you, might as well be crack), all over the counter. These products can be pricy, but aren't nearly as expensive as relapsing into your habit. Available at the pharmacies Apótekin, Lyfja and Lyf og heilsa. Locations around the country.

**4** The Hagkaup Music Bin Advertised here as "where Icelanders find it most fun to shop," Hagkaup certainly isn't lacking in, well, nearly anything, however expensive it can sometimes be. But the bargain music bin – with most titles under 900 ISK – is worth sorting through. We found our copy of Duran Duran's Rio there. Ah, sweet nostalgia. Hagkaup. At Kringlan, open Mon.-Weds. 10:00-19:00; Thurs. 10:00-21:00; Fri. 10:00-19:00; Sat. 10:00-18:00; Sunday 13:00-17:00.

# Buy Shit

— The Grapevine Celebrates Capitalism —

### GUIDE TO TRAVEL FOOD

Whether you go by rental car, bus, or hitchhike, one of the most important parts of travelling around Iceland is your food. Sure, you could stop at every gas station you find along the way and cram yourself full of pre-packaged sandwiches, but who wants to pay five euro for a sandwich? Your best bet is to go with the staple qualities that have kept nomadic bellies full for centuries: nutrition, preservability, portability and affordability. As hard as it may be to believe, there are actually a number of options in Iceland that fit these requirements to a tee.

**Harðfiskur:** Lightweight, won't go bad, chock full of protein. On the downside, your clothes could end up smelling like fish if you don't double-bag it.



**Bread:** Whole grain breads are best, as they're not only smaller than a store-brand loaf of white bread, but will give you the carbs you need to keep moving, whether you're trail hiking or hitchhiking.



**Mixed nuts:** Apart from being a spoil-free source of protein and iron, they also make for handy pocket eats.



**Apples and bananas:** Apples are nature's toothbrush – the roughage and the malic acid are both supposed to help keep your teeth clean, and apple skin is also high in vitamin A and calcium. Bananas are loaded with potassium. Sadly, these are the only two fruits that are likely to be fresh or edible at most grocery stores in the country.



**Pasta:** "Hippy chips" – crunching up a pack of cheap instant noodles in its own packaging and eating it dry, isn't as bad as it could be. Also, many gas stations have hot water dispensers—if you're courteous enough, you can probably get your ramen noodles heated and wet.



**Sardines:** Yeah, that's right, sardines. Canned meats aren't popular in Iceland, but if you want protein on the trip, try delightful canned fishes. On the downside, canned sardines are heavy and you have to carry the cans with you after you eat for sometimes a few days, but most gas stations have recycling stations.



**Portable grilling:** Lightweight and about the size of a frozen pizza for two, a single use portable grill can be bought at most supermarkets for about 300 ISK, making cooking outdoors cheap and easy. If you're feeling particularly extravagant, buy some vacuum-wrapped meat like marinated lamb. Don't forget to drown the coals in water and when you're done and let it cool completely before throwing it away.



In terms of what to avoid, the rule is pretty simple: if it needs to be refrigerated, it's generally not a good idea to bring along. Apart from that, buy smaller portions of different things instead of buying a great deal of one thing – it's not only healthier but will keep you from being disgusted at the site of your seventh tin of spaghetti. Follow these simple guidelines, and eating on the road will be a lot easier on you. All the same, we highly recommend going straight to a restaurant for a hot meal once you've returned from your trip. It'll make the homecoming that much sweeter.

by Paul F Nikolov

**Power To The Tourist!**



Events



CD / DVD



Apparel



Books



## Sick Bags to Icelandic Scrabble, HJÁ MAGNA Has It All

Would you believe me if I told you that there is a man out there who collects air sickness bags? That he has over 1700 different ones? Yes, it appears that pretty much anything can be the basis for a collection and a hobby. No one knows this better than Magni R. Magnússon, owner and proprietor of the famous Hjá Magna (At Magni's) on Laugavegur 15, a store that will provide almost anything to any collector.

"Everyone collects things," explains Magnússon. "The best rule is never to throw anything away".

Hjá Magna has been a Reykjavík institution virtually since it opened in 1979, and the man with a penchant for certain airline products has been but one of thousands of customers over the years. Morgunblaðið once snapped Hillary Clinton coming out of the shop, but Magni doesn't normally like to boast about the stars who shop there, "I don't keep a guestbook."

Hjá Magna specializes in collectibles of all sorts, with an emphasis on stamps, coins, and maps from Iceland and abroad. Bring in something from home, and the jovial Magni will give you a valuation of it. If you happen to have a first edition Icelandic postage stamp (from 1873-76) it is now worth about 20,000 GBP. If you want to buy, mint edition bank notes and other items are for sale at much better prices than at the main souvenir stores.

Of course, one can't run a business in Iceland based on coins and stamps alone. Hjá Magna is also the place shrewd Icelanders go for games, puzzles, and cards. Icelandic Scrabble and Monopoly are perpetual big sellers, but you can always find the newest game craze here. For tourists, there is a great selection of postcards and perhaps one of the best smaller souvenirs of a trip to Iceland: playing cards. Icelandic playing cards have been around since the 1930s, so they weren't created specifically for a big mass market, and they are available in styles from the Christmas elves to the sagas to whales.

What is it like to be an institution in this little country? "Well, you need to behave and can't have any scandal," Magnússon says with a twinkle in his eye. (He says this slightly wistfully – or perhaps mysteriously. I make a mental note to search the archives of Söð og Heyrt for some juicy stories...)

So now, after over 40 years of scandal-free existence, Hjá Magna is closing its doors on 1 October. Will there be a sale to mark the occasion? "No, I think I'm going to raise my prices!" jokes Magnússon. "Business has doubled since I announced my retirement." There will still be a games store at Laugavegur 15, though; Magnússon has sold to a young couple who will keep much of the same stock.

Nevertheless, it's the end of an era. We'll miss you, Magni.

Hjá Magna, Laugavegur 15, 101 Reykjavík, 552-3011.

by Eliza Reid



## Hressingarskálinn

**Hressingarskálinn (Hressó) is a Classical Bistro, located in the heart of the city at Austurstræti 20.**

Food is served from 10 until 22 every day. On Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, after the kitchen closes Hressó heats up with live music. Weekends, DJs keep the party going until morning, with no cover charge.

## bör eleber

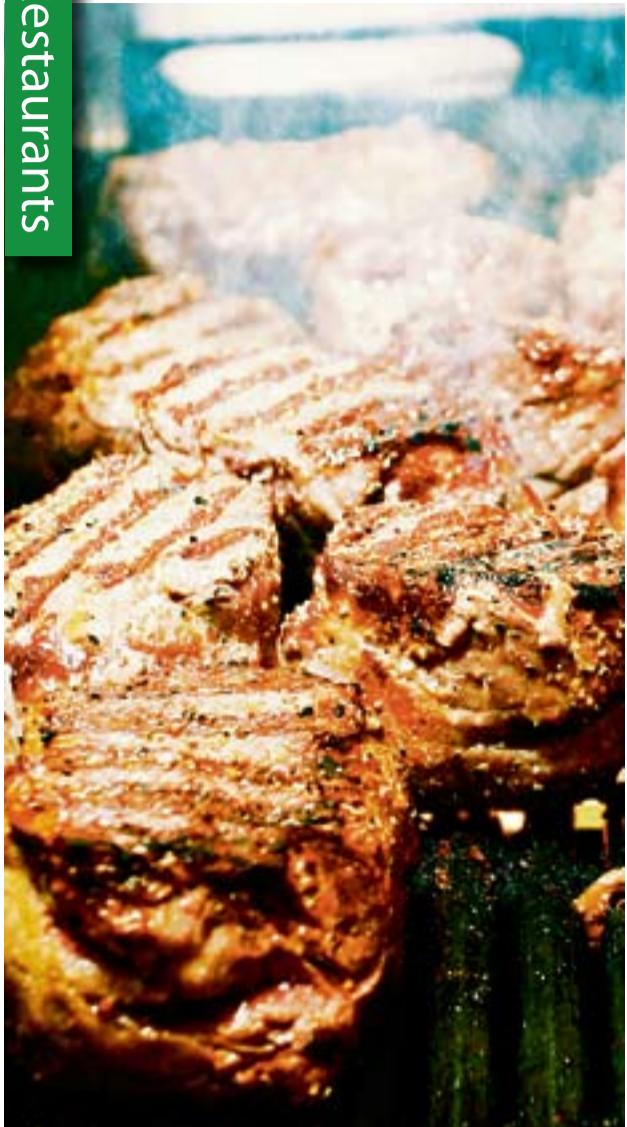
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**INFO GRAPE VINE**

## The Reykjavík Grapevine Info

Open 12 - 22  
Laugavegur 11  
see centerfold for location

## Restaurants



## RAUÐARÁ STEAKHOUSE



Heavily romantic. Huge candlesticks. Accompanied by my sister, we were quite pleased, after a drink in the upstairs parlour, to be relocated by the waitress to a table more suitable when no one is proposing marriage to anyone. Those tables are to be found, but they are scarce.

The restaurant is decorated with a collage of disparate kitschy items, which strangely enough, make a coherent and joyful whole ... a reindeer head with Christmas lights hanging from its horns stands out from the wall above a jaguar-patterned sofa – close to a statue of a cupid that seems to be washing his armpits, opposite a large painting by Sveinn Björnsson ... and somehow the whole is pleasurable. As long as one ignores the apartment buildings outside every window. One is also advised to ignore the bathroom, especially the ladies' room, my sister told me, and so we shall and move on: This evening the decor happened to be wonderfully supplemented with an accidental variety of music from someone's iPod, as a waiter explained to me: Drake, Oldham, Dylan, Bowie, Buckley ... is it the standardized iPod collection?

Now, as for the food: The menu is short but appealing, focusing on steaks. Pseudo-vegetarians can enjoy the fish menu, but vegans will have to settle with dessert and coffee.

The appetizer, a lobster soup, was very fine but outdone by the fantastic bread and creamy butter that came with it. My sister informed me that the steak was quite fine, but either

# DINING, EATING & GRUBBING

The Ideal Place for....  
Haukur Már Helgasson on Reykjavík Dining

slightly over- or underdone. There is little more to be said about it: served with a baked potato and salad, no surprises were involved. You may call it classic. The fish steak was good, even great, but on the scale of a good Sunday dinner – it did not reach the sublime. Which, of course, is not a fair demand from food. The prices don't really reach the sublime either, which makes the demand even less fair. And yet ... one wants bliss.

And in the end it was verified that happiness can be found through food. The dessert, home-made vanilla ice cream, was truly delightful, we both fell silent and finished up speechless, smiling.

The ideal place for which occasion? If a couple originated from very separate layers of the social fabric want to announce their engagement to both families at the same time, the food and service should please everyone and yet no one would feel intimidated or out of place.

But please make better coffee.



## THE BAGEL HOUSE



The Bagel House only arrived on Laugavegur two or three weeks ago. They serve bagels. The bagels are good, the raw material fresh, the guy who was working there when I dropped by was charming and efficient ... I could hold it against them that he served us the smaller bagel of two sizes, but that would not be fair. My rather plump companion complained that it wasn't that much food at all for the price, but I disagreed, and we soon started speaking about different things.

My salmon sour cream bagel was excellent and I guess we are all delighted that there is now a fast food restaurant in town that offers a better and cheaper solution to the sandwich problem than Sómi has hitherto done.

The place is ideal to grab a bite if you happen to be hungry and in the neighbourhood.



Under ISK 1000



Between ISK 1000 and ISK 2500



Between ISK 2500 and ISK 4000



Over ISK 4000



## EL RACÓ



El Racó is a new Mexican place by Tryggvagata, where there used to be a ... Mexican place. Unfortunately my knowledge of Mexican food is quite limited, and so when I actually complained to the chef that my fajitas were not spicy at all he explained to me that fajitas were not supposed to be spicy. Which has since been verified. And means that probably what I had were excellent fajitas – in any case the chicken meat was great, the vegetables fresh and the portions generous.

Not only did the dessert, a chocolate cake with cream, come quite close to the sublime, the slice was huge as well. Which made perfectly up for rather sour coffee.

The ideal place for what? Casual dinners and lunches with colleagues, family or friends, given that no drama or sense of fate is involved. Or if you want to break up with someone but make it seem like not that a big deal – the pastel colours soothe every soul.

## Restaurants in Reykjavík

- 3 Frakkar, Baldursgata 14, p: 552-3939
- Apótek bar grill, Austurstræti 16, p: 575-7900
- Argentina, Barónsstígur 11a, p: 551-9555
- Café Oliver, Laugavegur 20a, p: 552-2300
- Café Opera, Lækjargata 2, p: 552-9499
- Hornið, Hafnarstræti 15, p: 551-3340
- Humarúsíð, Amtmannstíg, 561-3303
- Jómfrúin, Lækjargata 4, p: 551-0100
- La Primavera, Austurstræti 9, 561-8555
- Maru, Áalstræti 12, p: 511-4440
- Pasta Basta, Klapparstígur 38, p: 511-2238
- Rauðará, Rauðarárstígur 39, p: 562-6766
- Shalimar, Austurstræti 4, p: 551-0292
- Sjávarkjallarinn, Áalstræti 2, p: 511-1212
- Skólabrú, Skólabrú 1, p: 562-4455
- Tapas, Vesturgata 3b, p: 551-2344
- Thorvaldsen, Aðalstræti 8, p: 511-1413
- Tjarnarbakkinn, Vónastræti 2, p: 562-9700
- Tveir Fiskar, Geirsgata 9, p: 511-3474
- Við Tjörnina, Templarasund 3, p: 551-8666
- Vox Nordica Hotel, Suðurlandsbraut 2, p: 444-5050

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# BEZT Í HEIMI

Restaurants

## ÍSBÚÐ VESTURBÆJAR

The old joke about selling ice to the Eskimos gets a dose of reality in Iceland: Icelanders love it, or ice cream. The sheer quantity of ice cream consumed on a sunny summer day is astounding to visitors, especially those who try the exceptionally thick, creamy local soft serve.

You should know then that there is one stand celebrated above all others, as indicated by a remarkably long line even during a hail storm: Ísbúð in Vesturbær. Serving the old (gaml) style ice cream, which, according to the customers in line, is water-based, this is the favourite of every local who truly knows Reykjavík.

Beyond the fact that the ice cream is lighter than other variations, and that it is indeed invigorating to chomp on a cone on an 11-degree summer day, the Ísbúð has other charms. The place can cover your ice cream in assorted toppings. They make a mean shake. As a cultural centre, you can actually get concert and play information from the booth. And as a respected institution, a visit from a foreigner is greeted—this is one thing most people in the country are proud of. Yes, locals are proud of damned near everything, but here it doesn't seem to be that defensive pride that comes with the "per capita" arguments.

Warning, even the water-based ice cream is heavy. I have never met a non-Icelander who could consume a large cone without severe dyspepsia.

Ísbúð Vesturbæjar, Hagamel 67, 107 Reykjavík, p:552-3330

by Bart Cameron



Oskar Pál

### Previous Bezt í Heimi winners:



Shalimar

For many visitors to Iceland, it can be very confusing to see a dish labelled as hotonlytodiscoverthismeansit'sbeen dusted with black pepper. Fortunately, you'll never have that problem at Shalimar.



Argentína

This is the kind of restaurant where you compliment the chef and tell yourself that if you ever really make it, you will send him a Cadillac, where you feel that you and the maitre d' really know something the rest of the world doesn't.



Pizza King

Taking our guidelines from an 8th grade health book published in Cleveland, Ohio in 1981, we can safely say that Pizza King will turn everyone who eats it into the next Bruce Jenner.



Hôtel Holt

When it comes to lunch, Hôtel Holt is one of the best kept secrets in Reykjavík. They offer two-course lunches for 2200 ISK and three-course lunches for 2700 ISK. Not to bad a price, which gets seven better when you consider the courses are classical French cuisine.

### Economics 101: *...have it delivered!*

Tel: 58•12345

**Oskar Pál**

A man in a suit sits at a table with several pizzas and soda bottles (Sprite, Coca-Cola, Diet Coke). A red Domino's pizza box is visible on the left.

# traffic

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## ARTS AND CULTURE



Oskar Pál

## Sound of Money

By Haukur Már Helgason

**3. Kafli  
Peningahávadinn  
Chapter 3  
The Noise of Money**

## Description:

1) Four or five separate spaces in one house are all filled with painful noises of fish factories, reproduced through speakers in all corners. All the spaces utilized are white, except one small storage room, full of junk.  
2) Headphones lie around here and there, and hang from the trees outside. Inside you can try to listen, but the noise makes the stories hard to hear. Outside you can actually listen to fish factory workers and sailors, native and migrant, tell stories from their days at work. 3) A sculpture on the wall: half a sphere of polished metal, surrounded with fake euro-coins that are probably containers for chocolate, distributed in a way that is tempting to see as sunrays, and yet too chaotic ... more like sunwind, disturbances. Or mountains and valleys. In the metal sphere the visitor sees his own reflection.

## Reflections:

"There are children in this world who get nothing to eat. So be grateful and finish up your boiled cod and potatoes!" The status of the third world has been that of a myth or a fairytale for Iceland, so remote from Africa and Asia. As well as America and Europe for that matter. The absolute, something close to hell, a valuable tool to cultivate a general guilt-based morality. But all of a sudden the third world is here. And we are there. There are new kids on the block all around. We are all direct participants in each others' lives. That is, we live in direct and obvious master-slave relationships, instead of hidden, mythical ones.

If not quite aristocratic, Iceland is very much a nouveau riche. With great taste for coffee. An interest in the arts. Cars – expensive and

numerous. Architecture is even expected in the country, anytime now. The first thing to do when you have superfluous wealth: smell good. That is, get someone else to do the slimy fish stuff.

The president of the republic seems to be smiling behind the mask, in a fish factory in China, where Chinese girls handle fish caught in Russia – for money that will go directly to Iceland. The news reporter accidentally hits the nail on the head as he introduces the new deal: "Better use is made of raw material here, where Chinese substitute machines."

And the position of the gallery itself next to a lively kindergarten underlines more or less everything.

Friendship among the nouveau riche and entrepreneurs is always defined by business, and the other way around. In a rather crude way, their/our stories serve a purpose. Defamation or aggrandizement, why are you telling this story? But the stories heard through the headphones are neither told nor mediated for any simple or direct goal. They are stories, that's all – and, precisely for that reason, a political act.

The political question of our times meets with the deeply personal. The mystery of the exhibition: Why is this not kitschy? Why does it work? It is so simple, so self-evident, it should be absolutely banal. But it is astonishing. (Haukur Már's piece has been edited due to space limitations. He has much more to say on these issues, and we are working on getting him more space for future issues.)

The Sound of Money, Chapter 3 by Ólafur Ární Olafsson & Libia Pérez de Siles de Castro. Gallery ASI, May 14 - July 3, 2005, Reykjavík Arts Festival.

A portrait of Hillary Clinton



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# ARTS AND CULTURE

## LISTINGS

Want to be seen in the listings? Send us a mail to [listings@grapevine.is](mailto:listings@grapevine.is) and your event will be announced in the next issue, and the best thing is that being in the listings is free!

### EVENTS

**Openings—Good art goes best with complimentary beverages.** Here are Grapevine's picks for May.

Compiled by Atli Bollason.

### 10 JUNE

17:00

#### Culture House

The president of Iceland, Mr. Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, will open the summer exhibit in the Library Room of the Culture House; Nordic Bookbinding 2005. Featured are some 81 hand-crafted bindings, one by each bookbinder, all of whom live in the Nordic countries. This exhibit travels the Nordic countries and is on view in the Culture House.

19:30

#### Klink & Bank

At 20:00 Christof Migone opens new exhibition TOURdeFORCE in Klink & Bank Gallery. "PASS", Kira Kira and Best Rider gerir það líka.will perform live music at the opening. The artists whose works are on display are Ásdís Sif Gunnarsdóttir, Ragnar Kjartansson, Birgir Örn Thoroddsen, Kolbeinn Hugi Höskuldsson, Kristín Björk Kristjánsdóttir, Haraldur Karlsson, Christof Migone, Marla Hlady, Tasman Richardson (CAN) and Jan Høvo (NOR).

### 11 JUNE

16:00

#### Kjarvalsstaðir

Some of Kjarvalsstaðir's best works will be presented in the new exhibition A Selection of 20th Century Works, which is opened today. The exhibition is divided into four themes: late-romanticism, expressionism, abstract works and artists related to legendary gallery Súm.

### 14-17 JUNE

20:00

#### Cirkus - The City Theatre

Modern circus Cirkus Cirkör from Stockholm every night at 8 pm in The City Theatre (next to Kringlan mall). Call 568-8000 for tickets and visit [www.cirkor.se](http://www.cirkor.se) for further information.

### 21 JUNE

20:30

Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum Mezzo-soprano Sesselja Kristjánsdóttir and pianist Antonia Hevesi perform lullabies from the East and the West in Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum.

### ONGOING

101 Gallery  
Jokla Series – Ólafur Eliasson until 1st of July  
Thu-Sat 14:00 - 17:00  
<http://www.101hotel.is/101hotel/101gallery>



þjóðleikhúsið,

### DÍNAMÍT

A play about Friedrich Nietzsche.

To some extent the same can be said about this play as about the Róska documentary: Friedrich Nietzsche as a character in Séð og heyr. Except that the playwright also intends to make a point, mainly that Nietzsche was misunderstood by the Nazis, that he really wasn't a leather-boot sort of nationalist. The point however is that neither novel is really relevant to any ongoing discussion. Would be great if it were better written.

Culture House  
The Road to Zion and Nordic bookbinding 2005  
Daily 11:00-17:00  
<http://www.thjodmenning.is>

Hverfisgata 15, tel: 545 1400

Einar Jónsson Sculpture Museum

Tues-Sun 14:00 - 17:00

<http://www.skulptur.is>

Njárlaugata, tel: 551 3797

FUGL – Reykjavík Project Space

Redundant Information – Ívar Brynjólfsson until 26th of June

Mon-Fri 10:00-18:00, Sat 11:00-16:00

<http://fugl.is>

Skolavörðustígur 10, tel: 695 4202

Gallery Fold

Mon-Fri 10:00-18:30, Thu 10:00-21:00, Sat 10:00-18:00 Sun 13:00-17:00

<http://www.myndlist.is>

Kringlan Mall, tel: 568 0400

Gel Gallery

Hverfisgata 37, tel: 551 7733



### SCHLINGENSIEF EXHIBITION

Klink & Bank

German theatre has been doing this for a while ... for some reason, the nation most obedient to red and green pedestrian signals finds its most honest artistic voice in excessively loud and violent expressionism. The artist, who originates in theatre, fills up a few spaces in Klink & Bank with something that looks and feels like the vomit of a nation ... and you will feel dizzy and you might want to bring a bucket. This is said in honest appraisal of the insane installation.

Gallery Hulduhólar  
Sat 11:00-14:00  
<http://www.hulduholar.com>

Mosfellsbæ, tel: 556 6194

Gallery i8

A Pursuit of Happiness ASAP – Lawrence Weiner

until 20th of August

Wed-Fri 11:00-17:00, Sat 13:00-17:00

<http://www.i8.is>

Klapparstígur 33, tel: 551 3666

Gallery of the Icelandic Printmakers Association

Forum For Kunst í Heidelberg until 12th of June

Tue-Sun 14:00-18:00

<http://www.islenskgrafik.is>

Tryggvagata 17, tel: 552 286

Gallery Skuggi

Thu-Sun 13:00-17:00

<http://www.galleriskuggi.is>

Hverfisgata 39, tel: 511 1139

Gallery Sævar Karl

Metamorphosis – Kristín Blöndal

Mon-Fri 10:00-17:00

<http://www.saevarkarl.is>

Bankastræti 7, tel: 551 3470

Gallery Tukt

Myndlist – Steinunn Harðardóttir and Sæmundur

Pór Helgason until the 18th of June

Weekdays 09:00-17:00

<http://www.hittusid.is>

Posthusstræti 3-5, tel: 520 4600

Gerðarsafn, Kópavogur Art Museum

Material Time/Work Time/Life Time until 21st of August.

Tue-Sun 11:00-17:00

<http://www.gerdarsafn.is>

Hamraborg 4, tel: 570 0440

Gerðuberg Culture Center

Collectors II – What do Icelanders collect?

Mon-Fri 11:00-17:00

<http://www.gerduberg.is>

Gerðuberg 3-5, tel: 575 7700

Gljúfrasteinn - Laxness museum

Thu-Sun 10:00-17:00

<http://www.gljufrasteinn.is>

Mosfellsdalur, tel: 586 8066

Hafnarborg – Institute of Culture and Fine Art

Wilhelm Sásnal, Bojan Sarcevic, On Kawara and

Elke Krystufek.

Wed-Sun 11:00-17:00

<http://www.hafnarborg.is>

Strandgata 34, tel: 555 0080

Hafnarfjörður Folk Museum

Weekends 13:00 - 17:00

<http://www.hafnarfjordur.is/byggdasafrn>

Vesturgata 5, tel: 565 5420

Hafnarhús - Reykjavík Art Museum

Train – Dieter Roth

Daily 10:00-17:00

<http://www.listasafnreykjavikur.is>

Tryggvagata 17, tel: 590 1200

Icelandic Institute of Natural History

Tue, Thu, Sat, Sun 13:00-17:00

<http://www.ni.is/>

Hlemmur 5, tel: 590 0500

Kjarvalsstaðir Art Museum

A Selection of 20th Century Works

<http://www.listasafnreykjavikur.is>

Daily 10:00-17:00

Flókagata, Miklatún, tel: 552 6131

Kling & Bang Gallery

Skipholt – John Bock until 26th of JUNE

TOURdeFORCE until 10th of July

Thu-Sun 15:00-18:00

<http://this.is/klingbang>

Laugavegur 23, tel: 696 2209

National Gallery of Iceland

Train – Dieter Roth

11:00-17:00 except Mon

<http://www.listasafn.is>

Frikirkjuvegur 7, tel: 515 9600

National Museum of Iceland

Daily 11:00-17:00

<http://www.natmus.is>

Suðurgata 41, tel: 530 2200

Nordic House

Works on Paper - Órnulf Opdahl

Deep Sea Organisms - David Shale both until

12th of June.

Tue-Sun 12:00-17:00

<http://www.nordice.is>

Sturlugata 5, tel: 551 7030

Orkuveita Reykjavíkur - Galleri 100°

Train – Dieter Roth

Mon-Fri 8:30-16:00, Sat 11:00 - 17:00

<http://www.rafeimur.is>

Bæjarhálsvegur 1, tel: 516 6790

Reykjavík Museum of Photography

Without Roots – 8 South African Photographers

Mon-Fri 12:00-19:00, Sat-Sun 13:00-17:00.

<http://www.ljosmyndasafnreykjavikur.is>

Tryggvagata 15, 6th floor, tel: 562 1790



## Snúður skiptir um hlutverk (Snúður changes roles)

There are better ways to learn Icelandic than shelling out fistfuls of cash to attend classes. You can watch English language television, for example, and follow the Icelandic text underneath. You could also head out into the country and try to find work on a farm. Or you could head to your nearest bookstore and buy some children's books. Learning Icelandic through children's books is perhaps not the best way to get an ear for the language, but once you manage to read one completely, it can help boost your confidence enough to try speaking Icelandic.

If you choose this last option, we highly recommend you buy Snúður skiptir um hlutverk (Snúður changes roles), a heart-wrenching tale about a kitten who learns the value of sharing. Although originally by French author Pierre Probst, who named the main character "Pouf," these books have been a part of Icelandic culture for decades. This was the very first book we

were able to read from cover-to-cover, albeit with some help from a dictionary, after being in Iceland for merely two months.

In Snúður skiptir um hlutverk, we meet Snúður, a lazy, spoiled fluffy white kitten who likes nothing better than to lie around the house in his basket, eating cupcakes and drinking cream. Apart from lactose intolerance, Snúður also has to contend with a lack of friends. He goes to his window one day and asks a butterfly to be his friend. The butterfly responds by flying away. Snúður then goes outside and asks a mouse to be his friend. Again, Snúður is shot down. He tries one more time by asking a bird to be his friend. The bird declines. Heartbroken, he bursts into tears (which I have to admit, made me really sad). After dipping himself in blue paint to disguise himself – which works briefly in convincing the bird and the mouse to play with him – a sudden rain storm washes off his paint and reveals to the bird and mouse that

their cool new friend is really just lame old Snúður, and they ditch him. And just why are Snúður's efforts to revoke the predator-prey relationship snubbed? Snúður's grandfather explains to him that he's a selfish twat who never shares his cupcakes and cream. Hence, Snúður learns a valuable lesson: if you want to make friends, offering them gifts works far better than trying to talk to them.

While we're not exactly sure this is a good lesson to teach your children, if you want to begin to understand the basics of Icelandic, we can highly recommend Snúður skiptir um hlutverk.

**Snúðurskiptirumhlutverk(Snúðurchangesroles)**  
Pierre Probst - Setberg Publishing  
490 ISK. Available at Mál og Menning bookstore,  
Laugavegur 18, 9:00-22:00 weekdays, 10:00-  
22:00 weekends.

by Paul F Nikolov

## The Saga of Guðríður

There are plenty of famous men in the Icelandic Sagas, from future brewer Egill Skallagrímsson to future comic strip cat Grétir the Strong. Yet no one will be naming a beer after Guðríður Þórbjarnadóttir, even though she holds the distinction of giving birth to the first European in North America, Snorri Þórfirnsson, and for leading a life story worthy of a Saga in itself.

Brynya Benediktsdóttir wrote and has been directing and acting in the re-enactment of that story with a one-woman play, The Saga of Guðríður, that's been playing at Skemmtihúsið Theatre for seven years running. The play follows a portion of Grænlandingsaga, the Saga of the Greenlanders. After Leif the Lucky discovered what he called "Vinland" (thought to be an area between Cape Cod and Manhattan),

his stories of the vast fertile land across the sea caught the attention of people such as Þórfirnsson Karlsefni (whose surname means "a man who's a real catch"), who assembled a group of 60 men and five women, including his wife, Guðríður Þórbjarnadóttir, and set sail. The group would spend three years in Vinland, during which time Guðríður acted as a sort of negotiator between the Native Americans and the Vikings, somehow finding time to give birth to Snorri Þórfirnsson between the random killings that often erupted between the Native Americans and the Vikings. In the end, the group returned to Iceland, but Guðríður would later travel to Rome and then back to Iceland again, where she became a nun and lived in a church at Glaumbær, near what is today Varmahlíð, in the north of Iceland.

That Ms. Benediktsdóttir could keep a one-woman play based on such an obscure tale going for seven years is impressive enough; that she could also have the piece performed on tours in the United States, Greenland, Ireland and parts of Europe and have it translated into English, Swedish, French and German just might say something about how capably Benediktsdóttir brings this story to life.

The Saga of Guðríður premieres at the Skemmtihúsið Theatre (Laufásvegur 22), every Thursday at 20:00 and every Sunday at 18:00 thereafter, until the end of August. The price of admission is 2000 ISK.

by Paul F Nikolov

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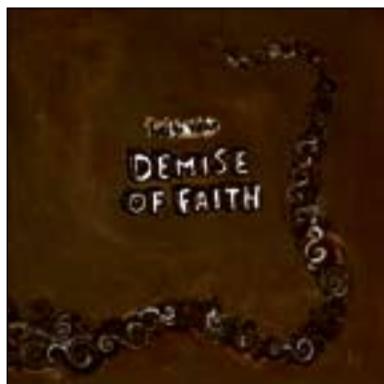
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**Lokbrá***Army of Soundwaves*

Lokbrá is a celebrated local garage-rock band. What makes something garage-rock? Typically with garage-rock you have lyrics that you don't go around quoting, you have somewhat flat vocals, and you have lead guitar work that sounds interesting but that doesn't quite fit, and you have a snare drum that falls a little after the beat. To Lokbrá's credit, they can be proud of not only recording but including in liner notes lines like "Rock n'roll. Bitches and alcohol (pronounced alco-hole)/ rock n'roll, Rock and fucking roll... we had a rockstar party with astronauts and hip hop hos."

Worth 1 beer. Costs 3 beers.

**Helgi Valur**  
*Demise of Faith*

I'm looking at the album photos and listening to the CD, I can't understand how Joe Cocker crawled into the body of what looks like an 18-year-old Icelandic boy. It's not just that this young man has an outstanding range, it's that his phrasing is similar to a fifty-year-old soul singer. The guitar work on the album is minimal, light steel-string acoustic work often strummed without a pick, but it works well to set a mood. All of these things should be celebrated. The curious thing, with such outstanding vocals, musicianship and recording, is that nobody stepped in to take young Helgi's pen away. The rhymes in a line like "But you came along lifted me HIGH, in the SKY I don't know WHY", especially when sung with such passion, damn near make you want to CRY. Perhaps like Joe Cocker or

Jeff Buckley, Helgi Valur might be better suited to singing other people's songs. Even with his considerable talents, I can't see myself making it through repeated listenings of "Can you see it slip AWAY, Do you sense we missed our DAY?"

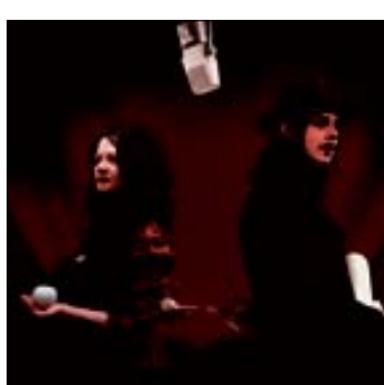
Worth 3 beers, more if you have difficulties with English. Costs 3 beers.

**Hudson Wayne**  
*The Battle of the Bandidos*

This band has been mislabelled the local alt country band; their roots, especially as demonstrated here, are more 80s English and Australian pop slowed down. Most of the nine tracks on this album involve dragging one chord through a slow four count, then repeating: the kind of melancholic monotony that worked well for Nick Cave ballads. Singer, Práinn, also uses a baritone and is not afraid to spend a long time on each word to keep the tone... low. With slow beats and low singing and songs about being annoyed, you can get the quick that this is supposed to make you feel a certain way; in fact, we sat in the office saying "I think I'm supposed to feel like a serious, hungover poet right now." But the lines, while often adequate, don't resonate. And, of course, melodies are out of the question. The guitar work is

at times commendable, especially when, later in the album, notes are played more than once every measure. These are obviously skilled musicians trying to make a mood. We just wish they were making music too.

Worth 3 beers. Costs 3 beers.

**The White Stripes**  
*Get Behind Me Satan*

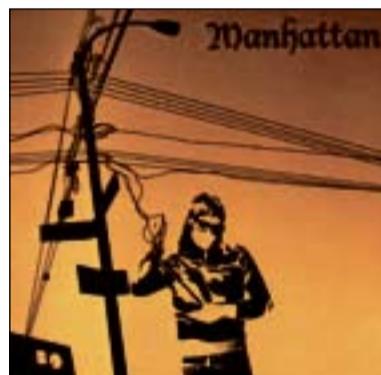
When White Blood Cells came out, everyone was wondering where Jack White got such a rootsy, genuine sound. With Get Behind Me Satan, Jack finally shows his hand. It turns out the garage rock guru is an absurdly knowledgeable music historian, as demonstrated in everything from the title—biblical quote but also a common bluegrass refrain—to tunes like "I'm lonely (but I ain't that lonely yet)", a final song that crosses tin pan alley and juke joint blues. Fans should be warned that the opening single, Blue Orchid, which sounds a lot like tunes from Elephant is not representative of the rest of the album, which is a lot less rock.

As impressive as Jack White's use of sources is, his exclusive focus

By Bart Cameron

**Guide to the ratings system:**

In prison, you deal in cigarettes.  
In Iceland, you deal in beers.  
We don't condone this, we just accept it as fact. One beer=500 ISK at the seedy bars we frequent. That means a mainstream release costs up to 2500 ISK... or \$40. Yes, that much. That's why we do the beer thing.

**Manhattan**  
*Self-titled*

Deep into the year 2005, we were surprised that we were asked to review this 2003 demo. What is more, we were surprised to hear the sounds of 1993 Alice in Chains coming through the speakers when we threw the disc on. An extremely competent album with remarkable drumming, the always minor vocal lines sometimes feel moody but

sometimes feel emotionally truthful. As with any good demo, the lyrics are slightly unintelligible.

Worth 2 beers. Costs 3 beers.

**Pan**  
*Virgins*

These five kids from Hafnarfjörður, who produced this album themselves, present tight hard rock worth respect. While the guitars, often mixing palm muting with harmonics, don't catch you by surprise, the band has the kind of timing that makes you nod your head to even conventional tunes. In addition to simply being well-rehearsed, the band works

around genuinely strong vocals from Halldór Órn Guðnason. How good is his singing? He can make "Pseudo-saviour of gold/ wash me whiter than snow" sound gutty and bold. (Rhyme intentional.) If the band can mix up the rhythms a little, as songs like Dying in Our Prime indicate, they have the ability to do, Pan will be touted as the next Mínus.

Worth 4 beers. Costs 3 beers.

Winner.

**Helvítis Útlendingur**

on love songs and ballads may be getting tiresome, especially when he quotes sources that struggled with oppression, poverty, jail, injustice and crises of faith. Still, he's at the top of his game, and this is an impressive comeback from the sometimes droning Elephant.

Worth 4 beers. Costs 4 beers.





## Concert Reviews

**Friday**

May 27th

Sirkus

### Nortón & Dáðadrengir



Icelandic hip-hopsters Dáðadrengir know that arrogance is one of the key elements of rock-stardom. Frontman Kalli is so full of himself that he makes you feel sorry for the other guys in the band. But that's one of Dáðadrengir's charismatic characteristics. Despite a power failure, distasteful remarks on homosexuals and an amateurish performance of the first couple of songs, Dáðadrengir kicked ass in the latter half of the show. New songs "Tokyo Vendetta" and "X" were among the highlights and an album is definitely something to look forward to.



Blue-eyed funk party band Nortón did their best to entertain a crowd of stunned revellers using the powers of short shorts, hand waving, and honest downbeats, but they soon fell victim to power failures. Immediately after, someone in the crowd pulled a red card on seeing too much thigh during the bounce steps of Nortón frontman Atli Bollason. Still, nothing could stop the funk, and they returned and battled through more power outages than seen in even the most harrowing episode of MASH. As a crowd member put it, Nortón "put on a hell of a show – while it lasted."

**Saturday**

May 28th

BadTaste Gallery

### Nina Nastasia & Huun-Huur-Tu



American singer and songwriter Nina Nastasia entertained an unusually mixed crowd at the Bad Taste Record Shop to kick off this venue of the Grapevine Bad Taste Summer Concert Series. Aided by throat singers Huun-Huur-Tu, and her own beautiful guitar plucking, she presented a part powerhouse part fragile performance in the beautifully eerie category. The performance was long enough for you to get to know what Nina's songs are all about and exactly short enough to keep the formula from growing tired. At the end of the show Huun-Huur-Tu performed one song by themselves. On their own they sounded much lighter and happier than when supporting the melancholic crooning of Nina, making it hard not to be touched by their unusual instrumentation and unusual singing style. A true experience.

**Thursday**

June 2nd

Sirkus

### Big Kahuna & Nilfisk



Big Kahuna didn't exactly take the stage, and this only added to the charm. This group of four 16-year-old progressive rockers eased slowly into their remarkably fresh set, breaking into open smiles by their third number. Applause continued to build, and by the end of their set most in the crowd were sure they'd seen a fresh take on the Franz Ferdinand style, and the most promising young band in town.



A comparatively veteran group of 20 year olds, Nilfisk, followed with a mask of feedback and a harder-edged performance. Nilfisk presented noisy power pop and made a point of demonstrating just how much groove they had going on. They definitely had the spirit of rock, if they weren't as fresh as they could have been.

# Grapevine Bad Taste Summer Concert Series

June 10 - June 23



**Friday**  
June 10th, 5pm

BadTaste Gallery

**Saturday**  
June 11th, 3pm

BadTaste Gallery

**Jagúar**

When Jagúar started playing funk music – really 1977 funk music – a lot of people thought they were crazy. But that was years ago, and they still pack every venue they play and have had a huge influence by introducing this kind of music to both DJs and bands alike. Latest album Hello Everybody was their best to date, and now they're putting out a 12" in Europe. Definitely recommended.

**Skátar & The Foghorns**



Skátar (Scouts) have a reputation for dressing up funny and giving their songs funny names, like "Halldór Ásgírsson" (the name of Iceland's prime minister) and putting them on funny named CDs, like last years World Peace in Chile: What Can Be Changed, Improved & Fixed. However, their music isn't that funny: a really loud post-punk assault that makes people sweat.

**Skátar**

**Foghorns**

The Foghorns have been around for a long time, originally cutting records in the United States but relocating to Reykjavík a couple of years ago. The band now has a locally-released album under its belt, where clever lyrics play a big part and the music pays respect to American folk music, bluegrass and country.

**RASS**

Rass is considered by many to be the only punk band in Iceland truly worthy of being called punk. Frontman Óttarr Proppé (formerly of legendary metal-band Ham) shouts political propaganda while big guitar riffs rip their way through the amps. This is however not done without a unique sense of humour, perhaps best demonstrated in the bands name which means arse.

**Thursday**  
June 16th, 9pm

Sirkus

**RASS**

**Bob**

If Sonic Youth ever had a baby they'd name it Bob. These guys recognize the importance of feedback and loud guitars, and they know audible melodies are only for wimps. Being known for performing a new song every single gig, Bob are definitely one of the most adventurous groups in town.

**Coral**

When British band The Coral suddenly became a household name, Icelandic rockers Coral weren't sure whether they should change their name or keep on rocking, already having established a faithful group of followers. Respect them for deciding not to and to continue performing their explosive kind of progressive rock; a point of reference maybe being Muse.

**Thursday**  
June 16th, 10pm

Bar 11

**Bob & Coral**

Heart-breaking debut album I Believe In This put Þórir in the front of other Icelandic troubadours. He seems to get better with every show he plays, which of course means that this will be his best performance yet and a guaranteed spiritual cleansing for those feeling guilty since the night before.

**Saturday**  
June 18th, 3pm

BadTaste Gallery

**þórir**

**Future Future**

Future Future are the ashes of what once used to be known as one of Iceland's best hardcore bands, Snafu. With Future Future we see them leaning in a more proggy and spaced out direction reminiscent of the Mars Volta. EP 'something' was a small but certain success. Maybe too heavy for some, but this band is something to keep an eye on.

**Thursday**  
June 23rd, 9pm

Bar 11

**Future Future**

The Grapevine and Bad Taste introduce the Grapevine Bad Taste Summer Concert Series

With the goal of providing legitimate venues and promotion for everyone involved in the vibrant and diverse local music scene, The Reykjavík Grapevine is proud to announce the Grapevine Bad Taste Summer Concert Series.

Starting May 27 and running until September 9, the Reykjavík Grapevine along with Bad Taste Gallery and Thule, the world famous beer by Vífilfell Brewery, will put on three concerts a week at Sirkus bar and at the Bad Taste Gallery.

The shows will feature local and international bands. Every performance will be reviewed, though the Grapevine promises to maintain its current standards: great performances will be acknowledged; lacklustre performances will be evaluated as such.

All Icelandic bands are invited to contact us and schedule a performance.

Please email atli@grapevine.is or call 847-9290.



Bad Taste Gallery (Smekkleysa gallery),  
Laugavegur 59, 101 Reykjavík.  
Phone: 534 3730

Bar 11,  
Laugavegur 11, 101 Reykjavík  
Phone: 511-1118



# MUSIC AND NIGHTLIFE

## LISTINGS

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.

### FRIDAY

JUNE 10

Apparat Organ Quartet & Langhorns from Sweden

Grand Rokk

Ari & Gunní between 22 and 01, then DJ Johnny takes over

Hressó

Blues-night: Mike Pollock & Siggi Sig Café Rosenberg

DJ Atli skemmtanalögga & Áki Pain Pravda Club

DJ Árni Már from Kiss FM Glaumbar

DJ Brynjar Már & DJ 3000 from midnight with the hottest dance and R&B music Sólón

DJ Maggi Legó

Sirkus

Friskó to 23:00, followed by Paul Oscar's disco party

Prikið

Trobadors Geiri Sæm & Tryggvi Ari Ógri

Tveir á milli strengja & Spilafíklarnir Celtic Cross

Skátar & The Foghorns

Smekkleysa plötubúð

### SATURDAY

JUNE 11

Blues-night: Mike Pollock & Siggi Sig Café Rosenberg

DJ Atli skemmtanalögga & Áki Pain Pravda Club

June 10, at Grand Rokk

### APPARAT ORGAN QUARTET & LANGHORSE

The band that made Iceland Airwaves cool, Apparat Organ Quartet are the godfathers of the local independent scene. They play rarely, but these four guys know how to rock antiquated equipment. Playing with Swedish surf rock band Langhorns, they win our pick over usual picks Paul Oscar and Skátar.

DJ Árni Már from Kiss FM Glaumbar

DJ Brynjar Már & DJ 3000 from midnight with the hottest dance and R&B music Sólón

DJ Gísli Galdur

Sirkus

DJ twins Erna & Ellen

Prikið

FM Party and concert in the garden from 8 pm to midnight. DJ Johnny after 12 Hressó

Memorial concert of Danish jazz player Niels-Henning. Players include drummer Einar Valur Scheving, violinist Finn Ziegler and pianist Oliver Antunes, Árni Scheving (vibes), Gunnar Hrafsson (bass), Björn Thoroddsen (guitar). Tickets sold at 12 Tónar Hôtel Nordica

Scarfe from France

Grand Rokk

Trobadors Geiri Sæm & Tryggvi

Ari Ógri

Tveir á milli strengja & Spilafíklarnir

Celtic Cross

Skátar & The Foghorns

Smekkleysa plötubúð

Fortune-teller Vala

Prikið

Jagúar & DJ Ingvar Smekkleysa Plötubúð

Trabant along with Swedish band Langhorns. Admission 800 ISK NASA

Jagúar & DJ Yngvi Smekkleysa Plötubúð

### SUNDAY

JUNE 12

Hangover DJs from Hannatt crew

Prikið

Jass Quartet Ziegler/Finn celebrates new album. Tickets available at 12 Tónar Bjartir Dagar, Hafnarfirði

### MONDAY

JUNE 13

Fortune-teller Vala

Prikið

### WEDNESDAY

JUNE 15

F.R.O.G. with Gunnar Bjarni from Jet Black Joe between 21 and 22 before DJ Kári takes over

Prikið

Palli from Maus DJs  
Prikið

### THURSDAY

JUNE 16

Bob & Coral Bar 11

Corona night! Sing Star contest hosted by Franz from Ensími and Kristó from Lights on the Highway aka Frizkó. They'll play unplugged at 23:00 until DJ Magg兹 takes over

Glaumbar

DJ Jón Gestur and Áki Pain Pravda Club

Live Music: Magni & Vignir play the party songs on the upper floor and DJ Tommi White & DJ Andrés play house and lounge music downstairs

Sólón

Punk-band Rass & DJ KGB

Sirkus

Reggae band Hjálmar supported by troubador Helgi Valur

Hressó

Troubador Garðar Garðarsson

Celtic Cross

Troubador Garðar Garðarsson

Enchanting DJ Gísli Galdur

Prikið

Lokbrá Grand Rokk

Troubador Garðar Garðarsson

Celtic Cross

Troubador Sváfnir Sigurðsson

Cafe Rósenberg

Úþplplaylive. Happy hour between 21 and 22

Prikið

British super DJ Nick Warren. Advance tickets sold at record-shop Þruman NASA

### FRIDAY

JUNE 17

DJ Jón Gestur & Áki Pain

Pravda Club

DJ Brynjar Már & DJ 3000 from midnight with the hottest dance and R&B music

Sólón

DJ Jón Atli

Sirkus

Friskó, DJ Jóði & Addi drummer

Prikið

Icelandic National Day and DJ Stján drives people crazy into the night

Glaumbar

RASS celebrate new album

Grand Rokk

Troubador Garðar Garðarsson

June 16, at Sirkus

### RASS & DJ KGB

Celtic Cross

Troubador Helgi Valur along with VAX

Hressó

Troubadors Acoustic

Ari Ógri

Papar. Admission 1000 ISK

NASA

### SATURDAY

JUNE 18

Atari between 22 and 01, then DJ Heiðar Austmann

Hressó

DespitethehangoversDJStjánillrockthe house 'till morning

Glaumbar

DJ Jón Gestur & Áki Pain

Pravda Club

DJ Árni Sveins

Sirkus

DJ Brynjar Már & DJ 3000 from midnight with the hottest dance and R&B music

Sólón

Enchanting DJ Gísli Galdur

Prikið

Lokbrá

Grand Rokk

Troubador Garðar Garðarsson

Celtic Cross

Troubador Sváfnir Sigurðsson

Cafe Rósenberg



Troubadors Acoustic  
Ari í Ógri  
Þórir  
Smekkleysa Plötubúð

## SUNDAY

JUNE 19

Hannatt crew  
Prikið

## MONDAY

JUNE 20

Fortune-teller Vala  
Prikið

## TUESDAY

JUNE 21

Palli from Maus  
Prikið

## WEDNESDAY

JUNE 22

Cutie-boy Benni DJs  
Prikið

US Hip Hop bands Sole, Pedestrian &  
Telephine Jim Jesus  
Grand Rokk

## THURSDAY

JUNE 23

Band Eg performs  
Grand Rokk

Bob Dylan tribute band  
Cafe Rösenberg

DJ Árni E  
Sirkus

DJ Maggi Legóplus happy hour between 21  
and 22  
Prikið

Future Future & Ókind  
Bar 11

Live Music: Magni & Vignir play the party  
songs on the upper floor and DJ Tommi  
White & DJ Andrés play house and lounge  
music downstairs  
Sólon

Troubador Turner from 10 pm  
Hressó



June 10 & 11

## MOTU Festival

Severed Crotch. Fighting Shit. Hard to believe that even with these names, the metal and hardcore scene here in Iceland is often overlooked. What do they have to do to get your attention/ validation, huh mom and dad? Why don't you love me? Why? I know I'm the reason you got the divorce!!! Sorry. Seriously, bands from around the world, possibly further away than that, are coming to participate in the second annual Masters of the Universe Festival with some of the most genuine and talented musicians in the country. Discount them to your PERIL. At Grand Rokk June 10, Gamla Sjónvarphusíð June 11. More info at [www.motu-fest.org](http://www.motu-fest.org).

## Live Music Review



"Sveitaball" are one place where you can see the whole community getting together.

TOUCH  
Sveitaball, May 28,  
Þinghús Bar and Grill,  
Hvammstangi

"I guess people really need to unwind. It's good to have a sveitaball like this once a summer to let off steam," my friend tells me just after we have helped a young woman get first aid from a bite to her stomach.

If you think Icelandic nightlife begins and ends in 101 Reykjavík, you're missing a celebrated and notorious section of the local culture. As one local told us, "Sveitaball" (country balls) are one place where you can see the whole community getting together. You go out to a bar in Reykjavík or even Akureyri and you'll see a room full of people who look the same."

She was quite right. The range of participants at a midsummer sveitaball's in Iceland's countryside, where nobody has any plans but to have fun until the sun... continues to shine, is remarkable. The result of three generations dancing, drinking and making merry together is surreal.

We had stopped by the Þinghús Bar and Grill, which also

serves as a guesthouse, to see the Reykjavík band Touch perform original pop music. Instead we found ourselves participating in sing-alongs of Borg Min Borg and 500 Miles until four in the morning. Musically, the experience was unremarkable, except in that lead-singer of Touch Böddi was able to belt out numbers for four straight hours while keeping enough energy to keep a passerby and blend a range of amusing and preposterous curses into coversongs.

Regarding the letting off of steam: as it turned out, this was the sixth sveitaball in as many weeks that Þinghús had hosted. We're guessing the party will continue all summer.

by Bart Cameron

April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
9:00	9:00	9:00	9:00	9:00	9:00	
13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00
		17:00	17:00	17:00		

Elding Whale Watching, Reykjavík, Iceland  
Tel: (+354) 666 3685, Fax: (+354) 654 7420  
Info@elding.is, [www.elding.is](http://www.elding.is)

# Live Music Review

Gundi



Huun-Huur-Tu and Nina Nastasia played most of the songs together with excellent results.

## HUUN-HUUR-TU AND NINA NASTASIA May 28, Smekkleysa

It's not too common to attend a concert which has true crossover potential when it comes to age and social groups. Still, a recent sunny Saturday afternoon youngsters and hipsters, mothers and fathers gathered in the Bad Taste record shop to listen to American singer and songwriter Nina Nastasia perform, and I think it's safe to say the excitement was even greater to hear the throat-singing group Huun-Huur-Tu give an example of their otherworldly sound.

Nina came on stage first. While the crowd was still chatting she started plucking her guitar strings carefully, creating a repetitious but intriguing sound. The crowd gradually went silent and opened up its ears. Nina opened up her mouth and sang in a voice that sounded fragile and powerful at the same time. Her lyrics, depicting lost love and the ups and down of everyday life are compact and bold,

earning generous applause at the end of her first number.

In her second song Huun-Huur-Tu joined in. Four men from the remote district of Tuva, just outside Mongolia, they looked ancient. Their peculiar string instruments and especially the amazing sounds coming from their throats added a new and eerie dimension to Nina's formula of repetitious guitar lines and melancholy crooning.

Nina and Huun-Huur-Tu played most of the songs together with excellent results, even though the aforementioned formula had begun to wear out a little towards the end of the show. A few of the tunes simply didn't have enough melodic weight.

by Atli Bollason

place



**PRAVDA**  
CLUB / SPA

# MOVIES AND THEATRE

## Movie Reviews



### CRASH

#### Can't We All Just Get Along?

The whites hate the blacks. The blacks hate the Hispanics. The Hispanics hate the Asians. And everyone seems to hate the Arabs, who are really Persian. Welcome to LA, or, at least, filmmaker Paul Haggis' version of the city of Angels, which he portrays as a melting pot of racial hatred and intolerance in *Crash*, his critically-acclaimed directorial debut.

*Crash* follows an ensemble cast of troubled characters all deeply scarred by racial hatred. These characters, whose lives intersect in a series of random events, are forced to confront their vile prejudices when tragedy strikes.

Critics will have you believe that *Crash* is one of those "important" films, a movie so vital to the national dialogue that talented actors work for scale just to be part of the project. Unfortunately, like an annoying Evangelical who won't stop ringing your doorbell, the film proselytizes so loudly the audience, instead of a moving story, gets Rodney King's trite plea: "Can't we all just get along?" The answer is a resounding no.

*Crash* certainly has stars. But not all the stars align. Sandra Bullock, who plays a lonely housewife, proves beyond a shadow of a doubt how skilled she is as a comedic actor. Brendan Fraser's (Bullock's district attorney husband) stilted performance makes his Encino Man look worthy of a golden statue.

Thankfully, there's Matt Dillon, Don Cheadle and Larenz Tate. Dillon plays a racist cop with such authenticity that he conjures up images of the corrupt police officer Mark Fughman who gained notoriety during the OJ Simpson trial. The scenes between Cheadle (a police detective), and his heroin-addicted mother (Beverly Todd), give you the sudden itch to call up your own mother and tell her you love her. And the underused Larenz Tate (a friendly carjacker) oozes with so much charisma you'll leave the theatre and head straight to the video store to rent the overlooked *Menace II Society*. It's these weighty performances (Terrence Howard and the beautiful Thandie Newton are equally impressive) that keep *Crash* from imploding from the overwritten dialogue and an overly dramatic soundtrack that lets you know exactly when to be sad, outraged, and anxious.

But the reason *Crash* has become a critic's darling is because the small film is successful in raising the uncomfortable truth that Haggis, who was the screenwriter of *Million Dollar Baby*, seems to understand all too well: these racist characters who are really honourable people struggling through difficult circumstances remind us of ourselves.

by Edward Weinman



#### We're Not Upset About: Mr. and Mrs. Smith

One would assume that a feature-length film about the joys of domestic violence would draw our ire. Just as one would assume that a movie with a \$100 million budget that has received more press coverage than any vote by the UN, more than any non-film-related cultural event, just for the private lives of its actors would annoy us simply in its existence. But we're happy about the absurdity of this movie's coverage.

In the many hundreds of stories about Brad and Angelina, how the 29-year-old vixen stole the leading man's heart, we keep on seeing in passing that Angelina Jolie does an enormous amount of charity work, with "charity work" flipped about as though it

were as vain as breast augmentation.

That a 29-year-old bombshell actress devotes her time and assets to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees is remarkable. That nobody believes her when she says this is more important than a movie with Brad Pitt, an outstandingly lame wardrobe and dialogue that will have you sharpening your toothbrush to shiv yourself in the ear-- that is truly absurd.

To donate to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, go to [www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch). To understand the brutal double standards and harsh stupidity of the world, type Angelina Jolie into Google.



Energize at  
BLUE LAGOON  
– Geothermal Spa

In-water spa treatments  
and massage

### A Day to Remember

A visit to BLUE LAGOON – Geothermal Spa is energizing for both body and mind. In addition to enjoying the lagoon's warm geothermal seawater, the following BLUE LAGOON – Geothermal Spa options await you: silica mud mask, steam baths, sauna, waterfall, in-water spa treatments and massage.

Enjoy a meal at our restaurant while enjoying a view of the lagoon. The tempting à la carte menu includes a selection of international courses based on fresh Icelandic ingredients.

Remember to visit our shop and bring home BLUE LAGOON skin care products, enabling you to have a spa experience at home.

Visit [www.bluelagoon.com](http://www.bluelagoon.com).  
Call 420 8832 to pre-book spa treatment,  
massage and a table at the restaurant.



Restaurant



Skin Care



BLUE LAGOON – Geothermal Spa is open daily year round.

## Outside Reykjavík

### Húsavík



**Museums**

*in the Old Town  
of Akureyri*

Visit Skjálfandi · Matís Jónasson -  
www.hausavik.is

**Njálsdalur · Jón Sigurðsson Memorial  
Museum, dedicated to the writer and  
Jesuit priest who had his books  
translated into around 40 languages.**

**Akureyri Museum. The Industry  
Museum, or just take a stroll through  
the history of old Akureyri.**

For further information visit [www.akureyri.is/english](http://www.akureyri.is/english)

## Come for the Whales; Stay... As Long As You Can

Whenever you talk whale watching in Iceland, you hear the stories about Húsavík. It is not atypical to come across the blue whale on the tours there, and their hit rate of spotting a whale 99% of the time is oft-quoted. As people genuinely interested in the most massive animals on the planet, we had been planning a trip to Gentle Giants and Húsavík for months.

The first thing we should report is this: we didn't see whales. An unusual cold front entered the harbour and has had a curious affect on the local whale population—by the time this goes to print, the front will most likely have passed, and the whales will once again be feeding in the Skálafandi harbour.

There are two whale-watching companies in Húsavík, and we've heard good things about both, but we were particularly impressed with Gentle Giants. For one thing, our captain, Jón, didn't panic when we didn't see whales. A Simpsons-style sea captain, he explained the weather problem, and then guided us past thousands of puffins and sea birds. In fact, seeing those absurd birds crash out of the waves and circle toward their cliffs would have been worth the trip on its own. Add to that the fact the Húsavík and its surrounding area, with a quaint town against somehow docile cliffs motif, make for some great scenery.

Three hours at sea would have been fine. But our captain had other ideas. After briefly making one

more attempt to track down some dolphins, he pocketed his pipe and reached for fishing poles.

"You guys like sport fishing?" he said, handing us each a rod, then promptly emasculating us by showing us how to hold them.

As it turned out, all you need to know how to do when fishing in Húsavík is hold on to the pole.

In fifteen minutes, we had a tub of five cod, and two pollocks. In addition, we had enjoyed the truly surreal experience of watching Captain Jón yank a small cod from a line, look it in the eye, spit in its mouth, and throw it back in the water. His eventual explanation was that he was telling the cod not to tell his friends about us, which made sense.

With a massive take of fish, we headed back to the harbour feeling somewhat productive, if embarrassed at the size of our take with so little effort. The odd thing about cod, they are handsome and tasty, but they are suicidal. They tended to dig into the hooks as soon as they hit the water, and their approach to finding out they were being reeled in was in the I've-had-a-good-run school of thought.

### The Town

From the boat we were told that our cod would be prepared at the local Salka restaurant. We would have thirty minutes to wait for our suicidal fish to hit the plate, so we made a run for the Húsavík Whale

Museum.

I have visited with the creator of the Húsavík Whale Museum, Ásbjörn Björgvinsson, a Time Magazine 2003 Hero, a few times. His creativity, his use of local resources, and his ability to educate and capture the imagination is remarkable. On this visit, in addition to two new whale skeletons, and a gorgeous new display on whale evolution, I couldn't help noting other small environmentally-friendly ideas he came up with, for example the idea of using broken wine bottles in a frame as a kind of stained glass display.

On the topic of cetacea, or whales, you can learn about the local history with whales going back more than 100 years, about strandings, and about whale hunting. On this subject, Björgvinsson can't help himself. Even though we are only stopping by to see the new attractions, he reminds us how

inconceivable Iceland's whaling policy is. "The government is subsidizing the whaling industry, while the whale watching industry, which makes money and is hurt by whaling, gets nothing," he points out, among many other poignant complaints.

As an activist, Björgvinsson is tireless and obviously deserved his Time mention. Whatever your thoughts on whaling, the museum is an outstanding public service.

After too short a visit at the Húsavík Whale Museum, we head off to the oldest structure in town, the Salka restaurant. I already knew that Salka was a respected restaurant that serves the full range of cuisine, from lobster and fresh cod to pizza, and that it gets visits from Akureyri on a regular visit. But I had never done the restaurant the service of sampling the local cod. Having done that, having tasted cod thirty minutes after it was caught prepared

in a light saffron sauce, I can say that I will never eat anything but that meal at Salka.

My travelling companion openly stated what we have always been afraid to say in Iceland, "I didn't know cod had any taste before this."

Yes, Americans and Brits have been evil in making fish sticks out of these animals. When not overdone or over-seasoned, these swimming buffets taste like a light, giant scallop.

#### The Sites

Our friends at Kaldbaks-kot cottages, a group of farmhouses where we kept our home base during our Húsavík visit, gave us a map of sites we had to get to. Our visit at Kaldbaks-kot was so nice, complete with hot tub looking over a 12:30 am sunset, that we wanted to follow all their advice.

Fleeing Húsavík, we couldn't help feeling guilty about one line of

dialogue from our visit, "You have to go to the Phalloglological Museum. It is the only one in the world, you know."

Yes, we would go.

"I've been there. Great stuff, great stuff," I said, having written about Sigurður Hjartansson and his remarkable collection of penises before.

As it turned out, though, driving past the enormous phallus that greets visitors to the museum, we just couldn't convince ourselves to go in.

"Just tell people there's a big collection of schlongs. They'll get the idea," my friend said.

Gentle Giants  
Husavík, 464-1500,  
[www.gentlegiants.is](http://www.gentlegiants.is)

Restaurant Salka  
Garðarsbraut, Husavík,  
464-2551.

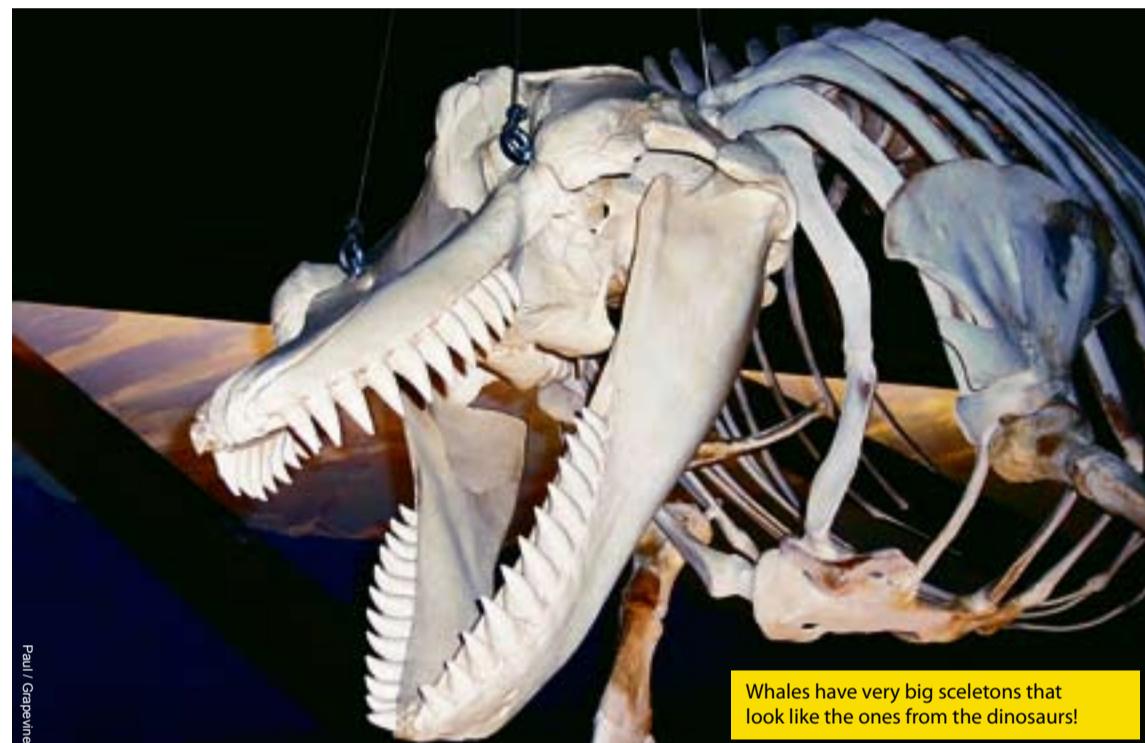
Husavík Whale Museum  
464-2520, [www.icewhale.is](http://www.icewhale.is)

Kaldbaks-kot Cottages and  
Guesthouses Husavík,  
892-1744, [www.cottages.is](http://www.cottages.is)

Icelandic Phalloglological Museum  
566-8668, [www.phallus.is](http://www.phallus.is)

Suzuki jeep used in travels  
provided by Cheap Jeeps,  
[www.geysir.is](http://www.geysir.is). Phone: 893-  
4455, Njarðvík. There will be  
an extended discussion on driving  
Iceland in the next issue.

By Bart Cameron



Whales have very big skeletons that look like the ones from the dinosaurs!

Paul / Grapevine



Icelandic Phalloglological Museum.  
Yes, that means penis.

Paul / Grapevine

## The Art of meeting People in Reykjavík

What is the difference between Reykjavík and cities such as Edinburgh, Oslo or Hamburg? The main difference between Reykjavík and other European cities is geothermal water. Reykjavík is heated with thermal water, a natural resource that causes virtually no pollution.

One of the many uses of geothermal water is bathing. Nowhere else in the world are there as many pools and baths per capita as in Reykjavík, and no other nation frequents swimming pools as often as the Icelanders.

Reykjavík's Thermal Pools and Baths have an extremely positive effect on overall wellness, the main reason why so many residents visit them regularly. Reykjavíkars also enjoy going to the thermal pools to meet people and discuss matters of the day, a custom they have in common with the ancient Romans. This social activity mostly takes place in the hotpots: small circular pools of thermal water kept at temperatures ranging from 37°C - 42°C (98°F - 111°F).

Water in the hotpots has a unique natural ability to transform all who sit in it into philosophers – which is why visiting hotpots at the Thermal Pools is a great way to meet Reykjavíkars. Not long after you sit in one of these hotpots, someone will address you in Icelandic. When you explain that you are here on a visit, an interesting conversation may well begin about anything between heaven and earth. And if you need reliable information about something in the city, for example advice about a good eatery or what's "hot" at the moment, a hotspot chat is probably the best and most dependable source of information.

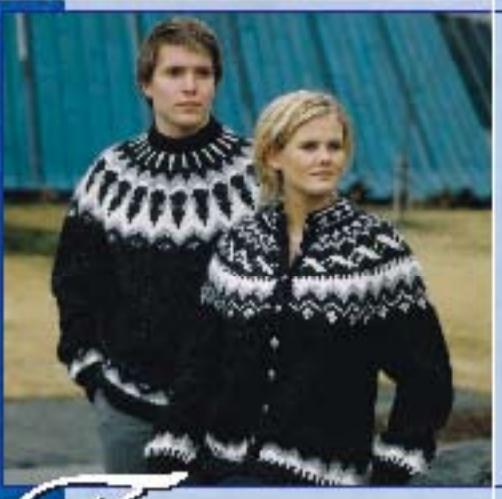
You haven't really been to Reykjavík until you have visited a Thermal Pool and Bath, and sat back in a hotspot filled with wellness water and interesting people.



Reykjavík's thermal swimming pools and baths – Sources of health, fitness and well-being.

BOB STREETER

**B**uy directly  
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## Hvítá River

Outside Reykjavík



## Look at Me, I'm Rugged

Hvítá is not the first river you'd think of putting a boat on. An extremely powerful glacial river, if you've gone to the awe-inspiring waterfall Gullfoss, you recognize the name. So it is surprising that Arctic Rafting runs a moderate tour, at a rating of about 2.3 on a 5 scale, down the river only two hours from Reykjavík.

The Grapevine filled a van with people who hadn't left the city all year, and headed out for a day of rafting and barbequing at the Arctic Rafting headquarters near Laugarvatn. While the company runs individual packages, the advantages to a group tour are remarkable. For starters, for glacial river rafting you must don a large amount of gear, including wet suit pants, booties and gloves, a dry suit top and helmet. Strangely enough, watching your friends dress like action figures... or at least active figures, makes for genuine entertainment.

As for the rafting itself, the key to that experience is the equipment and the guides. Having done a good amount of non-Arctic white water rafting, I was surprised at how organized and all-around competent the staff was at Arctic Rafting. Basic things like teaching people in the boat to row together

and preparing them for the excursion were handled well. As we rode down Hvítá, in a ride not at all dissimilar to a gentle roller coaster, the guides easily put the raft in the ideal position. In a boat in which two people had rafted before, and possibly six people would describe themselves as not interested in things athletic, we managed to hit every rapids in the sweet spot.

Toward the end of the ride, we were given a special surprise: we were shown a large rock and told it was the jump rock. As our guide went on to explain, there has never been an injury on the Arctic Rafting tours, but there have been many injuries jumping from the rock into the glacial river 40 feet below.

From the jumping rock, we continued down the river, though those dumb enough to leap into a glacial river suffered the consequences—it was a chilly day

anyway, and glacial rivers tend to make a person cold. Still, nobody got cold enough to do any permanent damage, and, had the air temperature been above five degrees, as it is most of the year, we all would have been perfectly comfortable.

Base camp had a sizeable kitchen and barbecue area. If you forgot beer, chocolate or coffee, the staff is happy to help you out. If you bring your own, they're happy to join you. To their immense credit, they are able to smile and respond to rafting anecdotes and jokes as though they've heard them for the first time, a remarkable skill.

By Bart Cameron

Arctic Rafting,  
near Laugarvatn, 898-0410,  
information at [www.activity.is](http://www.activity.is).



# Faxafloi Bay



## Whale Watching in Faxaflói Bay

The Grapevine sent two young foreign residents of Reykjavík on a whale-watching tour of Faxaflói Bay.

I think you know the question we have to ask.

The first thing to report is that there were whales. There was even a juvenile humpback whale, a rare sight and something that had the captain extremely excited. Almost immediately after we saw this juvenile humpback whale, we came across a pair of minke whales, and the captain pointed out that he thought the whales were dating. We thought this was odd.

The captain said the minke whales were dating?

No, he said the humpback and the minke were on their way to a date. I don't know how the guy with the microphone determined this, that the whales from different species were dating, but I thought it was an interesting idea, nonetheless.

Any other surprises?

What surprised us the most was the whale breath. I've seen whales in Boston and in Connecticut, but I've never smelled whale breath. The captain claimed the odour was unique. That it was essentially

shit. But I would say it was more fishy. Like marine life and foecal matter. And it was worse with the humpback, because the humpback has a blowhole.

Minke whales don't blow, but humpbacks definitely blow.

So what's the total count on whales?

Three total. But a few we saw more than once. We really followed them around. Almost harassed, but I suppose that's a necessary evil.

Other animals? Other than whales?

At the beginning of the trip, we went by Puffin Island, and I was surprised at how close we came, and at how many birds we saw taking off. They look so awkward when they're trying to fly. Then we came upon the whales.

Capable crew?

The crew definitely seemed to know what they were doing, as far as one could tell. I mean, their ability to view the species and size of the whale was remarkable. That's all you can ask, I think.

The boat also had hot whale punch, which included hot chocolate, rum and tea. But we debated the potential flavour combination and decided that couldn't work out well.

So you'd recommend this, whale watching?

Yes, definitely. I think, even though it's a little expensive, people should definitely take a boat ride, even without the whales, from Reykjavík harbour. I think it's an important part of the city. When you see the seaweed, you think how weird it is. Considering how important fishing is here, it's a part of Reykjavík that most tourists don't pay attention to, and if you take a whale watching trip you're forced to come in contact with it.

My one problem with whale watching is that there isn't that much exercise. It feels like you should get a workout doing this. Maybe if there were some way to wrestle with the whales or something.

Maybe whaling?

Yeah.

As told to Bart Cameron by Harris Schaer and Kajsa Anderson

Whale-watching trip courtesy of Elding Whale Watching, The Old Harbour, 101 Reykjavík, 555-3565, [www.elding.is](http://www.elding.is)



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The author by himself on the way to Bridge of Orchy

## Camaraderie on a 95-mile Pub Crawl: Walking Scotland's West Highland Way

Glasgow --- "We have come over heath and rock and river and bog to what in England would be called a horrid place," wrote the poet John Keats in the summer of 1818, during a trek with his friend Charles Brown into the Scottish Highlands. "We have now walked 114 miles, and are merely a little tired in the thighs and a little blistered."

Not bad for a five-foot tall, 19th century man who never knew the luxuries of Gortex and bug repellent and had only just recovered from a mysterious illness (rumoured to be venereal disease).

Keats drew his strength from this jaw-dropping Scottish scenery, which helped him transcend the limitations of what he called his "stature." The landscapes, he wrote, "make one forget the divisions of life; age, youth, poverty and riches."

But let's forget Keats who, after contracting a cold in Scotland that turned into acute tonsillitis, was finished off by tuberculosis three years later in Rome.

Unlike certain poets and wayfarers, four days into my six-day tramp along the West Highland Way --- Scotland's first and most popular long-distance hiking trail --- every step of "the Way" I was reminded of my puny stature and life's painful divisions.

Take day four. Clive and Jim were two 70-somethings I overtook while trudging through the deluge of day three. But during the next day's 19-mile stage, they passed me somewhere between Crianlarich and Tyndrum, arriving a good hour before me at Bridge of Orchy.

Had my huge backpack not been transported by car each day to my designated hostel or B&B, I might not have felt so bad. That's because Clive and Jim had hauled all their gear, on their backs, the entire 95 miles.

They were still chipper when I finally had the nerve to introduce myself that evening in the hotel bar.

"Most retired people are just counting their days till the end," said the white-bearded, sprite-eyed and luxuriously-tanned Clive. The Brit

once climbed part of Everest and most of the Appalachian Trail. "All you need to do is keep fit."

"Cheers," said Jim. They smiled at me across the table, and raised their glasses.

Cheers. I smiled, but it felt more like a wince. I took a deep cold gulp, imagining their disgust at this traveler nearly half their age taking the easy way out. Not that the West Highland Way is a competitive activity. But, like a swelling blister, a rivalry festered, irrationally, inside me. In the shadow of these men, I felt like a charlatan.

After two pints, I stumbled back to the West Highland Way Sleeper, my railway station hostel. Rising steeply from the glen like a squat volcano, Beinn Dorain, a 3,529-foot "munro" (or peak over 3,000 feet) dominated the valley, soaking up the dregs of the disappearing sun at 10 pm. I felt even smaller.

In the hostel's kitchen, a trio of Scottish teens were playing chess. They seemed none the worse for wear after their day-long hike. I inhaled my haggis-in-a-can and, joints aching and soles of my feet throbbing, entered the bunkhouse.

Collapsing into my bed, I remembered I had a 21-mile tramp the next day.

Where'd You Start Today? Everyone in Scotland seems to have walked parts of the West Highland Way, which officially begins at a granite obelisk in a town called Milngavie, 20-minutes by train outside of Glasgow.

While marching along, you can jabber for hours beside total strangers, exchanging stories, discussing homelands, politics, customs and beer. "Where'd you start today?" and "Where are you headed tonight?" are excellent icebreakers.

I hiked solo, but I was rarely alone. On day two, I marched beside a man out walking his dog in the Garadhan Forest. Day three, in an old-growth oak grove beside Loch Lomond, I passed a couple who told me they'd done "the Way"

seven years ago. "Today," the man said from under the hood of his rain slicker, "we're just out stretching our legs."

That serious walkers intersect with the rhythms of local residents is one reason why the Way is one of the world's best multi-day treks. It's also adaptable to the hiker's desire for creature comforts and unpredictable level of stamina. You can sleep in rooms with hot meals and showers, or pitch a tent and cook by the campfire. You can race through in six days (as I did) or extend the trip over seven, eight or even nine days (as many I met had wisely done). You can go alone or with a guided group.

I had selected the Way because the track is relatively flat. I figured the primary difficulty would be in motivating my tender feet and creaky knees to keep up a steady pace for six to ten hours, every day, for a week. The well-marked trail seemed doable for a novice like myself.

Besides, it traverses some of the Highlands' most scenic glens, as well as skirting Britain's largest lake, Loch Lomond, and Ben Nevis, its tallest mountain. With its incessantly varied vegetation and geology, this swath of west central Scotland does, as Keats said, "live in the eye." In late May, I would cross carpets of wild onion, bluebell and primrose; I would see rabbit, sheep and feral goat; I would hear stone-chats, cuckoos and warblers.

Rather than take on all planning myself, I signed up with Mac's Adventure, a walking tour company run by the enthusiastic Neil Lapping. Lapping arranged my lodging, baggage transport, and entire itinerary. He even lent me a pair of hiking boots. The evening before my departure, over beer in Glasgow's West End, he debriefed me, pulling out the maps and guides I'd be using and explaining the beauty of the Way. "The experience can be social, or you can have peace and quiet," Lapping promised.

He was right. Often following an 18th-century British military road, the trail penetrates zones of total

isolation. But just when you need a phone booth, a plate of "neeps and champit tatties" (yellow turnips and mashed potatoes), or a pint of ale, a small hamlet appears around the bend. Those dangling McEwan's and John Smith's signs were like carrots on sticks. I began to think of the West Highland Way as a 95-mile pub crawl.

When my mood fluctuated, I didn't attribute it to over-socialization or physical effort. But the weather sometimes dragged me down. By the end of day two, fog and drizzle seemed drawn to the loch. For most of the third stage, scrambling along the rocky trail that hugged the shoreline, I slogged through a steady downpour. At times, the trail was a cascade. Keats' experience of July 26, 1818 was much the same: "Among these Mountains and Lakes ... I have got wet through day after day --- eaten oat-cake, and drank Whisky, walked up to my knees in Bog, got sore throat."

About two hours after passing Rob Roy's Cave, a huge jumble of mossy boulders where the infamous outlaw/hero was said to hide out, I finally arrived at the Drovers Inn, a circa-1705 former shelter for Highland cattle drovers.

Never had I been more thankful for a bar this dingy and malodorous.

The Drovers' scintillating fireplace dried my gear. Its steak and Guinness pie warmed my insides.

And the other shelter-seekers amused me. As afternoon changed into Saturday night, the mixed herd of tourists and locals grew more unruly. A pony-tailed guitarist played note-for-note replicas of anthems by Black Sabbath, Kansas and Lynyrd Skynyrd. Scruffy Scots tossed down pints and drams of whisky, then lifted their kilts to moon the hearth.

"Sweet home Alabama!" the mob of drunken Scots chanted until 1 am. "Where the skies are so blue!"

While beefy men with tattoos in Lord of the Rings Elvish script circumscribing their upper arms kept buying me drinks, Clive and Jim sat

in the corner, silently sipping their beer.

I don't remember if I ate oat-cake, but I did have whisky. Miraculously, I didn't get sick.

**Devil's Staircase to Myself**  
On Sunday morning, May 30, I hiked past a sheep pasture strewn with tumbled walls and into Bogle Glen's groves of coniferous trees. As I passed more leisurely hikers like Jeremy and Janice, I finally caught up to myself.

"Oh, you must be that writer," Jeremy said nonchalantly. News of that "travel journalist" asking questions at the Drovers Inn the night before had already passed up the multi-national wagon train of hikers ebbing and flowing across the vaporous countryside.

The British couple and I walked side-by-side for a couple of hours, then met up with Gabriella and Michael from Switzerland, who I had not seen since eating bowls of muesli together at the Rowardennan Youth Hostel the previous morning. When Janice, Jeremy and I stopped for our picnic lunch at the remains of St. Fillans Priory, the Swiss couple walked ahead. I forgot to say goodbye. An hour later, Jeremy and Janice detoured at Tyndrum. I never saw them again.

But I didn't need other people. I was tough and craved the privacy of my own mind. I found solitude by striding ahead and keeping my mouth shut.

On day five, the drover's road to Glen Coe veered into Rannoch Moor --- a massive blanket of scrubby bog, heather and bilberry. Under pristine skies, visibility extended to 10 miles. I played a game, trying to match the shape of a shadow on a distant hill to the cloud that cast it. I thought how words, cameras and watercolors never adequately capture how, over great expanses, greens and grays morph into purples and milky blues.

My fellow hikers' day ended at the Kinghouse Hotel, but I had another eight miles to go to Kinlochleven. My feet were on auto-

pilot. My mind slid and shifted. No trees, no closed spaces, no sound except boot crunching gravel. I forgot who I was. My feet thought for me.

At five o'clock, I ascended the dreaded Devil's Staircase and had the entire trail --- and trial --- to myself.

But at the summit I thought of Ian and Donald, the barrister and Pfizer lab scientist from Kent who I'd hiked with from the beginning. At the Glengoyne distillery on day one, we'd downed a dram of whisky at 11:30 am on empty stomachs. By day two, we'd already shared many a pint. I knew they'd have to ascend the Staircase's on day six --- forecast: rain. I wondered what their story would be.

Oh, my fellow travelers! Whatever ever happened to Margaret and Carol, middle-aged ladies who'd already tackled the Inca Trail? The Kiwis Evette and Gareth, the Canadians Meghan and Erin, all working at Kingshouse for the summer? Tanya from Amsterdam? Toni and Jodi from Australia? The mother and son, the lesbian foursome, the couple carrying their baby on their backs?

I even missed Clive and Jim, those old unstoppable blokes. Our paths would never intersect again.

Writing this weeks later, I concluded that loneliness is overrated. I did need other people.

I remembered Janice and Jeremy, just before they turned off the trail. I had been hiking in those brand-new, Mac's Adventure loaner boots ever since soaking my running shoes (not recommended footwear). Bad idea. Along the banks of the River

Cononish, my blisters shredded.

Before I could protest, Janice had my boots off and was inspecting the damage. "Ooh, that's a bad one," she said, applying "plasters" to the sore spots that looked like raw pork meat. Total strangers touching my disgusting feet ---- now that's true camaraderie on the trail.

My mind also went back to Chris and Todd, the two Duke University students on summer break I overtook towards the end of day four. Lugging massive packs, Todd struggled with a water jug; Chris had (of all burdens) a Greek bouzouki strapped to his back. Red from sunburn and covered in midge bites, they had been camping out for the last week. They looked miserable.

"Thanks, man," said the curly-headed Chris, looking over at me.

"For what?" I asked.

"We were getting tired. But you showing up --- you gave us a boost."

Keats was right about Scotland. "I am more comfortable than I could have imagined in such a place," he wrote on July 18, 1818. "The people are all very kind."

Our presences dwarfed by Beinn Dorain but encouraged by each other, we forsook those false and hurtful divisions of life: age and youth, poverty and riches, solitude and fatigue. Together, we quickened our pace towards our well-earned bed and tent and pint, all three of us --- four, if you count Keats.

Ethan Gilsdorf last contributed to the Grapevine to report about cycling through the mountains of France. He writes for the Boston Globe and Washington Post, among other papers.



## IF YOU GO: SCOTLAND

### How to get there

Some hikers begin walking from Glasgow, but the actual start of the West Highland Way is in Milngavie, about 7 miles north of Glasgow. Take a train from the Queen Street Station (20 minute ride); the hike starts at a granite obelisk on Douglas Street in the center of the Milngavie pedestrian shopping zone.

### What to do

Hike! To plan a West Highland Way adventure, several options are available. Hikers can choose self-guided or guided (with a leader) trip; if selecting self-guided, hikers can make all their own arrangements, or book with a company that handles all the accommodation, luggage and itinerary planning. Mac's Adventure (Unit 510, 355 Byres Road, Glasgow, [www.macsadventure.com](http://www.macsadventure.com); 011 44 141945 4945) offers two packages: self-guided hikes from £195 to £485 (\$375 to \$933), depending on accommodation choice and duration of walk) or guided £325 to £435 (\$625 to \$837). The package includes accommodation (single travelers booking the B&B option are charged an extra £60 (\$115) to £90 (\$173) per trip), breakfast (if taking B&B option), daily door-to-door baggage transfer, guidance notes, maps and guidebooks. All Mac's Adventure itineraries start in Milngavie on day one, end in Fort William and can be customized with extra days before, after or during the walk.

But many hikers make all the accommodation, meal, luggage transportation and navigation arrangements themselves, or even "rough it" by bringing tents and camping equipment. Because the Way builds from easy to harder terrain, south to north is Way's traditional (but

not required) direction. During quieter periods, booking accommodations in advance isn't necessary; if bad weather or blisters get you down, you can call to change your lodging reservation, take a day off and rest your feet for the next day of hiking. AMS ([www.ams-scotland.com](http://www.ams-scotland.com)) offers baggage transfer, accommodation booking, and return transportation from Fort William to Glasgow. A stunning way to return is by taking the West Highland Railway, which crosses the Way at various points (three and a half hours); Traveline Scotland ([www.travelinescotland.com](http://www.travelinescotland.com)) provides bus, train and airfare options.

Either before or after the hike, you might consider staying on to explore for a few days on either end, Glasgow or Fort William. From Fort William, you can ascend Ben Nevis, Britain's highest mountain, or continue hiking 70 more miles on the Great Glen Way to Inverness.

For further information especially helpful for self-organizers, purchase a copy of the painstakingly detailed guidebook *The West Highland Way* by Charlie Loram (Trailblazer Publications), which includes precise walking maps and places to stay and eat. Lonely Planet Walking in Scotland contains a brief chapter on the hike. If you book with Mac's Adventures, you'll be provided with the useful map-guide *The West Highland Way* by Jacquette Megarry (Rucksack Readers). Also see [www.macsadventure.com](http://www.macsadventure.com) for excellent travel resources and other links, [www.west-highland-way.co.uk](http://www.west-highland-way.co.uk), the Way's official website (includes lodging contacts), and [walking.visitscotland.com](http://walking.visitscotland.com) for general info on walking in Scotland.

By Ethan Gilsdorf



*Galleri Lis*

# Home: Reykjavík Gets a World Class Hotel from Its Returning Local Boy

I'm invited out to visit a local hotel that has friends from New York dropping their jaws. It turns out, some Icelander has just returned to the rock and created a high end hotel with so much open curiosity and effortless style that even the most weary of travellers, and even the harshest of hotel critics, is impressed.

Agnar Agnarsson's new upper-range hotel, Home, obviously draws influence from Ian Schraeger's living art approach to temporary housing, but what is even more impressive, he has outcharmed and out-comforted the best of the American hotel scene.

Everything about Home seems like a fortuitous accident, especially



when presented by the imminently likeable, laid back creator. Yes, the rooms are full of upper-end gallery level works of art from Iceland and from a few of Agnar's friends in New York. Yes, he has stunning ideas like balancing a form of rock carpet with the best sleeping mattress in the world, like presenting a flat screen plasma tv above a wall of pop-art

wallpaper, but as he waves his hands and sips from a wheatgrass shake, it's just natural.

Agnar has the easy-going confidence about his design that you only see from the most excessively qualified. He graduated from the respected Parson's School of Design, won a design competition for W Hotels,

and having served a tour of duty designing Weston Hotels, and he has also had respected tenures with the Harry Allen and Tsao McGown Architecture Studios. Still, in coming back to Iceland he has to start up all over again. Joking about how quickly Iceland cycles through artists and how much it changed during his 9-year absence,

he claims "Nine generations of people have gone through here since I've been gone. These days, I have to go to the back of the line to get in to the good clubs." For more information or to book go to [www.this.is/home](http://www.this.is/home).

by Bart Cameron

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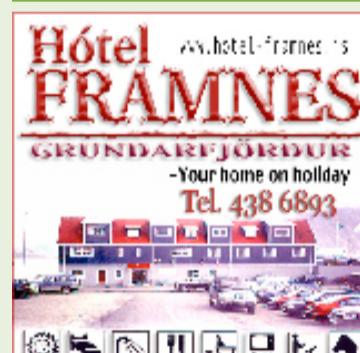
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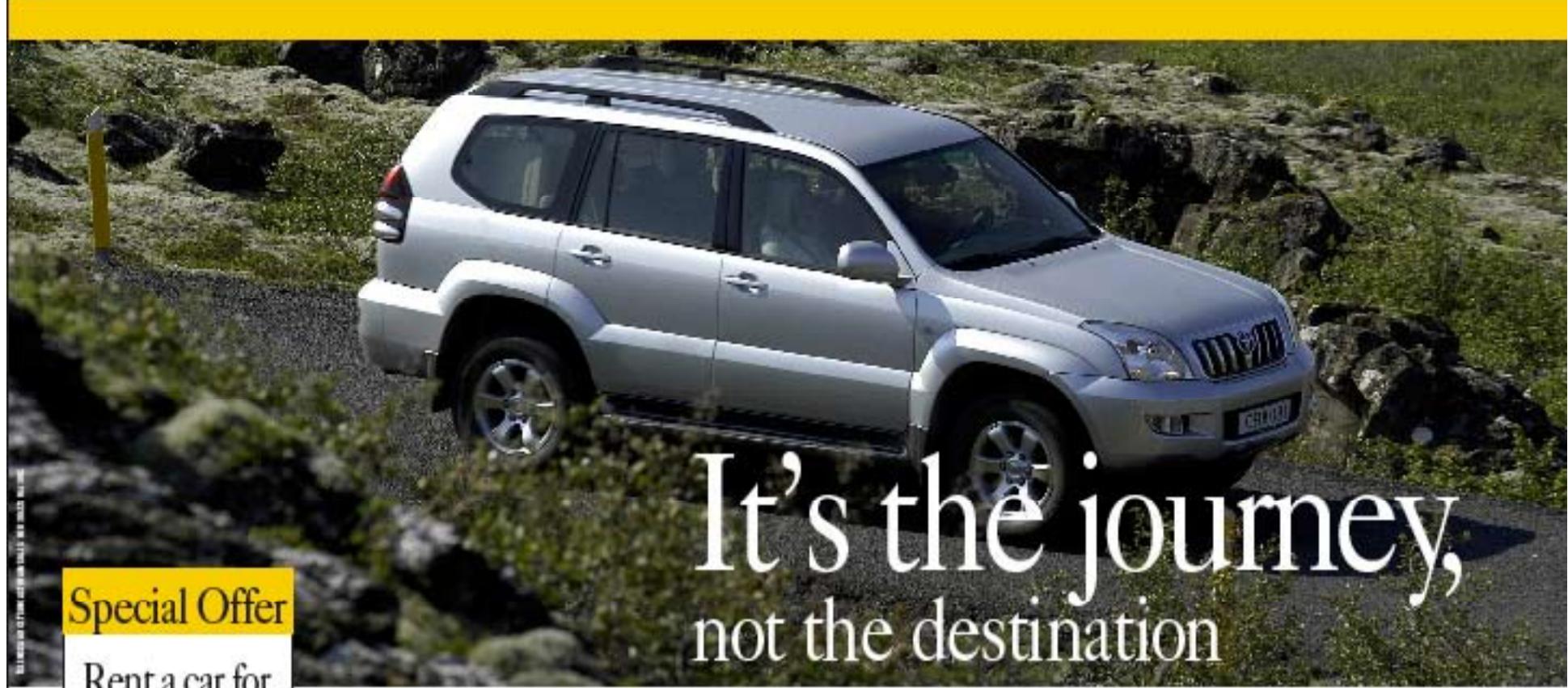
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"It gives me chills to think that one out of every four women experiences violence at some point in their life." Heba, rape survivor councillor. [PAGE 6](#)

"How am I supposed to remember what I meant by what I said ten years ago?"

Shell CEO Gunnar Karl Guðmundsson, on the evidence against him in the oil scandal. [PAGE 19](#)

"If we can show that we can stop the biggest project, they'll know that we can stop all of them."

Ólafur Páll Sigurðsson, one of the key organisers of the upcoming protest against the Kárahnjúkar dam project. [PAGE 14](#)

"Total strangers touching my disgusting feet -- now that's true camaraderie on the trail."

Ethan Gilsdorf, on one stop of his 95 mile trek down Scotland. [PAGE 44](#)

"The ideal place for... if a couple originated from very separate layers of the social fabric want to announce their engagement to both families at the same time..."

from Haukur Már Helgason's nuanced restaurant reviews. [PAGE 28](#)

# passing... away?

Icelandic roads are narrow

