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The Travel Awards

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Summer Edition 2019

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Wind in Snæfellsnes

Strange Shops & Top Stops

South & Reykjanes

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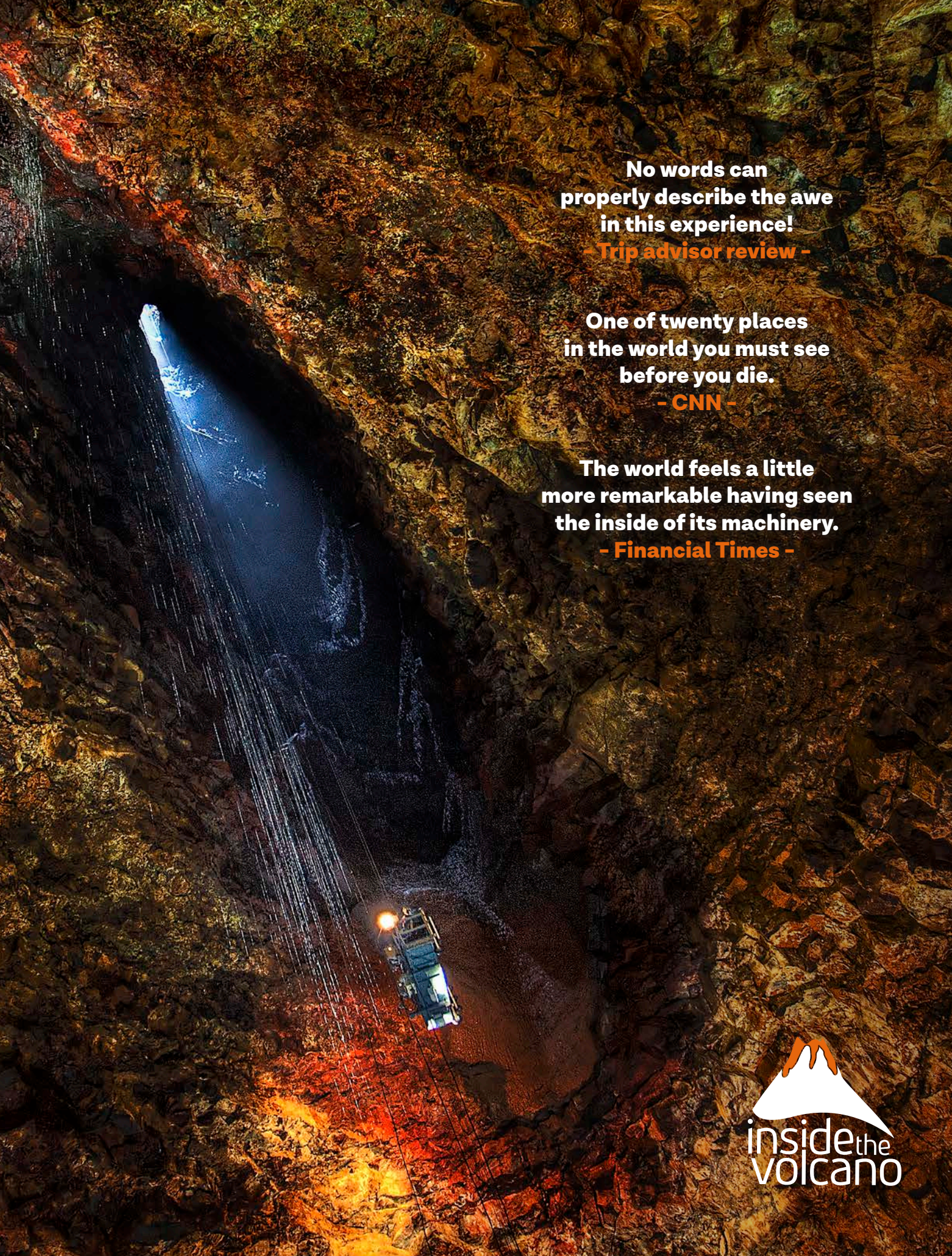
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AN INTRODUCTION

Break Out The Sunscreen

Summer is here in Iceland, and while that doesn't always mean blue skies and picnics, it does mean that all the high peaks and distant corners of the countryside are opening up again for travel.

It's also the time we call upon some well-travelled friends, wanderlusting contributors and in-the-know locals to form the independent panels who help us make an all-new **Best of Iceland** magazine for 2019.

Compiling this guide is a thrilling and educational exercise each year. For such a sparsely populated country, Iceland has a seemingly endless variety of glorious hikes, remote geothermal viewpoints, Highland road trips and hidden gems for adventurous travellers to discover. There's also a multitude of newly-opened bars, cafés, restaurants and hotels that have been quietly germinating over the winter. We've tried many of them out—and revisited some old favourites—to make sure that this magazine

is fresh and on-point.

We were busy during the cold season too. Our recently launched **Go Travel** booking website, made in partnership with some of Iceland's top tour providers, brings you a curated selection of our very favourite trips, from ATV, snowmobiling and snorkelling adventures to relaxed whale watching excursions and stunning glacier hikes. Visit gotravel.grapevine.is in the knowledge that every trip is tried and tested, and every booking helps fund our journalism. Also, look out for our flagship publication, **The Reykjavík Grapevine**, and sister mag **Best of Reykjavík**.

Most of all, be safe out there, respect the nature around you—don't throw cigarette butts, pick moss, drive off-road, etcetera—and have fun. We hope you enjoy reading the Best of Iceland 2019 as much as we enjoyed making it.

John Rogers, Editor



Browse the tours we've recommended at
go.grapevine.is

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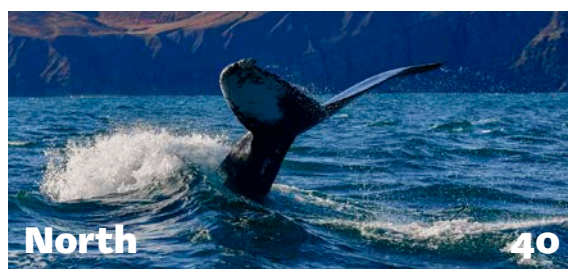
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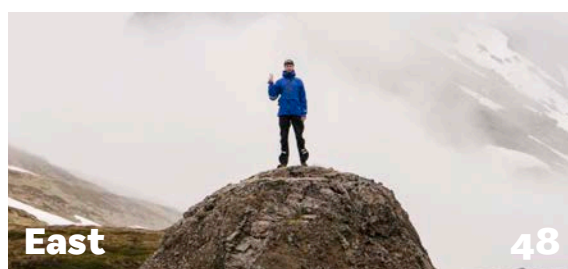
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JUNE 9TH

Græni Hatturinn, Akureyri

JUNE 20TH

Ráin, Keflavík

JUNE 21ST

The Freezer, Ríf

JUNE 22ND

Hendur í höfn, Þorlákshöfn

JUNE 27TH

Tjarnarbíó, Reykjavík

JUNE 28TH

Bragginn (Café Riis), Hólmavík

JUNE 29TH

Edinborgarhúsið, Ísafjörður

JULY 5TH

Súpufélagið, Vík

JULY 6TH

HAVARÍ, Berufjörður

JULY 11TH

Mælifell Sauðárkrókur

JULY 12TH

Tjarnarbíó, Reykjavík

JULY 19TH

Tjarnarbíó, Reykjavík

JULY 20TH

Vagninn, Flateyri

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Skyrgerðin, Hveragerði

JULY 27TH

Final Show in Tjarnarbíó, Reykjavík

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THE AWARDS

How We Picked The Winners

For a small country, Iceland is actually pretty big, as you've maybe discovered in planning a trip around this island, with its roads winding around fjords, through all-but-impassable mountain passes, along the edge of rocky cliffs, to far-flung fishing villages, hidden hot pots, and barren beaches. And with every small blue or yellow sign you drive past—in a language you can't read, signaling a place you've never heard of, accessible via a muddy and rutted rural track—the question naturally arises: What did I just miss?

Well, we're glad you asked. For our Best of Iceland special issue,

we at The Reykjavík Grapevine convened panels of experts—artists and musicians, tourism and hospitality workers—ready to opine on the natural and man-made highlights of Iceland's five regions. The panellists made impassioned and often surprising cases for their favourite spots; we debated, we bargained; we weighed options carefully, we followed our hearts; we consulted a local völvu, or seeress; we put a GPS tracker on a raven and monitored its flight. Much of that last sentence is true.

Now, voyager, sail thou forth, to seek and find. MA

FIND **EVERY GOOD THING** IN REYKJAVÍK!

Grab a copy of *Best Of Reykjavík*

THE GUIDE-GUIDE

Look For These Stickers Out There In The Wide World

You'll find these stickers of recommendation, which we've handed out to this year's winners, as you make your way around the country. They indicate an award winner—a place that our panels and experts want to flag to you as absolutely worth your time and attention. Whatever you're looking for in the far-flung corners of Iceland, we hope that they will act as a guiding light and a helpful presence on your trip. And if you find something you think deserves a sticker? Let us know at grapevine@grapevine.is.

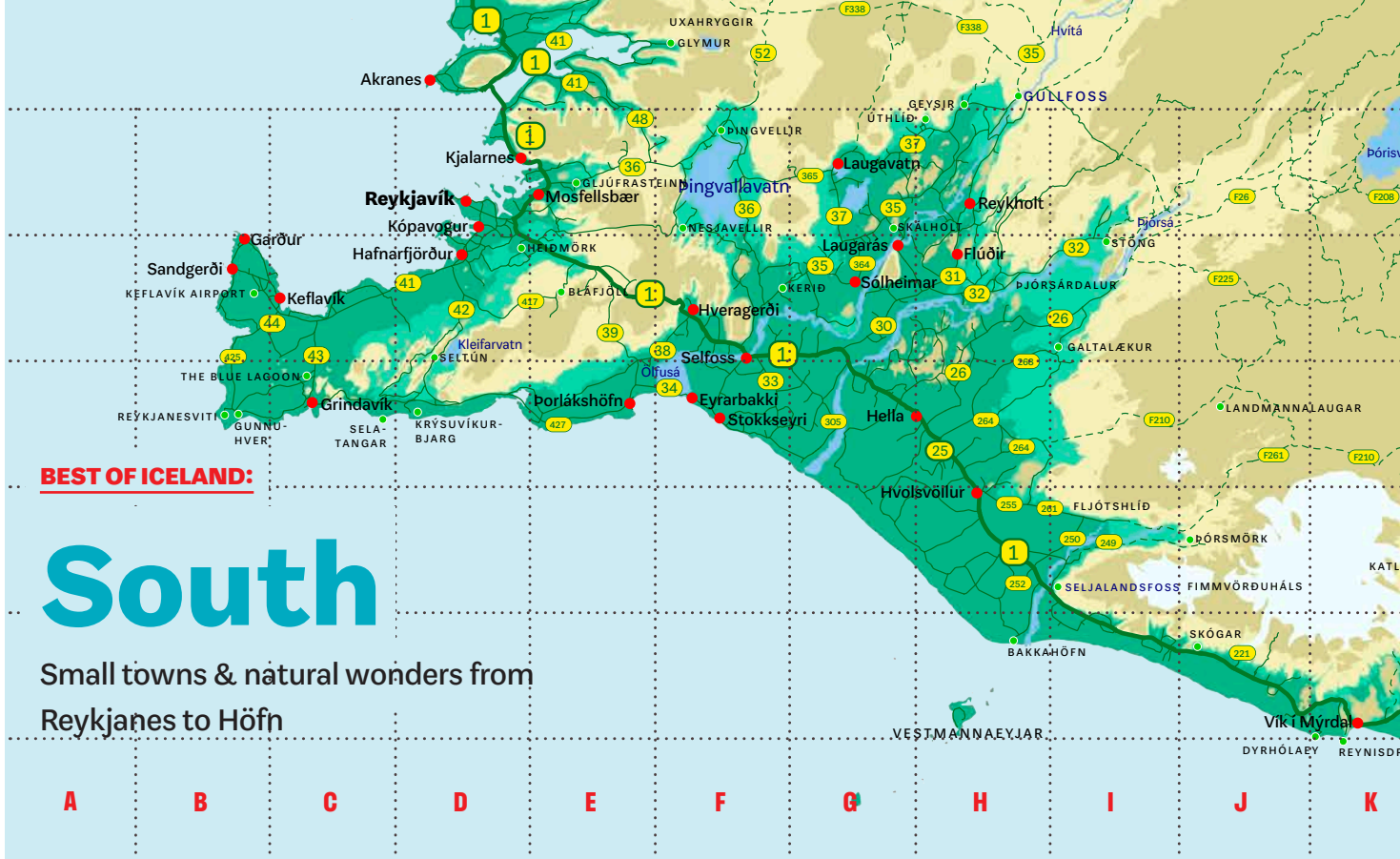


A DAILY DOSE OF ONCE IN A LIFETIME

Hrífunes Nature Park is a new 5400 acre nature resort in Southern Iceland. The park lies in a lush area, nestled in between powerful glaciers and is surrounded by the nation's most significant natural wonders. Hrífunes luxury villas can be rented all year round and premium land is available for purchase. For more information, visit hrifunesnaturepark.is.



FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT HRIFUNESNATUREPARK.IS



Reykjanes

Southwest Iceland

Further Info: visitreykjanes.is

This Reykjavik-adjacent volcanic peninsula where people enter the country at Keflavík Airport, but holds much more besides. You can easily fill a day with a road trip around the eerie Kleifarvatn lake, the multisensory Krýsuvík and Gunnhver geothermal areas, the bustling town of Grindavík with its many restaurants, and the stunning viewpoint of Reykjanesviti. There are organised day tours of the peninsula, too, if you're not driving. See our awards for the Reykjanes area from page 22.

Map Square: B3 to D2



Sólheimar Ecovillage

Grímsnes

Further Info: solheimar.is

The Sólheimar Ecovillage is a peaceful rural community where people with special needs live, work and thrive together. It's an idyllic location, with greenhouses, gardens, a pleasant café, a shop selling handmade objects, and events going on all year round. You'll leave feeling calmer than when you arrived. **G2**



Dyrhólaey & Reynisfjara

South Iceland

Further info: south.is

These two proximate spots are incredibly beautiful in different ways. Dyrhólaey is a high headland with a stunning view of Mýrdalsjökull and the endless black sands of Sólheimasandur; Reynisfjara is a black beach with basalt rock cliffs behind and the Reynisdrangar sea stacks in front. Note: Always stay far back from the water. Reynisfjara is known for its sneaker waves and strong undertow. **K5**

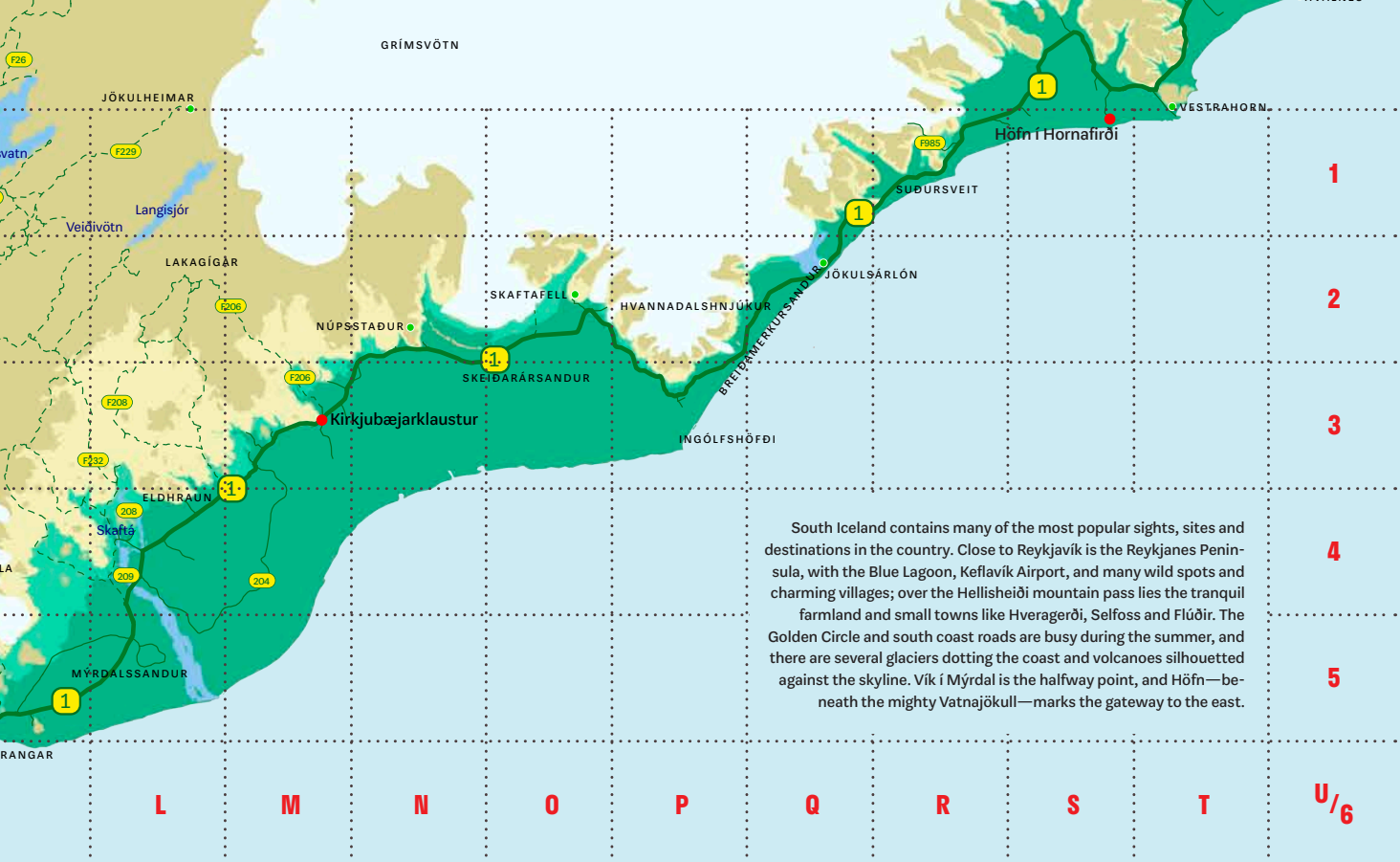


The Highlands

Central Iceland

Further Info: south.is/en/the-highland

Only accessible in the summer, Iceland's desert interior is a stunning, inhospitable wilderness. There are two main roads cutting across it, leading from south to north: Kjölur in the West, and Sprengisandur in the East. A sturdy 4x4 is required to drive there, but there are buses too; the Kerlingarfjöll and Landmannalaugar campsites are must-sees.



South Iceland contains many of the most popular sights, sites and destinations in the country. Close to Reykjavík is the Reykjanes Peninsula, with the Blue Lagoon, Keflavík Airport, and many wild spots and charming villages; over the Hellisheiði mountain pass lies the tranquil farmland and small towns like Hveragerði, Selfoss and Flúðir. The Golden Circle and south coast roads are busy during the summer, and there are several glaciers dotting the coast and volcanoes silhouetted against the skyline. Vík í Mýrdal is the halfway point, and Höfn—beneath the mighty Vatnajökull—marks the gateway to the east.



Campsites

Various locations, Info: south.is/en/where-to-stay/camping

For those on a budget, Iceland's campsites make for excellent summer accommodation options. Many have geothermal hot pots on-site, and the modest nightly fee includes shared shower and bathroom facilities. Some are in particularly good locations, with beautiful scenery and hikes right next door—the Þakgil canyon and Skaftafell nature reserve are both stunning spots.



Þórbergssonsetur

Hali, Suðursveit
Further info: thorbergur.is

Easily spotted from Route One because of its distinctive bookshelf design, this museum is dedicated to famed author Þórbergur Þórðarson, who was born on the Hali farm. Learning about his writing—including the seminal memoir 'The Stones Speak'—will bring the landscape around you to life. There's also a guesthouse on site. **T1**

USEFUL INFO

Grapevine on the South:
gvp.is/south

Our articles, info and guides for South Iceland

Tourist Information:

South Iceland Tourist Information

Sunnumörk 2, Hveragerði
www.south.is
tourinfo@hveragerdi.is
Tel: +354 483-4601

Emergency services

Tel: 112 (national helpline)

Weather report

en.vedur.is

Recorded info: +354 902 0600

HOW TO GET THERE

By domestic airline:

Vestmannaeyjar (VEY)

Flights from Reykjavík.
Main airline operator:
www.eagleair.is
Tel: +354 481 3300

Höfn (HFN)

Flights from Reykjavík.
Main airline operator:
www.eagleair.is
Tel: +354 478 1250

Smaller airports

Flightseeing.is operates charter flights between Bakki and the Westman Islands, a 10-minute jaunt.

Ferry to Westman Islands:

Herjólfur leaves from Bakkahöfn
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Travel provided by: sba.is
Accommodation: kerlingarfjoll.is

South

High And Wild

A rainy highland getaway at Kerlingarfjöll

Words: **John Rogers** Photos: **Timothée Lambrecq**

The bus bounces over the bleak highland desert under heavy, spitting clouds, taking a sharp right turn and trundling down the track towards the Kerlingarfjöll mountain resort. A few kilometres later, a tranquil scene comes into view—a tall, sculptural rust-and-ochre escarpment standing over a surprisingly verdant valley, cradling a winding blue river, an idyllic campsite, a visitors centre and a small village of A-frame cabins.

My accommodation for the night turns out to be one of the latter. Shaking the rain off my anorak and

stepping inside, I'm delighted to find such unexpected luxuries as made-up beds, radiators, a plug socket, one bar of 3G signal, and a small en-suite bathroom with a hot shower. For the Highlands, this level of comfort makes my cabin a palace.

Rained off

It's even more appreciated as the day wears on. The grim weather doesn't let up, so I sit huddled by the window, watching the shower intensify into a violent rainstorm.

The sky darkens into an inky grey blot and campers scamper between the toilet block and their disconsolately flapping tents in the downpour. Despite my plans for a day of hiking, I watch a sole hiker trudge ponderously up the gravelly main hiking trail without a flicker of envy. I take off my boots decisively, draw the curtains and settle in to wait out the weather.

The evening draws in without much improvement. In the visitor centre dining room they're serving hot dinners to French hikers, conspiratorial couples, German

Plokkfiskur. As the waitress takes the empty plate, she mentions that most of the hikers heeded the weather warnings and didn't hike the trails today, but the weather looks set to improve by morning. Back at the cabin, I drift off to sleep quickly, serenaded by the now torrential rain drumming on the roof.

Old women mountains

The prediction turns out to be correct, and the next day, I set off on a hike up to Hveradalir, the geo-

“Steps have been hammered into the sticky clay of the earth like stitches in the ground.”

families and a quiet Chinese tour group. I pretend not to watch them and tuck into a piping hot dish of

thermal valley nestled deep inside Kerlingarfjöll (“Old Women Mountains,” in English). The trail begins

**“My senses tingle keenly,
awakening to the feeling of
amplified nature in the vast
empty space.”**

by zig-zagging up a steep hillside to the top of a long, pebbled, jet-black expanse. Before long, the cabins are out of view, and my senses tingle keenly, awakening to the feeling of amplified nature in this vast empty space.

I stride through fields of glistening pebbles, running down steep slopes and labouring up the other side. As the trail ascends higher, bands of snow start to appear, and I take the opportunity to cool down by lying in the snow.

After a couple of hours, the wind starts to carry the distinctive smell of sulphur and the ground changes from firm dirt to an orange clay that clings to my boots heavily. I arrive, panting, at a viewpoint overlooking a deep chasm with several plumes of steam jetting emphatically into the air.

Dragon spine

Hveradalir turns out to be bigger than I could have imagined. The onward path leads gradually down a long ridge into the valley, over the course of an entire kilometre. Steps have been hammered into the sticky clay of the earth like stitches in the ground, which changes colour through a spectrum of bright yellow, earthy red, mouldy powder blue and vivid bottle green. As the colours change gradually beneath my feet, it's intensely stimulating, and a sense of adrenalized awe courses through me. The long descent feels like so much as walking down the spine of a dragon.

At the base of the valley, various paths converge from different directions, intersecting and splitting off again. As a result, the bottom of Hveradalir has become an improbable hiking junction, and a mid-Highlands meeting point. A long procession of silver-haired hikers in brightly coloured raincoats stride purposefully past us,

heading back up the hill with bulging backpacks that hint at a multi-day route. A family of German tourists disrobe and gamely jump into the warm, burbling stream for a soak. Through walls of steam, I fleetingly glimpse figures wandering the pathways in all directions, taking in the otherworldly scene.

Suspended in time

It feels like the regular flow of time has been suspended, and I wander the trails, prolonging this immersive moment. Steam pours skywards from the countless hotspots, melting the lingering snow into organically formed sculptures;

the hammered rungs of the various trails look like lines drawn over the earthy hills.

Eventually, I take an upwards path that loops around the other lip of the valley. The bright, unctuous mud gives way to firm ground, and the trail leads through broken lava outcrops and mossy, boulder-strewn fields. Back at the summit, I bang the mud from my boots, still intensely present in the moment. I take a long final look back, and a broad smile steals over my face. I start the return journey with a spring in my step, brimming with joy from this fantastical, sensually overwhelming place. 🍷




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BEST OF ICELAND 2019

South

Greenhouses and local ingredients

Best Meal



Slippurinn

Strandvegur 76, Vestmannaeyjar

The undisputed heavyweight of South Iceland restaurants is the exquisite family-run Slippurinn eatery. Located on the wild and picturesque Westman Islands, it alone is worth the trip. Head chef Gísli Matthías Auðunsson is a famed New Nordic innovator whose team lovingly harvests wild ingredients, and works with local farmers and suppliers—you can be certain that everything on your plate has been thoroughly considered. The result? A stunningly fresh and vibrant taste of Iceland that you'll never forget. **Map square: H5**

Runner Up



Tryggvaskáli
Tryggvatorg, Selfoss

Located in a historic former hotel building on the banks of the gushing Ölfusá river, Tryggvaskáli is a charming restaurant that uses local ingredients to eye-popping effect. The colourful, playful dishes will wake up your tastebuds and the warm environment and friendly service are perfect. A worthy dinner stop. **F2**

Newcomer



Otto Matur & Drykkur
Hafnarbraut, Höfn

Otto is a new-kid-on-the-block restaurant that's making waves in the south-eastern outpost of Höfn. Once the main building of the town, this historic harbourside house now holds a tasteful eatery with an equally tasteful and tasty menu. "Their risotto is perfect," said the panel. "It's a real find on your road trip." **S1**

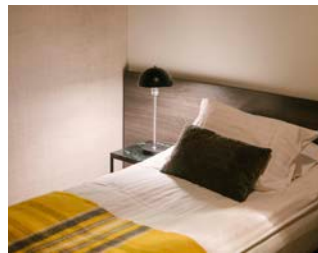
Best Accommodation



Skálakot Manor Hotel
Hvolsvöllur

Ideally located in the heart of South Iceland, Skálakot is our favourite from a considerable crop of recently-opened hotels. It's a new building, but you'd never know from the comfortable country manor vibe; every detail of the rooms is perfect, from the tasteful patterned wallpaper to the modernist kettles, slender coffee makers, cloud-like beds and deep bathtubs. The in-house restaurant is also excellent. "It's like an Icelandic version of the Twin Peaks Great Northern Lodge," said the panel. **I5**

Runner Up



Fosshotel Glacier Lagoon
Hnappavellir, Örfæfi

Fosshotel is a reliably comfortable hotel chain, and the Glacier Lagoon location is one of their newest additions. The rooms are comfortable and minimal, with nice design touches, and all south-facing windows look directly onto the sea; it makes a luxurious base from which to explore the Vatnajökull area. **R1**

Budget Option



Héraðsskólinn Boutique Hostel
Laugarbraut 2, Laugarvatn

This old schoolhouse is a proud and pleasing piece of architecture set on the shores of lake Laugarvatn. It retains an old-Iceland charm that's increasingly hard to find, and offers everything from dorm bunks to ensuite private rooms, so it'll always suit your budget. **G1**

Best Shop



Sveitabúðin Una
Austurvegi 4, Hvolsvöllur

A spacious emporium packed with locally-made products, Una is probably Iceland's best souvenir shop. You can pick up that authentic hand-knitted lopapeyja you've been dreaming of, and browse shelves and display cases teeming with interesting objects. Jewellery made from lava beads? Check. Rhubarb-infused salt from the Westfjords? Check. And don't think twice—yes, you will fit be able to squeeze that cosy and pristine sheepskin rug in your case. Go for it. We support you.. **H4**

Runner Up



Geysir Centre
Haukadalur, Reykholt

You don't go to Geysir to shop, it's true—but you probably will anyway. The sprawling complex has a wide range of Icelandic-designed clothing and accessories. "It can be a bit expensive, but it is one of the best shops for souvenirs," said the panel. "There's also a warm and well-organised café." **H1**

Budget Option



Nytjamarkaðurinn Selfoss
Eyravegur 5, Selfoss

The shelves of this cavernous and enticing secondhand shop are laden with finds, from handmade drinking glasses to candleholders, old Icelandic LPs, home decor, kitchenware and clothing. "You can find anything from plants to blenders to musical instruments," said the panel. "It's impossible to leave empty handed." **F2**

South

Floating glaciers and steamy hikes

Must-See Spot



Landmannalaugar

Friðland að Fjallabaki, Highlands, Road F208

Of all the deep nature of the South, the astounding Landmannalaugar is a true must-see. “It’s a stunning place with fantastic views,” said the panel. You could spend days hiking the trails, which wind around the geothermal area where hot steam pours from vividly coloured mountains. There are captivating lava fields, a bright green canyon, crater lakes, and lots more. Only accessible in summer, buses arrive at the campsite daily; Don’t forget your swimming gear—there’s a geothermal bathing spot. **Map square: J3**

Runner Up



Hveradalir

Kerlingarfjöll, Highlands, Road F347

This hidden gem is high in the west Highlands. Take a bus to Kerlingarfjöll, check into a cabin or pitch up on the lovely campsite, then take a daylong hike into the mountains along the well-marked trail. You’ll find a jaw-dropping series of geothermally active valleys. “It’s life-changingly beautiful,” said the panel.

Runner Up



Pórsnörk

Highlands. Road F261

The Pórsnörk valley is surrounded by active volcanoes, glaciers, and the gnarled, ashen landscape they created, it’s a deeply immersive environment for camping and hiking. “You can see parts of three glaciers when you hike in the mountains,” said the panel. Take a shuttle bus: the rivers are notoriously treacherous for drivers. **J4**

Best Bathing Spot



The Secret Lagoon

Hvammssvegur, Flúðir

“Of all the geothermal pools, this is the one where you see the process most,” said our panel of this remarkable bathing spot. “There’s a mini geysir, and you can hear the bassy gurgling fumaroles and feel the temperature fluctuations in the water.” While the “secret” of this popular outdoor bathing lagoon is out in recent times, our panel was impressed by the investment into better facilities. “It’s clean and organised, but still not too manicured—you’re right there in the landscape.” **H2**

Runners Up



Sundlaugin Laugaskarði

Reykjamörk, Hveragerði

An understated architectural classic, Laugaskarði stands head and shoulders above the municipal pools in South Iceland, boasting a reception building that’s perfectly curved to shield the water from the wind. “This retro beauty has a straight-from-the-earth steambath,” said the panel. “It’s a Wes Anderson dream of symmetry.” **F3**



Seljavallalaug

Seljavellir, Route 242

Originally built as a training pool in 1923, this curious unmanned pool juts directly from the mountainside, making it a popular tourist attraction. “It’s lost that secluded vibe over recent years,” said the panel. “But it’s still a stunning place to visit, and a great place to go for a dip.” Note: there are no toilet facilities. **I5**

Best Hike



Fimmvörðuháls

Skógar to Þórsnörk

One of the more challenging day-hikes in Iceland, this 25km route is worth it for the diverse riches you’ll see along the way. The trail starts at the foot of Skógafoss, passing countless Highland waterfalls on the way to its 1,000m apex. You cross between the Eyjafjallajökull and Mýrdalsjökull glaciers, passing the still-steaming site of a 2010 eruption. Finally, you’ll descend into the dreamy Þórsnörk valley, where you can camp, bathe, and catch a homeward bus. Take hiking poles. **J4**

Runners Up



Landmannalaugar

Friðland að Fjallabaki, Highlands

There are routes to suit all skill levels threading around this stunning Highland paradise. “The colourful mountains are just amazing,” said the panel. Access the area as the finale of a multi-day Landmannalaugar hike, take a 4x4, or go by bus; camp for a few days to reap the full benefit. A truly breathtaking trip. **J3**

Easy Option



Reykjadalur

Hveragerði

In the Reykjavík-adjacent town of Hveragerði you’ll find this famous route. It’s a gentle hike over a stunning mountain trail with a dreamy soak waiting for you at the end in the geothermal river that gushes down the Reykjadalur valley. “Go first thing, or late in the evening when it’s quiet,” advised the panel. **F2**

BEST OF ICELAND 2019

South

Over volcanoes and under a glacier

Best Road Trip



The South Coast

Route One South

Iceland's south coast is the road trip dreams are made of, and there are countless things to experience and discover along the way. "The whole shoreline is spectacular, and no one spot is like the other," said the panel. "You'll see waterfalls, lava fields, active volcanoes, black beaches, glacier tongues, flood plains, natural bathing spots, wildlife, and all the local life of the lovely seaside villages." Whether it's your first time of your fiftieth, it just never gets old. **E2-S1**

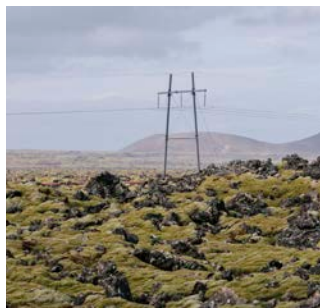
Advanced Option



Friðland að Fjallabaki The Highlands

If you're driving a 4x4 and it's summertime, head to the one-off region of Friðland að Fjallabaki. "This exuberant drive takes you along an unforgettable road up into the Highlands," said the panel. "You'll see views that are hard to put into words." Camp at Landmannalaugar to extend the adventure. **J3**

Easy Option



Reykjanes Ring Reykjavík-Grindavík-Sandgerði

The Reykjanes peninsula is a treasure trove in its own right, with many thrilling tucked away secrets—and it's easily doable in a single day. "Drive past the Kleifarvatn lake to the Seltún geothermal area," said the panel. "Loop past Grindavík, Gunnahver, Reykjanesviti, Sandgerði, and back to Reykjavík. A perfect day." **J3**

Best Sightseeing Tour



Rib Safari Westman Islands

The Westman Islands is an intriguing archipelago, easily reachable from the mainland by ferry. However, only one island is inhabited; the others sit scattered around it, jutting up mysteriously from the fog and spray. A Rib Safari boat tour provides a closer look at some of the smaller islands, also offering a unique perspective on the coast of Heimaey, with its majestic puffin cliffs, echoing sea caves and dazzling rock formations.. **H5**

Runners Up



Glacier Hike Various locations and suppliers

The best way to get up close and personal with a glacier is an guided ice hike. With an experienced glacier guide, a helmet and crampons provided, it's safe to hike up a glacier tongue, taking in the deep blue hues and shining icefalls, and learning about glaciers' features. Sólheimajökull and Skafafellsjökull are both ideal.



Inside The Volcano Operated by 3H-Travel

After a short hike, descend into the dormant Þríhnjúkagígur volcano and witness a side of the earth one could rarely experience. "There's something bizarrely humbling and emotional about standing in the Rothko-esque empty belly of a volcano," said one panellist after seeing this natural wonder.

Best Action Tour



Snorkelling at Silfra Þingvallavatn

Going snorkelling in the rift between the Eurasian and North American tectonic plates took our panel's collective breath away. "It's overwhelming in the most magical way," they said. "There are so many sights and sensations all around you—it's truly something you won't be able to experience anywhere else." The tour is tailored to individual preferences, and can be made more athletic or relaxed, with divers hovering in the sub-zero water in their thick floatation suits. **H1**

Runners Up



ATV Tour & Snowmobiling Sólheimar, various suppliers

From the Arcanum tours reception at Sólheimajökull you can either go snowmobiling on the top of Mýrdalsjökull, or motoring over the black sands of Sólheimajökull on an ATV. Both are just stunning—highlights include a view of the distant Westman Islands, or the famous DC-3 plane wreck, respectively. **J5**



Ice Climbing Various locations and suppliers

Another way to get close to a glacier is to take an ice climbing trip. With expert guides, you'll soon master the technique of scaling an ice wall. "There are plenty of places to do it," said the panel. "It's harder than it looks, but thoroughly rewarding." Note: never venture onto a glacier without an experienced guide.



Browse the tours we've recommended at
go.grapevine.is

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BEST OF ICELAND 2019

South

Beautiful, and needs a little time...

Best Museum/Gallery



LAVA Centre

Hvolsvöllur

There's a huge range of museums in South Iceland, from old-time folk town museums, to exciting technology museums. The Lava Centre is one of the latter, boasting engaging interactive displays and ingenious visualisations of Iceland's volatile geography. "The museum displays exciting and interactive scientific information from knowledgeable Icelandic volcanologists," said the panel. A memorable highlight is a huge model of the glowing tectonic rift below the country, which really puts things in perspective. **Map square: H4**

Runner Up



Eldheimar

Gerðisbraut 10, Vestmannaeyjabær

Well-conceived, entertaining and informative, this modern museum focuses on the Westman Islands' eruption of 1973. Indeed, it's built around two houses that were half-buried in molten lava. Interactive displays show the spread of lava over the island, and video footage from the time brings the disaster to life. **H5**

Runner Up

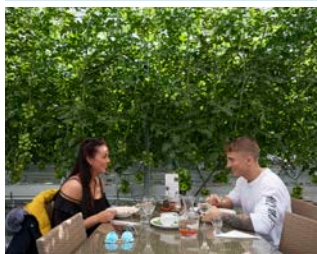


Listasafn Árnesinga

Austurmörk 21, Hveragerði

The Listasafn Árnesinga art museum brings local and international contemporary art to Hveragerði year round. It's a beautiful white space, with carefully curated shows that are always worth a look. "They have the best exhibitions," said the panel. "There's always something interesting to see—and there's a lovely café there as well." **F2**

Best Café

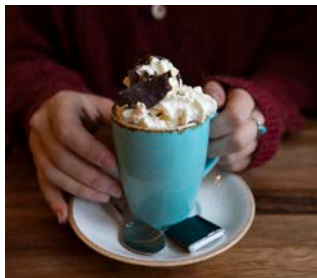


Friðheimar

Reykholt

The wonderful Friðheimar is a café experience like no other. Located inside a large tomato greenhouse, it's a verdant haven where you can taste soups, pasta sauces and Bloody Marys that are as fresh as possible. There's a bread buffet to fill up on, and basil plants on the table to garnish your delicious homegrown tomato soup. Eating amongst the vines rejuvenates your mind, body and spirit. Book ahead—it's a very popular stop on the Golden Circle. **H2**

Runner Up



Suður Vík

Suðurvegur 1, Vík

Perched on the hillside in Vík is this wonderful homely café. "It's a great spot for a mid-journey meal," said the panel. "The service is friendly and the menu has something for everyone." The rafted upstairs dining room overlooks the famous sea stacks below. **K5**

Newcomer

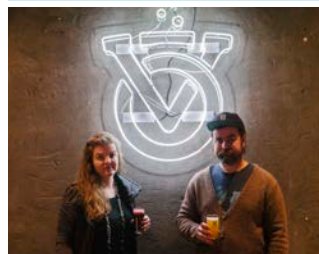


Farmers Bistro

Garðastígur 8, Flúðir

At Farmers Bistro, you can get a tour of the facilities of Iceland's only mushroom farm, learning about mycelium, hyphae, fertilization and waste-free practices. Best of all, the adjoining café boasts a stellar menu. Everything is locally grown and completely fresh, and the prices are outstanding, especially for Iceland. **G2**

Best Bar



Ölverk

Breiðamörk 2, Hveragerði

Brew-pubs are popping up all around Iceland, but nobody does it better than the cosy and welcoming Ölverk Pizza & Brewery. Whether you're dropping by for a quick pint of their house-brewed beer—made just metres from the tap—or you're a beer nerd who wants the full tour of their steam-powered facilities, Ölverk is a fantastic boon for Hveragerði. The pizzas are great, so it's an ideal lunch or dinner stop, too. The designated driver has our pity. **F2**

Runners Up

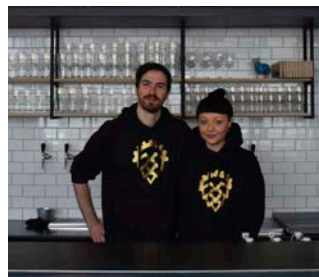


The Brothers Brewery

Vestmannaeyjabær

Started by a couple of friends and their brothers in 2012, this small brewery has started pumping out a selection of great small-batch beers and recently expanded into bottling. It's a friendly, genial experience and they offer a tour-and-tasting for a great price. **H5**

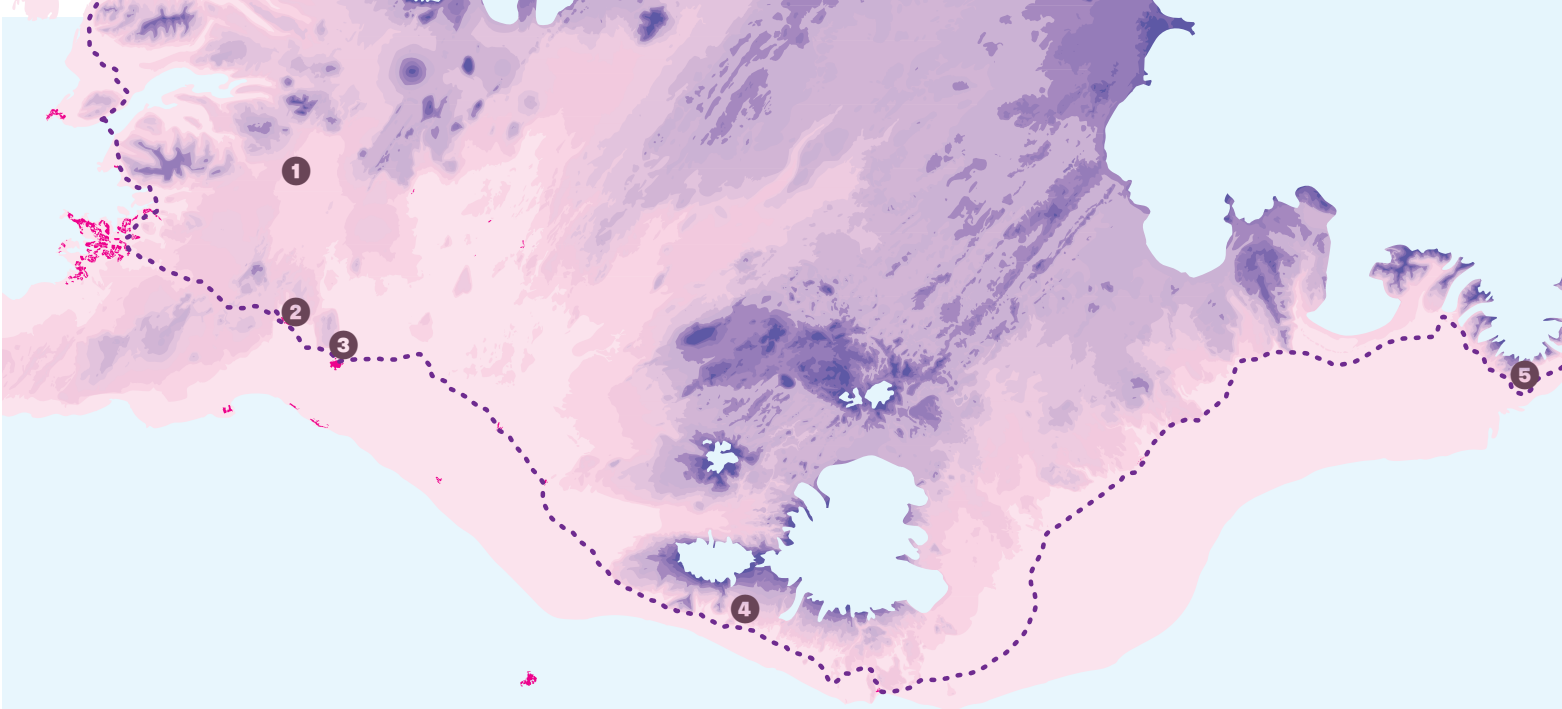
Newcomer



Smiðjan

Vík í Mýrdal

Smiðjan is a year-old brewpub with ten beers on tap and an impressively extensive craft-beer bottle menu. The interior is crisp, but with a grungy edge, and you can see the brewing facilities through a glass wall at the back. They also have a solid bar food menu and they're open till midnight. **K5**



Local Delights: South

ADVERTISEMENTS



1 The Cave People

Háholt 2c, Laugarvatn
Info: thecavepeople.is
Tel: **+354 888 19 22**

Can you imagine how it is to live in a cave? Well less than 100 years ago a normal Icelandic family did!

The caves have now been renovated and look the way they did when the last cave dwellers in Iceland lived there only a Century ago.

Join us in a Guided tour in the Caves and their Surroundings and we will bring the story to life with amazing tales about how they lived, their struggles and their happiness.



2 Give Visit a Chance It Might Surprise You

Austurmörk 21, Hveragerði
Info: listasafnarnesinga.is
Tel: **+354 483 1727**

The Listasafn Árnesinga / LÁ Art Museum is only 40 minutes' drive from Reykjavik on the Golden Circle in the geothermal town of Hveragerði. On Bus 51 route.

We welcome you to exhibitions of modern and contemporary art in our spacious art galleries. We also offer a seating area with wealth of art related material, activity for children and a small Café.

Entrance free of charge.



3 The Bobby Fischer Center

Austurvegur 21, Selfoss
Info: fischersetur.is
Tel: **+354 894 12 75**

The Bobby Fischer Center houses memorabilia of the world chess champion Robert James Fischer. The Center also serves as a club house for Skákfélag Selfoss and others that want to play chess, offers chess classes, and hosts chess tournaments. In addition, the Center has a small chess library for those who want to learn more about chess and offers lectures about the chess game and other related matters.

From May 15th to Sept. 15th: open daily, 13.00 - 16.00 or appointment by contacting the personnel at the Sjafnarblóm store on the first floor at the Center Building.



4 Skógar Museum

Skógasafn 1 (Museum way), Skógar
Info: skogasafn.is
Tel: **+354 487 88 45**

Skógar Museum was founded in 1949 and now hosts a collection of more than 18,000 regional artifacts, exhibited in 3 Museums. It is located 150 km east from Reykjavik just off Ring Road 1 and 30 km west of Vík. The Folk Museum offers variety of artifacts displayed on three floors and in the Open-Air Museum you can catch the atmosphere of times long gone. The Technical Museum tells the story of technology and transportation and its development in Iceland.



5 Local Guide of Vatnajökull

Hofsnes Mói, Örfæfi
Tel: **+354-894-1317**
E-mail: info@localguide.is

We at Local Guide are a small family run company, we pride ourselves in offering glacier tours suitable for all abilities and levels of enthusiasm. So whether you are experiencing the glaciers for the first time,

or if you are a more adventurous explorer with some experience on glaciers, we hope you will enjoy a trip with us.

In the summertime we offer glacier hikes on Vatnajökull, in the wintertime we specialize in Ice Cave tours.

BEST OF ICELAND 2019

Reykjanes

The name means “Smokey Nose.” Promise!

Best Accommodation



Hotel Berg
Bakkavegur 17, Keflavík

This smart, modern hotel is located on the hill behind Keflavík harbour. While the town itself is not known for its beauty, this spot is as tranquil as you could wish for, with comfortable bedrooms, a relaxed sitting area, and a rooftop pool from which you can watch the sun sink into the sea. Two highlights of Keflavík are practically nextdoor: the Skessuhellir troll cave, and the Duus Museum and café. The perfect final stop before a morning flight. **Map: C2**

Fancy Option



The Retreat
The Blue Lagoon, Grindavík

The Blue Lagoon powered up recently, coping with ever-increasing demand by enlarging the bathing area and adapting the facilities. One upgrade is this luxury hotel, which also contains the Michelin-rated Moss restaurant. Had a lottery win? Book the suite, which comes with a private “lava cove” lagoon. **C3**

Budget Option



Lighthouse Inn
Garður

As far as location goes, the Lighthouse Inn is winning. Perched right on the toe of Reykjanes, it’s a clean, warm and welcoming hostel that’s a stone’s throw from Garður’s twin lighthouses. One of them opens as a café in the summer, and on a clear day, you can see all the way to Snæfellsnes. **B2**

Best Meal



Salthúsið
Stamphólsvegur, Grindavík

Grindavík’s “House of baccalao,” Salthúsið, is a spacious, wood-panelled restaurant that takes humble salted cod and places it front and centre on the menu. With a down-to-earth atmosphere and a menu that prides itself on Icelandic recipes and ingredients—especially, of course, fresh local seafood—you’ll come away with a full belly and a smile on your face. It’s right next door to the town pool, so you can take a dip before or after. **C3**

Fancy Option



Moss
The Blue Lagoon

When the Michelin Guide revisited Iceland earlier this year, they confiscated the island’s only Michelin Star, but they also lavished several Bib and Plate awards on new eateries. Moss was one of the recipients, and their upscale New Nordic fare, tasting menus and vegan options are a true treat. **C3**

Runner Up



Papa’s Restaurant
Hafnargata 7a, Grindavík

Serving steaming hot, perfectly battered deep-fried fish pulled straight from Grindavík harbour, it doesn’t get any fresher than the outstanding fish ‘n’ chips at Papa’s restaurant. The chips are chunky, the servings are generous, the service is friendly... and it’s so delicious we wish we could eat it every day. **C3**

Must-See Spot



Seltún
Krýsuvík, Route 42

Reykjanes is a lively, geothermally active peninsula, and there’s nowhere better to feel the heat and power of the living earth than at Seltún in the Krýsuvík valley. The iconic zig-zagging wooden walkway takes you over steaming vents, bubbling fumaroles and gurgling clay pots; the colours vary from earthy to vividly fluorescent. There’s a hiking path to get a view over the area, and more tempting trails lead you up to other hidden hot spots. **F2**

Runners Up



Gunnahver & Reykjanesviti
Reykjanesbær, Route 425

Less quaint but more powerful, the allegedly haunted Gunnahver hot spot sends a torrent of steam jetting into the sky. Nearby, you’ll get a chance to straddle the tectonic divide. The Reykjanesviti lighthouse area has a Great Auk sculpture looking out to sea, marking the spot where the last one was reportedly hunted. **H5**



Hópsnes
Grindavík

On the southern shore of Reykjanes is the thriving seaside town of Grindavík. The Hópsnes peninsula that juts out from the town is a truly curious spot: drive around the winding dirt track to the lighthouse to see lava plains studded with eerie rusting shipwrecks. **C3**

Best Hike



Keilir
Reykjanesbær, Route 41

This cone-shaped mountain is much-admired, standing between Keflavík and Reykjavík. Most people only gaze at its silhouette from the Flybus, but there’s a hiking trail to the summit. It begins just off Route 41, taking you through a lava field and up a rough dirt road before the 378m ascent begins. The path is steep and gravelly in places, so wear sturdy shoes; if you time the 2.5-hour hike well, you’ll get a sublime sunset view. **F2**

Runner Up



Krýsuvík
Krýsuvík, Route 42

There are many hikes in the Krýsuvík geothermal area. The main focus of the region is, understandably, Seltún, but if you have some spare time and a sense of adventure, take a chance on one of the lesser-travelled marked routes—you could be rewarded with a remote geothermal area all to yourself. **D2**

Easy Option



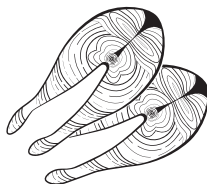
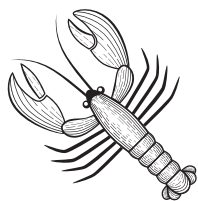
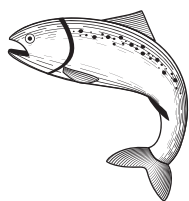
Þorbjörn
Grindavík

This 243m mountain is located between the Blue Lagoon and Grindavík. An easy ascent offers impressive views of the surrounding lava fields and ocean. A narrow cleft scars its peak; you’ll have to squeeze between the tall walls to descend the other side. **C3**



Traditional Icelandic food, Salt fish, Fish Stew, Lobster Soup, Lamb Soup, Vegetable Soup

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Lobster soup to die for. Everyone was so nice and friendly. The locals were very warm as well, they made a point to talk to us and explain the history of the restaurant and harbour.

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.....

Best Bathing Spot



The Blue Lagoon

Norðurljósavegur 9, Grindavík

Iceland's iconic, cinematic, mineral-rich geothermal lagoon is extremely popular—and deservedly so. Sliding into the milky water in the midst of a gnarly lunar landscape is an experience like no other. The water coats your skin in silica; slather on a mineral mask for a rejuvenating spa experience. Our panel gave a shout out to the recent improvements to the pool, which made it feel more spacious than before. Book ahead—it's sometimes sold out.

Map square: C3

Best Museum



Viking World

Víkingabraut 1, Njarðvík

There are a lot of Viking-themed stops around Iceland, but nowhere else will you find a full longboat replica. Viking World in Njarðvík allows you to set foot on the Íslendingur, a longboat built in 1996 and modelled after the famous Gokstad vessel—a close-to-complete Viking ship that was excavated in Norway way back in 1882. You'll also find a Smithsonian-produced exhibition spanning the key events of the whole Viking saga. **C2**

Best Tour



ATV Adventure

Grindavík

Yearning to get close to nature? Straddling a roaring ATV and zooming into the wilderness might not be the most tranquil method, but it quickly gets you into the thick of it. You'll reach impressive spots much faster than by hiking, and you'll be able to crawl over black sand beaches and summit towering mountains that road-trippers can only gaze at longingly through the wind-screen. Hike? Road trip? An ATV tour offers the best of both. **F2**

Best Café



Hjá Höllu

Víkurbraut 62, Grindavík

Hjá Höllu really is a no-brainer when it comes to good food. Seasonal menu? Check. Locally sourced ingredients? Double check. Rip-roaringly delicious? Triple check. This unassuming restaurant is run with a great deal of care and love that translates straight to the plate. Highlights include an open beef sandwich with thin strips of tender meat, the variety of sauces (including a particularly delicious bear-naise) and balsamic onions that our panel still dream about. **C3**

Runners Up



Grindavík Pool

Austurvegi 1, Grindavík

Iceland's standard-issue municipal swimming pools are amongst the best in the world. With naturally heated geothermal water swirling through the outdoor pool, and two hot pots, one of which has a jet massage, you'll come away refreshed—especially if you dare for a plunge in the cold pot on the way out. **C3**

Runners Up



Museum of Rock 'n' Roll

Hjallavegur 2, Keflavík

Icelandic music aficionados can have an informative and fun time at "Rokksafn". The museum attempts to trace the history of Icelandic music, from the 1800s to the present day, via memorabilia, interactive exhibits, and, of course, displays about Iceland's biggest musical exports. **C2**

Runners Up

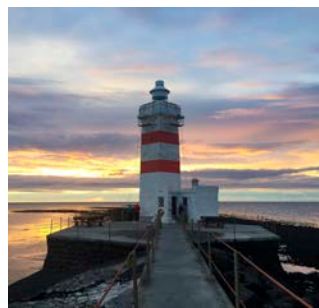


Reykjanes Ring

Various tour providers

There are many Reykjanes tours on offer that will reveal the peninsula's sights and secrets in an easy day-trip. Whether it's a bargain bus ride around the basics, or a tailored private tour that goes further afield, the decision is yours—and you'll have fun either way. **All Over**

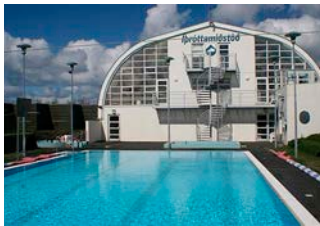
Runners Up



Old Lighthouse Café

Garðskagi, Garður

Built in 1897, but long since obsolete—see the taller, new-fangled lighthouse just a few metres away—the second oldest lighthouse in Iceland is the memorable location of a café during the summertime. Pop by for a coffee and a snack, and to fulfil your lighthouse keeper fantasies. Open June–September only. **B2**



Vogar Pool

Hafnargata 17, Vogar

An all-but forgotten hamlet located just off Route One between Reykjavík and Keflavík, Vogar has a lovely little swimming pool. Drop by for a soak in the hot pot, get some exercise swimming laps, and soak in the authentic feeling of small-town life in Iceland. **C2**



Sudurnes Science and Learning Centre

Garðvegi 1, Sandgerði

For anyone interested in wildlife and natural sciences, the Sudurnes Science and Learning Centre could prove to be a mecca. As well as being an active research institute, they host several exhibitions; their taxidermied specimen collection includes allegedly Iceland's only stuffed walrus. **B2**



Whale Watching

Various locations and providers

Having caught sight of a pod of orcas hunting off the coast at Reykjanesviti, our panel can vouch for the presence of whales around Reykjanes first hand. A whale watching boat tour will get you even closer to the sea giants. Look out for spray plumes; have your camera at the ready. **A1-D3**



Bryggjan Café

Miðgarður 2, Grindavík

For some delicious cakes, coffees, breads, and possibly the best lobster soup in the country, don't miss beloved local haunt Bryggjan Café. Cosy, warm, and inviting, the café is all you could hope for in the winter chill, but it also serves up a delightful outdoor sitting area in the summer. **B3**

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hjá höllu

Fresh Healthy Local

Hjá Höllu is a cozy restaurant located in the town of Grindavík where you can enjoy many healthy dishes in just five minute drive from the Blue Lagoon. Fresh fish from the harbour, chicken, salad and vegetarian/vegan options.



We are also located in Keflavík Airport where you can get a healthy meal to enjoy or take away in time before your flight.



Wood-oven pizza
ready 5 minutes



Fresh local
health food



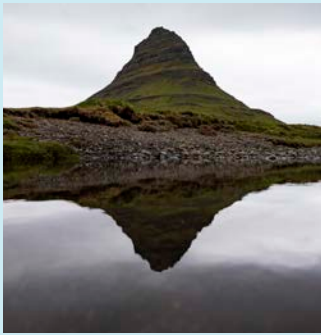
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Mountain: Kirkjufell

Grundarfjörður, Snæfellsnes

On the northern shore of the Snæfellsnes peninsula, not far from the town of Grundarfjörður, is the impressive Kirkjufell. Meaning “Church Mountain,” the 463 m Kirkjufell is entrancing. Broad and flat topped from one angle, but appearing to jut up from the earth like a shark fin when viewed from another side. There’s a reason this mountain is the most photographed in Iceland. **Map square: C11**



Town: Stykkishólmur

Snæfellsnes
Info: visitstykkisholmur.is

Of all the small towns around Iceland’s coastline, Stykkishólmur—population 1,195—is perhaps the most charming. The small harbour is enclosed by a small and easily hikeable cliff that offers views out into the island-dotted fjord, and for such a small place there’s plenty to see and do, including a handful of museums, shops, and restaurants. The perfect spot for a weekend getaway. **D11**



Farm: Háafell

Hvítársíðu, Borgarbyggð
Tel: +354 437 1600

The Icelandic goat is on the decline, so stopping by the country’s only goat farm at Háafell is a must-do in the West. Play with the goats, learn about the breed, and sample some goat cheese and goat milk ice cream. You might even meet a television star: Háafell’s goats appeared on “Game of Thrones.” Whether or not any were harmed in the filming by being consumed by actual dragons remains unconfirmed. **E13**



Museum: Bjarnarhöfn Shark Museum

Bjarnarhöfn, Tel: +354 438-1581
Info: www.bjarnarhofn.is

One of Iceland’s notorious bizarrely specific museums, the Bjarnarhöfn Shark Museum is packed to the brim with shark boats, shark info sheets, shark skeletons, shark stomach contents, and so much more shark related content. If that’s not sharky enough for you, just up the hill is a drafty shack where shark meat hangs down right before your very eyes. We’d recommend you don’t eat it, but hey, it’s your life. Make your own choices. **C11**



Food Tour: Viking Sushi

Stykkishólmur, Tel: +354 433-2254
Info: www.seatours.is

Viking Sushi gives you a two for one deal: a gorgeous cruise among the Breiðafjörður bay and a taste of the freshest seafood around. Right in front of your very eyes, scallops, clams, and sea urchins are plucked from the seafloor and served to you on a giant trough on the bow of the boat. It’s a unique experience your brain won’t soon forget, and a delicious culinary one your tongue won’t either. **D11**



Road Trip: Kaldidalur

Húsafell to Þingvellir

The snowy, glacier-flanked mountain pass of Kaldidalur is a dirt trail which meanders through some of Iceland’s most beautiful scenery. It’s a rough road, no doubt, but one that allows you unfettered access to some of the more obscure locations about Langjökull. On a good day, don’t forget to park and take a hike up to Ok, the dead glacier. The trip starts at Húsafell, eventually ending at Þingvellir. **G14**

USEFUL INFO

Grapevine on the West:
gvpv.is/west
Our articles, info and guides for West Iceland and the Westfjords

Tourist Information:
West Iceland Marketing Office
www.west.is
info@westiceland.is
Tel: +354 462 3300

Emergency services
Tel: 112 (national helpline)

Weather report
en.vedur.is
Recorded info: +354 902 0600

HOW TO GET THERE

By car:
Road conditions
www.road.is
Tel: 1777
(Summer hours: 08:00-16:00 / Winter: 06:30-22:00)

By ferry:
From Stykkishólmur
Ferry to Flatey and Brjánslækur
Schedule & Info:
www.seatours.is

By bus:
National Bus Network
www.bus.is
Tel: +354 540 2700



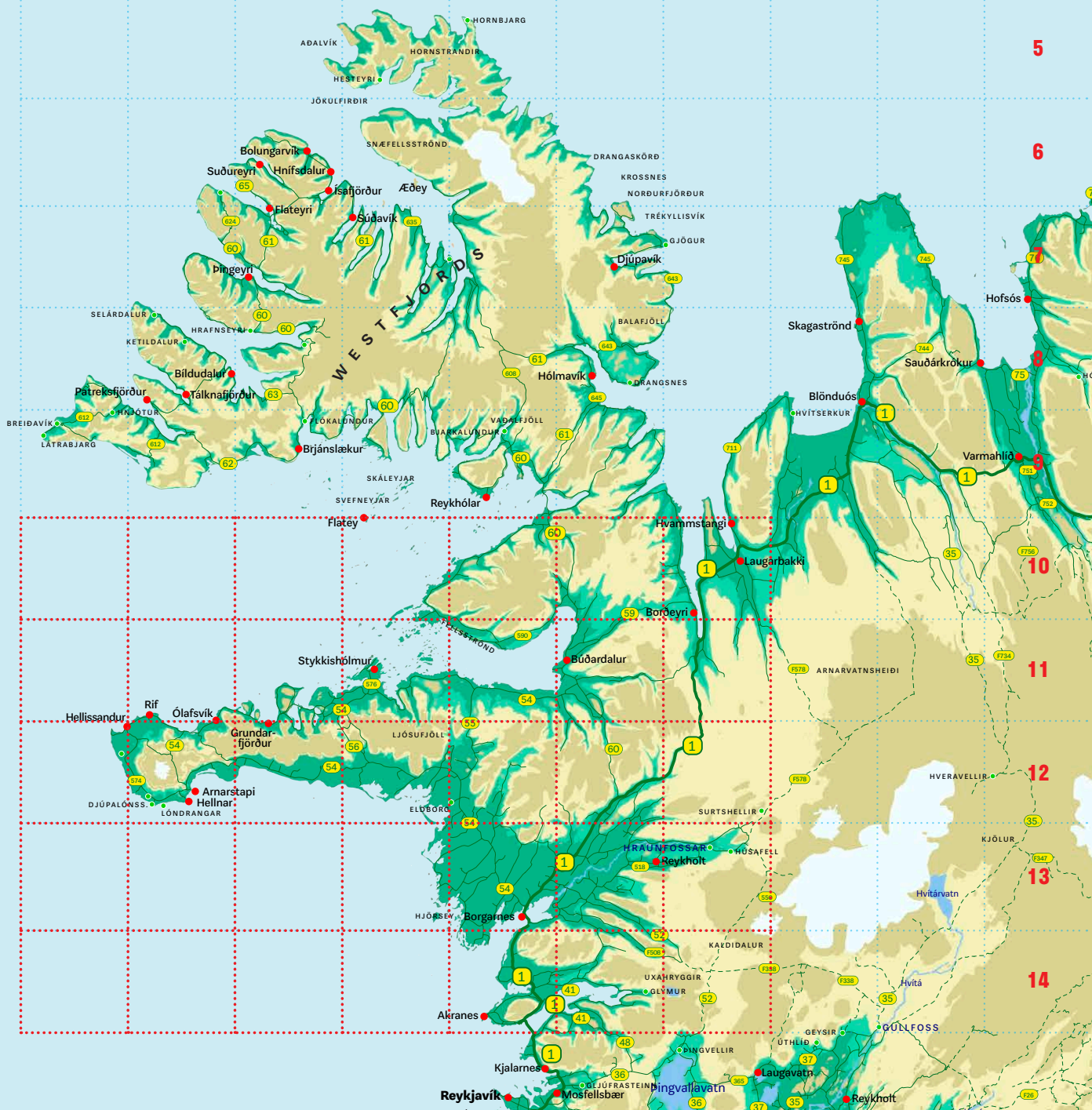
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BEST OF ICELAND:

West

A Reykjavík-adjacent vista of mountains, lava fields, waterfalls and glaciers

West is best! However true that sentiment rings, we'll try a little harder to illustrate what we love about the region. The West of Iceland is a stunning place to explore, offering up some version of the numerous wonders that Iceland at large has become famous for. From the frigid expanse of Langjökull to the otherworldly beacon that is Snæfellsjökull, from the lush serenity of Hvalfjörður to the stark and shapeshifting lava formations of the Snæfellsnes peninsula, from the peaks of mountains to the depths of the lava caves; it is a region rich in well-known sites and hidden gems





**Distance from
Reykjavík:**
75 km

How to get there:
Route One North, turn onto Route
54 at Borgarnes

Car provided by: gocarrental.is
**Accommodation
provided by:** budir.is

West

Under The Weather

High gales and wild waves on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula

Words: **John Rogers** Photos: **John Rogers & a. rawlings**

A sudden blinding flash lights up the room. I wake from a sleepy reverie, leaping up from the bed to the attic room's window to determine its cause. Was it some kind of electrical fault outside, or just a car arriving? Or, could it be...

My eyes scan the murky sky as heavy rain drums on the glass, distorting the dark horizon into a watery scribble. A minute later there's another bright flash. This time, there's no mistaking it. It's that rarest of phenomena in Iceland—a bolt of lightning, forking down silently from the clouds and licking the ground somewhere south of Hótel Búðir.

It shouldn't come as such a surprise. The two hour drive from Reykjavík was beset by violent weather from the off. High gales

buffeted the car as we passed Kjalarnes, and grabbed at the car doors when we pulled over for a break in Borgarnes. Throughout the journey, bands of inky, fast-moving clouds sent freezing rain and volleys of hailstones down at regular intervals. Rounding the tip of the Snæfellsnes peninsula, the raging wind was deafening when we pulled over to look at a frozen waterfall. At the wide beach of Skarðsvík, the tide tore up the beach into the boulder-strewn clefts of the shoreline at a frightening speed; at Lónrangan, the waves crashed in so hard they splashed higher than the rooftop of the closed-up visitors centre.

After a few more blasts of sheet lightning illuminate the churning sky, I pull down the blind, turn up

the radiator, and feel grateful to have reached the warm and comfortable confines of the hotel.

Ever-changing cloudscape

There are few better places to hide from such weather than Hótel Búðir. A luxurious getaway spot located in a small nature reserve, this proud building is surrounded by a spectacular 360° vista of raw Icelandic nature. The house stands

cloudscape of the westward horizon.

The hotel is a welcoming beacon in this engaging wilderness. The lobby has an open fire, the bar has floor to ceiling sea-view windows, and the furniture and decor has a classy, old-world feel. The rooms are nicely appointed and quiet, the upscale restaurant serves hearty portions of fresh fish and local produce, and the generous breakfast buffet has everything you could want to start the day.

“The sea was so high it was splashing the windows of our apartments in Hellissandur, and it pulled down the dunes in Krossavík. The shape of the bay changed.”

on an undulated stretch of coastline where huge shards of ice mass on the white sand beach, backed by the rugged Búðahraun lava field. On a clear day, the towering peak of the Snæfellsjökull glacier dominates the area, standing 1,446m tall against the ever-changing

Salt spray fog

After filling up on coffee, scrambled eggs and fruit, we head out into the grey morning to further explore the peninsula. Snæfellsjökull looks over the nearby hamlet of Hellnar, which is all-but aban-

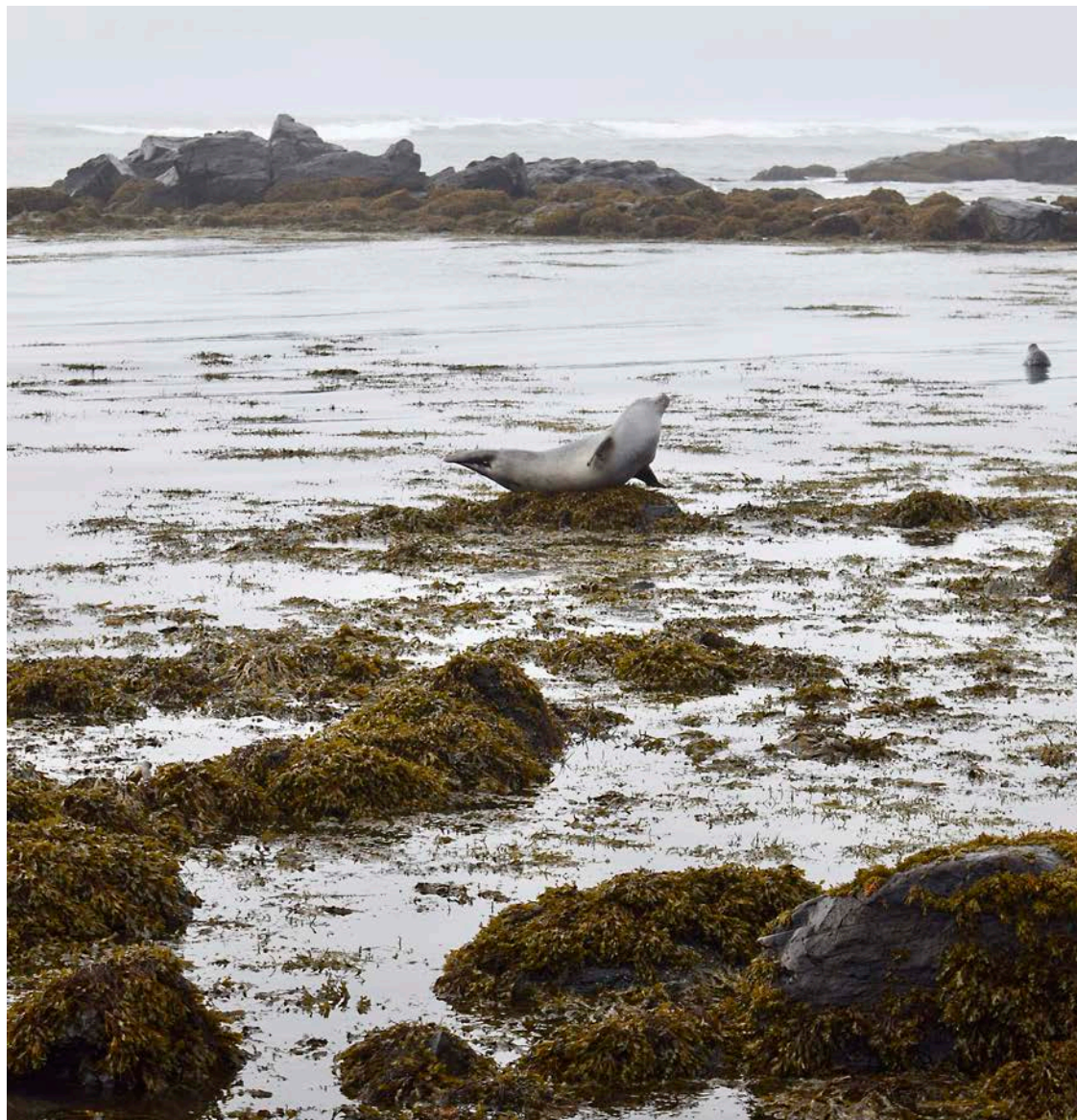
done at this time of year. Past two closed cafés and a Foshotel undergoing renovations, an icy path leads down to the rocky shore, where a large basalt tidal cave is under assault from the high seas. The frothy torrent smashes into the swirling rock formations so hard that it creates a fog of salty spray.

There are several other stops around the tip of the peninsula. At Lóndrangar, two huge spiked sea stacks stand silhouetted against the dim sky, as if in conversation. At Djúpalónsandur, a gaggle of tourists meander between the rusted shards of a 1948 shipwreck that now form a spectral permanent memorial. Back at Skarðsvík, the aftermath of yesterday's storm is visible: seemingly immovable car-sized boulders have shifted around overnight, blocking off rock pools and coves that were open for exploration just a day before.

We drop by the Freezer Hotel and theatre in Rif to find the owner, Kári Viðarsson, working on some improvements to the building's insulation in the spluttering rain. "The waves were unusually high yesterday," he says, taking a break in the cosy lounge. "The sea was so high it was splashing the windows of our apartments in Hellissandur, and it pulled down the dunes in Krossavík. The shape of the bay has changed." He takes a sip of coffee, finishing: "This is a new thing, weather like this."

Animal nature

It isn't only the humans who are noticing the weather. At Ytri-Tunga, the seal colony has moved closer to the shore than usual into a tucked away inlet, where twenty or so plump animals bask on the rocks, flopping into the water occasionally to peer curiously at the gathered crowd of observers.



In Grundarfjörður, an innumerable flock of seagulls are massing over the beach. Thousands of birds wheel in the air as one, circling the cliffs, swooping over the white tideline below and drawing an impromptu audience who've pulled over to watch the spectacle unfold.

As the sky starts to dim, we set out back towards the hotel via the Snæfellsvegur mountain road. Rain starts to fall as we pass the distinctive wedge of Kirkjufell and before long, the windscreen wipers can't work fast enough to sweep away the water. We creep over the

mountain slowly, peering out into the gloaming. In awe of the wild nature and violent elements of Snæfellsnes, the car is enveloped by darkness and deluge alike, and we're beyond grateful when the lights of Hótel Búdir appear once more through the downpour. 🍷



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BEST OF ICELAND 2019

West

Go West, life is peaceful there

Best Accommodation



Hótel Búðir

Búðir, Snæfellsnes

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Hotel Búðir is our favourite luxurious westerly bolthole once more. "It's still the best," one panellist declared. We can't argue. Inside and out, Hotel Búðir is a charming destination. Whether you explore the picturesque surroundings, with views of the majestic Snæfellsjökull one way and the sea the other, or plant yourself in the handsomely appointed lounge taking in the sights through Búðir's antique telescope, you can't go wrong. **Map square: B12**

Runner Up



Hótel Húsafell
Stórarjódur, Húsafell

Another classy standout in the West, Hótel Húsafell "has it all," as one panellist put it. "A beautiful building, breathtaking scenery, and comfortable beds." There's also a swimming pool and an excellent restaurant and bar serving up toothsome tasting menus and dangerously good cocktails. **G13**

Budget Option



Freezer Hostel
Hafnargata 16, Rif

Need an affordable place to stay in Hellissandur? Freezer Hostel. Looking for some local performance art? Freezer Hostel. What about some exciting street art? You guessed it: Freezer Hostel. Located on the cusp of the Snæfellsjökull National Park, it's a lively crash pad with a fun social calendar throughout the summer. **B11**

Best Restaurant



Bjargarsteinn Mathús
Sólvellir 15, Grundarfjörður

Location, location, location! Plus a charming old-world interior and delicious fare. Bjargarsteinn Mathús makes it worth the drive to Grundarfjörður. "It's very charming and the food is fantastic," raved one panellist, who was particularly impressed by the seafood soup—brimming with shrimps, juicy king prawns and bright orange scallops—and the perfectly prepared lamb fillets. The waterside location, with a view across the bay to the iconic Kirkjufell, further augments an already memorable dining experience. **C12**

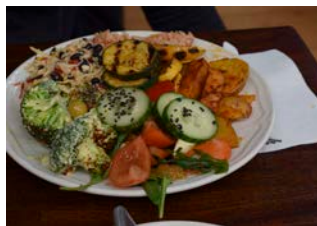
Runner Up



Hótel Húsafell
Stórarjódur, Húsafell

Even if it isn't Tuesday, you should treat yourself to a tasting menu at perfectly remote Hótel Húsafell. The tasting menu presents the freshest Icelandic ingredients, creatively prepared and artfully plated. The service is also top notch. "It's just really, really good," enthused the panel. A countryside haven. **G13**

Budget Pick



The Settlement Centre
Brákarbraut 13-15, Borgarnes

Don't simply drive through Borgarnes. Our panel sang the praises of the lunch buffet at the Settlement Centre, which boasts fresh, local ingredients, salads, soups and more. "I cannot recommend this highly enough," exclaimed one panellist. Vegetarians can come hungry; the plant-based options are top notch. **E13**

Best Café



Gilbakki Kaffihús
Gilbakki, Hellissandur

Don't pass through Hellissandur without dropping in on your grandma. Okay, so maybe not your actual grandma—but we imagine she'd be right at home in this comfortable café. "I love the cosiness of the place," said one panellist. "Enjoy a piece of cake with your coffee." Another panellist called Gilbakki the perfect place to while away a summer day, enjoying the view of the glacier, framed by antique lace curtains. **B12**

Runners Up



Café Kaja
Stillholt 23, Akranes

The only certified organic cafe on the island, "Kaja is a treasure," one panellist exclaimed. With fish soup, falafel salad, avocado toast, cakes, coffee and more on the menu, it's all you could you ask for in the Western outpost of Akranes. Plus, there's an organic market—something the denizens of 101 are still missing. **E13**



Skemman Kaffihús
Hvanneyrabraut, Hvanneyri

If your tummy is growling for, as one panellist put it, "the best waffles in West Iceland, without a doubt," then let Skemman be your beacon. Located in the oldest house in Hvanneyri, this cosy café brews Reykjavík Roasters coffees to serve alongside those aforementioned waffles. Did we mention the waffles? Waffles. **E13**

West

Go West, in the open air

Best Tour



Snæfellsjökull Glacier Tour

Various providers, Snæfellsnes National Park

The Snæfellsjökull glacier is a staggering 1,446m high, crowning the tip of Snæfellsnes. Many would be happy just gazing up at its icy form—but then you'd be missing out on the best tour in the West. There are a couple of ways to summit Snæfellsjökull. 3-5 hour tours will deliver you to the highest accessible point in a snowcat, with the option of skiing back down; other tours allow you to conquer the glacier on foot. **Map square: B12**

Runner Up



Viðgelmir Cave
Fljótstunga

The West is riddled with caves, but you'll need a guide to safely explore them. One cave with regular guided tours is Viðgelmir. The tour brings you into the heart of the largest lava cave in Iceland, to explore the lava formations therein and gape at the earth's power. **G12**

Runner Up



Into the Glacier
Langjökull, leaving from Húsafell

So, you've seen glaciers in the distance—but have you been inside one? Into the Glacier is a tour that gives you the opportunity to do just that, via a man-made tunnel into Langjökull. It's a fascinating glimpse at the lifespan of the ice giant, with history literally frozen into the tunnel's walls. **H13**

Must-See Spot



Flatey
Breiðafjörður

You know that quintessential summer feeling of time slowing down? The smell of the season—grass, wildflowers, sea spray—floats on the breeze and there's nothing on your agenda but to breathe it in. That's Flatey. Drive to Stykkishólmur—a gem of the West in itself—and catch the ferry out onto Breiðafjörður to spend a day among Flatey island's colourful houses, impossibly green grass and undeniable charm—and puffins. Said one panellist: "It's a magical place." **A10**

Runners Up



Snæfellsjökull
Snæfellsnes

All of Iceland's glaciers are magnificent, but Snæfellsjökull is something else. It glows. It beckons you to gaze upon its majesty. You cannot say you've been to West Iceland unless you've basked in its glory, or, better still, booked a tour to the top of the glistering leviathan to explore it up close. **B12**



Arnarstapi & Hellnar
Útnesvegur, Snæfellsnes

These two coastal villages are just a stone's throw from one another—a 6-minute drive, or an hour-long stroll—and both come recommended by our panel as places to sit and watch the sea life as the sun sets. Fly over to Arnarstapi for seabirds, or roll down to Hellnar to try and spot seals. **B12**

Best Hike



Glymur
Botnsdalur valley, Hvalfjörður

If you want a hike to brag about, try Glymur. Iceland's second-tallest waterfall, Glymur plummets an impressive 198m, and it is a real gem of the oft-overlooked or bypassed entirely Hvalfjörður. Be warned, though—it's no stroll in the park. The hike is a four-hour round trip on uneven terrain, and crossing a stream. Sturdy hiking boots and a decent level of physical fitness are required, but the payoff is, as our panel puts it, "Breathtaking!" **F14**

Runners Up



Arnarstapi to Hellnar
Snæfellsnes

If you need to stretch your legs on a Snæfellsnes road trip, this is a no-brainer. It's an easy coastal walk that takes around 50 minutes (one way); in exchange for your minimal effort, you'll see crashing waves, lively bird cliffs, lush valleys and possibly a playful seal or two. **B12**



Hafnarfjall
Borgarnes

This trek up a volcano isn't for beginners, but, as the panel exclaimed, "Oh my, those views!" Your hike begins near the base of the bridge running across the fjord from Borgarnes, and will take you to a height of 844m. It can be windy, so check the forecast before lacing up your boots. **E13**



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BEST OF ICELAND 2019

West

Go West, be all that you can be

Best Road Trip

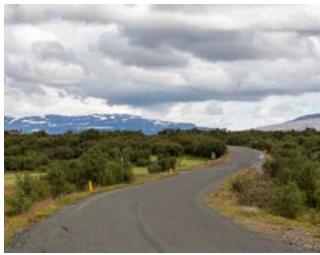


Snæfellsnes
Snæfellsnes

Forget the Golden Circle, Snæfellsnes is where it's at. Oft referred to as "Iceland in miniature," this peninsula has it all: mesmerizing lava formations, bird cliffs, seals, picturesque old churches, twisted remnants of a shipwreck, a shark museum, street art—and the cherry on top is Snæfellsjökull glacier. You can do it on a day trip from Reykjavik, but a more leisurely drive is preferable. Bunk somewhere for a night or two, and take your time.

Map square: A12-D11

Runners Up



Borgarfjörður
Borgarnes-Húsafell

Borgarfjörður makes for a great road trip. Start at the Hraunfossar and Barnafoss waterfalls; check out the museum in Reykholt, and drop by Húsafell; catch the view to Langjökull, then circle the Kalmanstunga lava field, visiting the Viðgelmir lava tube; end up at the Krauma spa, which is powered by the Deildartunguhver hot spring. **E13**

The Waterfall Circle
Hvalfjörður-Akranes

The South has the Golden Circle, the North has the Diamond Circle, but the West has the Waterfall Circle. This route delivers you to one stunning chute after another—six, to be precise—while driving through Hvalfjörður, Borgarfjörður, Borgarnes and Akranes. Glymur is a four-hour round-trip hike, so this could be a multi-day adventure. **E14-G13**

Best Museum/Gallery



Library of Water
Bókhöðustígur 17, Stykkishólmur

Vatnasafn—or The Library of Water—is an eye-opening museum. Made by Roni Horn, the main room is a display of glass cylinders filled with meltwater from Iceland's glaciers. It's fascinating how the colour of each sample is unique, and sobering to think that more than one of these samples comes from a glacier that no longer exists. Eventually, as the glaciers keep melting, the samples in the museum could be all that's left of Iceland's mighty ice giants.

D11

Runners Up



Borgarnes Museum
Bjarnarbraut 4-6, Borgarnes

"It's a solid museum, whether you're interested in history, art or nature," said the panel. The artfully arranged Borgarnes Museum gives visitors an overview of the flora, fauna, and history of the area, but it's the permanent childhood-themed exhibition that'll keep you engaged with its treasure trove of hidden artefacts. **E13**

Eiríksstaðir Living Museum
Haukdalsvegur, Buðardalur

Eiríksstaðir is the farmstead of Erik the Red, the birthplace of Leifur Eriksson, a.k.a. Leif the Lucky, a.k.a. the first European in North America. See where the legend was born and learn about Icelandic farm life 1,000 years ago. "It's one of the most historic sites of Iceland," noted the panel. **F11**

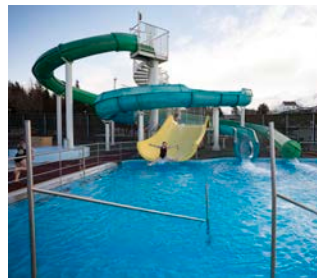
Best Bathing Spot



Krauma
Deildartunguhver, Reykholt

Asking for an Icelander's favourite bathing spot is sensitive business. One panellist said their favourite is "somewhere I want to keep a secret so it doesn't get too busy." Still, several panellists sang the praises of the Krauma spa, with one declaring it a "10/10." It's a stark and stylish place featuring steam rooms and hot pots powered by the sulphurous water of Deildartunguhver. Your muscles will thank you for visiting this (literal) hotspot. **B12**

Runners Up



Borgarnes Pool
Þorsteinsgata 1, Borgarnes

Calling all families and the young at heart: Borgarnes Pool has not one slide, but three. That's right: three slides! This swim palace also boasts an indoor and outdoor pool, hot pots and mountain views. As one panellist said, "it's a no-brainer." **E13**



Guðlaug
Langisandur, Akranes

These beachside hot pots are brand new, and they're an impressive piece of design. Plus, they're never crowded, so you can soak your muscles in one of the geothermally heated pools and look across the bay toward all the suckers in Reykjavik that aren't in Guðlaug. **H13**

Best Shop



Witchcraft Shop
Búðir, Snæfellsnes

This fascinating store is a true one-off. Tucked away in an unassuming cottage next door to Hotel Búðir, you'll recognise it for the Icelandic stave stencilled onto the wall. Step inside, and you'll be entranced by scores of runes, tinctures, charms, spell kits, salves and more, all made from ingredients sourced from Icelandic nature. The pair of witches who run the place will no doubt be present, and they're happy to share some of their secrets. **C12**

Runners Up



Blíomasetrið
Skúlagata 13, Borgarnes

This quaint plant and flower store is a lovely place to shop, and also to spend some time—it doubles as a homely café. Get a cup of coffee and cake, shuffle through the various fortune-telling card decks, and leave with a radiant peace lily or some flowers for your home. **E13**



Leir 7
Aðalgata 20, Stykkishólmur

Located on the main strip of Stykkishólmur, Leir 7 sells eye-catching and unusual ceramics. Run by Sigríður Erla Guðmundsdóttir, a graduate of the Icelandic Academy of the Arts, everything in the store is made from Icelandic clay; they'll pack your purchase carefully to get it home safely. **D11**



KRAUMA

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Krauma offers five relaxing natural geothermal baths, a cold tub, two steambaths and a relaxation room where you can rest by the fireplace.

At Krauma Restaurant you can enjoy Icelandic cuisine with emphasis on fresh ingredients from local farms. Relax with the spectacular view of Europe's most powerful hot spring.



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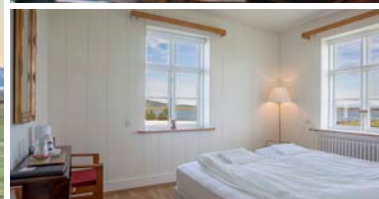
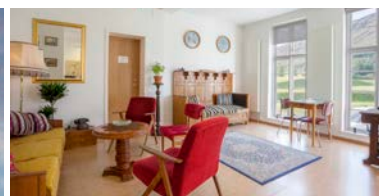
www.krauma.is

Deildartunguhver, 320 Reykholt

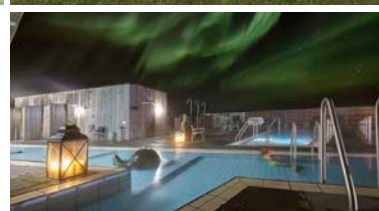
Krauma is located at Deildartunguhver,
a 97 km (60 miles) drive from Reykjavik.



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Gallery: Húsið

Patreksfjörður, Tel. +354 695-7620
Info: www.husid-workshop.com

The Húsið Creative Space brings art and culture from around Iceland and beyond to Patreksfjörður. Stop by for a monthly exhibition programme, artist talks, events, and a store selling local handicrafts, Reykjavík Roasters coffee, posters, design objects and more. If you fall in love and decide to move to Patreksfjörður, you could also hire a desk in the co-working space on the second floor. Above all else, Húsið proves that one need not be in the big city for some cutting-edge art. **Map square: B8**



Place: Látrabjarg

Route 612
Info: westfjords.is

Sitting pretty on the westernmost point of Iceland, Látrabjarg could best be called the avian metropolis of Iceland. A lush green cliff that juts abruptly down more than 400 metres into the Atlantic, Látrabjarg is the perfect place to laze around and watch the puffins dance above your head. Birds in this location are particularly tame, and thus it's a great location for photography, bird-watching or just general enjoyment. **A9**



Town: Ísafjörður

Info: isafjordur.is

The regional capital of the Westfjords is Ísafjörður, an old merchant town that's definitely worth a visit. It's the cultural capital of the area, and around the turn of the 20th century, Ísafjörður was the second-biggest town in Iceland, with a history filled with witch trials and industry. Today, it has a population of only 2,600, but despite its location deep in the Westfjords, it remains a lively town with three museums—including the oldest row of houses in Iceland—two bars, and a movie theatre. Its houses are old, and its people proud. **C6**



Area: Hornstrandir

Accessible only by boat, horse or hike
Info: westfjords.is

This largely uninhabited peninsula is so far off the beaten track that you have to either undertake a lengthy hike or get a boat ride there. The only way to get there is by boat, or as part of a multi-day hike. The trouble is worth it: it's a hidden preserve of outstanding natural beauty, and a haven for Arctic foxes, which are protected in the region. In summer, it's also something of a hiking mecca, with campsites and all the trails you could want. **D-E5**



Place: Djúpavík

Strandir, Route 643
Info: djupavik.is

Djúpavík is a far-flung and breath-taking hamlet around a rough dirt track deep in the Westfjords—be sure to check ahead that the road is serviced because it's truly sketchy. A handful of houses and a rusting shipwreck stand nestled next to a huge, crumbling factory building that seems like a surreal vision in the depths of the Strandir coast. The factory was abandoned when the fish vanished, and now serves as a workshop, museum and gallery; the workers' quarters are now a cosy and informal family-run hotel. **F7**



Museum: Museum of Witchcraft & Sorcery

Hólmavík, Tel: +354 897 6525
Info: galdrasyning.is

A weathered wooden structure with a turf roof, Hólmavík's main tourist attraction may look underwhelming, but like its subject, it's got some magic. The museum's most famous acquisition is a replica of a pair of "necropants": trousers made of human skin, which allegedly dispense gold from the crotch for those brave or psychotic enough to make a pair. If that tickles your occult bone, indulge your morbid side with a visit. **F8**

USEFUL INFO

Grapevine on the Westfjords:
gvp.is/westfjords
Our articles, info and guides for West Iceland and the Westfjords

Tourist Information:
West Iceland Marketing Office
www.west.is
info@westiceland.is
Tel: +354 462 3300

Emergency services
Tel: 112 (national helpline)

Weather report
en.vedur.is
Recorded info: +354 902 0600

HOW TO GET THERE

By domestic airline:

Ísafjörður (IFJ)
Domestic flights to and from Reykjavík.

Main airline operator:
www.airiceland.is
Tel: +354 570 3000

Other airports are at Bildudalur and Gjógur, with flights to and from Reykjavík serviced by eagleair.is

By car:
Road conditions
www.road.is
Tel: 1777
(Summer hours: 08:00-16:00 / Winter: 06:30-22:00)

By ferry:
From Stykkishólmur
Ferry to Flatey and Brjánslækur
Schedule & Info:
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BEST OF ICELAND 2019

Westfjords

Breathe in, breathe out

Best Accommodation



Hotel Djúpavík

Djúpavík, Strandir

Frozen in time in the smallest village in Iceland, Hotel Djúpavík is more than just a hotel: it's an experience. Hotel Djúpavík's haven-like atmosphere encapsulates the word 'unforgettable.' There's an abandoned herring factory-turned-museum, a shipwreck, and the surrounding wilderness to keep you company. The panel praised the hotel's homely atmosphere, friendly staff and—of course—location. "All you hear at night is the nearby waterfall, the tide, and the birds," said one panellist. "It's so peaceful."

Map square: F7

Runner Up



Heydalur

Mjóifjörður, Ísafjörður

"Entering Heydalur is like entering a little utopian fantasy," exclaimed one panellist. In a picturesque valley near Ísafjörður, it's more than just a place to sleep, boasting a guesthouse, campsite, restaurant, swimming pool, greenhouse, farm, and recreation centre. It's a perfect base for outdoor activities in the Westfjords and you can try local food and bathe in one of the best pools in the country. A gorgeous wilderness sanctuary. **C6**

Runner Up



Hótel Laugarhóll

Hólmavík

Located in the quiet hamlet of Bjarnafjörður, Laugarhóll is, according to the panel, "the perfect spot for peace and quiet." In its immediate vicinity is a 25-metre outdoor geothermal pool, and a small natural hot pot with panoramic views of the unbridled Westfjords nature. **B8**

Best Meal



Tjörúhúsið

Neðstakaupstað, Ísafjörður

This was an easy one for the panel. "It's the best fish restaurant in Iceland," said one panellist. "What else can you say?" With communal tables, low wooden ceilings, warm lighting and a seemingly endless buffet, Tjörúhúsið offers an informal take on fine-dining in an 18th century fishing building. The fish comes straight from the harbour, so dishes change daily—it could be anything from crunchy gellur to wolffish in cream cheese sauce. Book ahead, and come hungry. **C6**

Runners Up



Restaurant Galdur

Höfðagata 8, Hólmavík

Don't let the exterior fool you. Attached to the Icelandic Museum of Sorcery and Witchcraft, the modest Restaurant Galdur is a true hidden gem, full of authentic Icelandic grub. The panel recommend the locally-harvested blue mussels—but if they're not in stock, the fish soup is positively divine. **F8**



Malarhorn

Grundargata 17, Drangsnæs

A low-key restaurant, Malarhorn offers a down-to-earth selection of Iceland's finest. "There's something about looking out towards Grímsey on Steingrímsfjörður and eating the tasty fish caught by local fisherman earlier that day," said the panel, fondly. The catfish with pepper sauce comes recommended. **F8**

Must-See Spot



Dynjandi

Just off Route 60

Iceland—and particularly the Westfjords—is dripping with waterfalls, but Dynjandi is a show-stopper, nonetheless. Cascading down a series of levels like a tiered wedding cake, it has an immense presence that must be seen to be understood. For the full experience, check out the view of Dynjandi from across the fjord before seeing it up-close. The difference in scale is breathtaking. There's also a lovely picnic spot at the bottom. **C8**

Runners Up



South Westfjords Beaches

Southern Westfjords

The southern Westfjords area is famous for its beaches, include the yellow sand of Barðaströnd and the red sand of Rauðisandur. Both are off the beaten track, making them an ideal spot for tranquil strolls and wildlife spotting. Walk out to the sand reefs, stare out into the bay, and keep your eyes peeled for seals. **A9-A11**

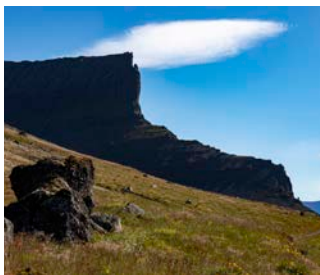


Trékyllisvík

Trékyllisvík, Árneshreppur

The remote cove of Trékyllisvík is located deep in the sparsely-populated Árneshreppur. Hemmed in by mountains, it's the perfect place for birdwatching and seal-spotting. Mostly undiscovered by tourists, this stark fishing village seems stuck in time. Take a walk along the road towards Munaðarnes to see the jagged peaks of Drangaskörð. **F7**

Best Hike



Kaldbakur
Dýrafjörður

Directly between Dýrafjörður and Arnarfjörður lies Kaldbakur, the highest point of the “Alps of the Westfjords.” Unlike the flat-topped, glacier-shaped mountains you might expect in Iceland, this one is steep and pointy and, as such, it’s recommended that only those who are physically fit, with good hiking gear attempt this hike. That said, the view is worth it, with a 360° expanse of valleys, lakes, mountains, and grasslands for your eyes to drink in. **B7**

Best Bathing Spot



Krossneslaug
Route 643, past Árneshreppur

Straight up the road from Djúpavík, this old-school bathing spot is quite literally where the road ends. Sandwiched between the mountains and the sea, it offers a wild and positively sublime pool experience. “By the time you make it there on that rough road you’re exhausted, and jumping in the pool is that much more rewarding,” said the panel. “Those views out to the sea from the edge of the pool are just incredible.” **D7**

Best Bar



Vagninn
Hafnarstræti 19, Flateyri

An almost unanimous pick, Vagninn is without a doubt the most happening bar in the Westfjords. “It’s a legendary spot, and it always gets me in a good mood,” said one panellist. Known for its tasty food, great beer selection, live music, local vibe, and rowdy crowd, Vagninn proves that you can find that sweaty, smiley bar ambience, even in the middle of nowhere. **C7**

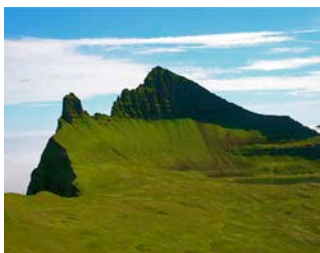
Best Café



Simbahöllin
Fjardargata 5, Þingeyri

Who says you can’t get Belgian-style waffles in the middle of nowhere? Certainly not Simbahöllin. This cafe is nestled in the tiny fishing village of Þingeyri, and it was another near-unanimous pick from the panel. “It has the best coffee, the best waffles, and the jam is magic!” exclaimed one panellist. “It’s also worth the stop just to sit in that beautifully restored old building,” another added. They make a damn good latte, too. **C7**

Runners Up



Hornbjarg
Hornstrandir

The crowning jewel of Hornstrandir—the uninhabited northernmost point of the Westfjords—is Hornbjarg. Only accessible by a boat ride and five hour hike, it’s a series of lush, green cliffs that drop abruptly down into the harsh Arctic waves below, with nothing standing between you and the North Pole. **E5**

Runners Up



Pollurinn
Tálknafjörður

A few kilometres outside of Tálknafjörður, this idyllic fjordside bathing spot offers an unforgettable, jaw-dropping view of the surrounding mountains. There are a couple of hot pots of different temperatures. It’s open 24/7, so feel free to arrive late to soak while the sun sets. **C8**

Runners Up



Húsið
Hrannargata 2, Ísafjörður

“It’s a social hub,” said one panel member in regards to Ísafjörður’s beloved Húsið. “It has a decent selection of my favourite Icelandic beers,” another agreed. “And the atmosphere is really nice.” A café by day, Húsið transforms into the best type of small town pub later on. Expect to make new friends. **C6**

Newcomer



Heimabyggð
Aðalstræti 22b, Ísafjörður

Heimabyggð’s cosy, wooden interior breeds relaxation. The panel praised the café, which opened only this year, for their coffee, fresh sourdough bread, beer selection and general atmosphere, which they described as healthy and homey. Expect large portions, larger lattes and lots of laughter. **C6**



Seljalandsdalur to Syðridalur
Seljalandsdalur

The valley of Syðridalur is a prime location for spotting eiders, bar-tailed godwits, black-headed gulls, and many other winged inhabitants of Iceland. It’s also surrounded by awe-inspiring views. Start in the skiing area in Seljalandsdalur and hike six hours to a beautiful vista overlooking the picturesque Hnífsdalur and Ísafjörður. **C6**



Heydalur
Ísafjörður

Heydalur offers four choices: two indoor pools, a warm swimming pool, and a hot tub. Housed in a greenhouse surrounded by fruit trees, it’s a true oasis. Don’t miss the natural hot pot—it’s only accessible by walking across a cold, narrow glacial stream. But that just makes it all the more worth it, right? **F6**



Edinborgarhúsið
Aðalstræti 7, Ísafjörður

Edinborgarhúsið could best be described as the cultural centre of Ísafjörður. With everything from rowdy rock and rap gigs to jazz nights, the venue is certainly a mixed-bag, but one that works steadfastly to bring the best of Icelandic culture all the way to the far reaches of the Westfjords. **C6**

Runner Up



Stúkuhúsið
Aðalstræti 50, Patreksfjörður

Stúkuhúsið walks the line between diner and café, but its warm atmosphere and friendly service make it the perfect place to stop for a bite of cake and a hot cup of joe. “It’s like being at your grandma’s house,” said one panellist. “And the cakes are homemade!” **B8**

BEST OF ICELAND 2019

Westfjords

The Westfjords are so foxy

Best Tour



Hornstrandir

Northern Westfjords

This was an easy one for the panel. “Take any tour out to Hornstrandir,” they said. Lying at the northernmost point of the Westfjords, Hornstrandir is a deserted region that is inaccessible except via boat, or a days-long hike. There are no roads, no hotels, no campsites—not even toilets. That said, you’ll be rewarded with an immersive tract of Icelandic nature. With sheer cliffs, wide valleys and abandoned villages, “it feels like the end of the earth out there.” **D5**

Runner Up



Whale Watching
Hólmavík

In Hólmavík, you’ll probably see a humpback no more than a stone’s throw from the town centre. The calm bay has smooth currents, so it’s a perfect place to see the giant marine mammals. Our panellists recommend Láki Tours. “I don’t think they’ve ever not seen whales on that tour,” they said. **F8**

Runner Up



Vigur Island
Ísafjörður

This tiny island, smack in the middle of Ísafjarðardjúp, has more avian residents than humans, including puffins. Reachable via boat from Ísafjörður or by taking a kayak tour, it’s an afternoon trip full of birdwatching bliss. Make sure to pay attention to the shoreline, too—you might just see some sunbathing seals. **D6**

Best Museum



Samúel Jónsson Museum
Brautarholt, Selárdalur

Imagine this: You’re driving through one of the most isolated areas of Iceland on an unserviced 25km dirt track. Suddenly, you come upon a house surrounded by bizarre, brightly coloured, cartoonish sculptures. Well, welcome to the Samúel Jónsson Museum. Samúel was a self-taught artist and a hermit who used his pension money for plaster, which he used to make the memorable oddities that litter the yard surrounding his jaunty white and red house. “It’s wonderfully surreal,” said the panel. **B8**

Runners Up



Arctic Fox Centre
Eyrardalur, Súðavík

Stopping at the Arctic Fox Centre is a magical afternoon for adults and kids alike. Arctic foxes are, in fact, the only terrestrial mammal native to Iceland. Famously elusive, they’re also amongst the hardest to spot in the wild, so the centre is your best bet to get close to one. **D7**



Sea Monster Museum
Dalbraut, Bildudalur

There’s no better place to learn about Iceland’s supernatural sea creatures than the tiny coastal town of Bildudalur. Indeed, Arnarfjörður is said to host many of them. This museum is dedicated to studying this branch of folklore with a loving, academic touch. Come with an open mind and you might leave a believer. **B8**

Best Road Trip



Southern Westfjords
Brjánslækur to Dynjandi

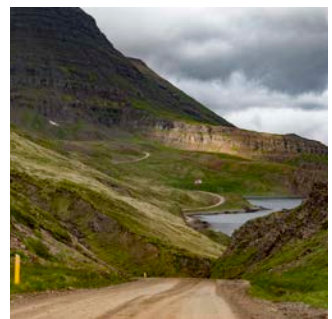
The southern Westfjords contain some of the most breathtaking scenery in Iceland. Start at Brjánslækur, where the ferry from Snæfellsnes comes in, and drive west on Highway 62 to the Rauðasandur red sand beach. Next, turn onto Highway 612 for the beautiful bird cliffs of Látrabjarg, before heading up to Patreksfjörður to check out the Húsið art space. Take Route 63 to the Samúel Jónsson Museum, then cross Dynjandisheiði for a perfect finale at the incomparable Dynjandi waterfall. **C9-C8**

Runners Up



Súðavík To Þingeyri
Súðavík To Þingeyri

Here’s your itinerary: Start with the foxes in Súðavík, go to Ísafjörður for a snúður at the Old Bakery and lunch at Tjörúhúsið, head to Suðureyri for a soak at the pool, jaunt to Flateyri for a pint at Vagninn, and end with some coffee and waffles at Simbahöllin. Now that’s a day well-spent in Iceland. **D7-C7**



Strandir
Route 643

“If you want remote, this is it,” said the panel of the Strandir road. “It’s only for confident drivers, but you’re treated to sheer cliffs with mist clinging to their tops, waterfalls, beaches, and total solitude for hours.” Stop at the Djúpavík factory to see their latest exhibit, and finish at Krossneslaug. **F7-G7**



NO. 1 PIZZA IN ICELAND

SOURCE: GALLUP, 2017 & 2018



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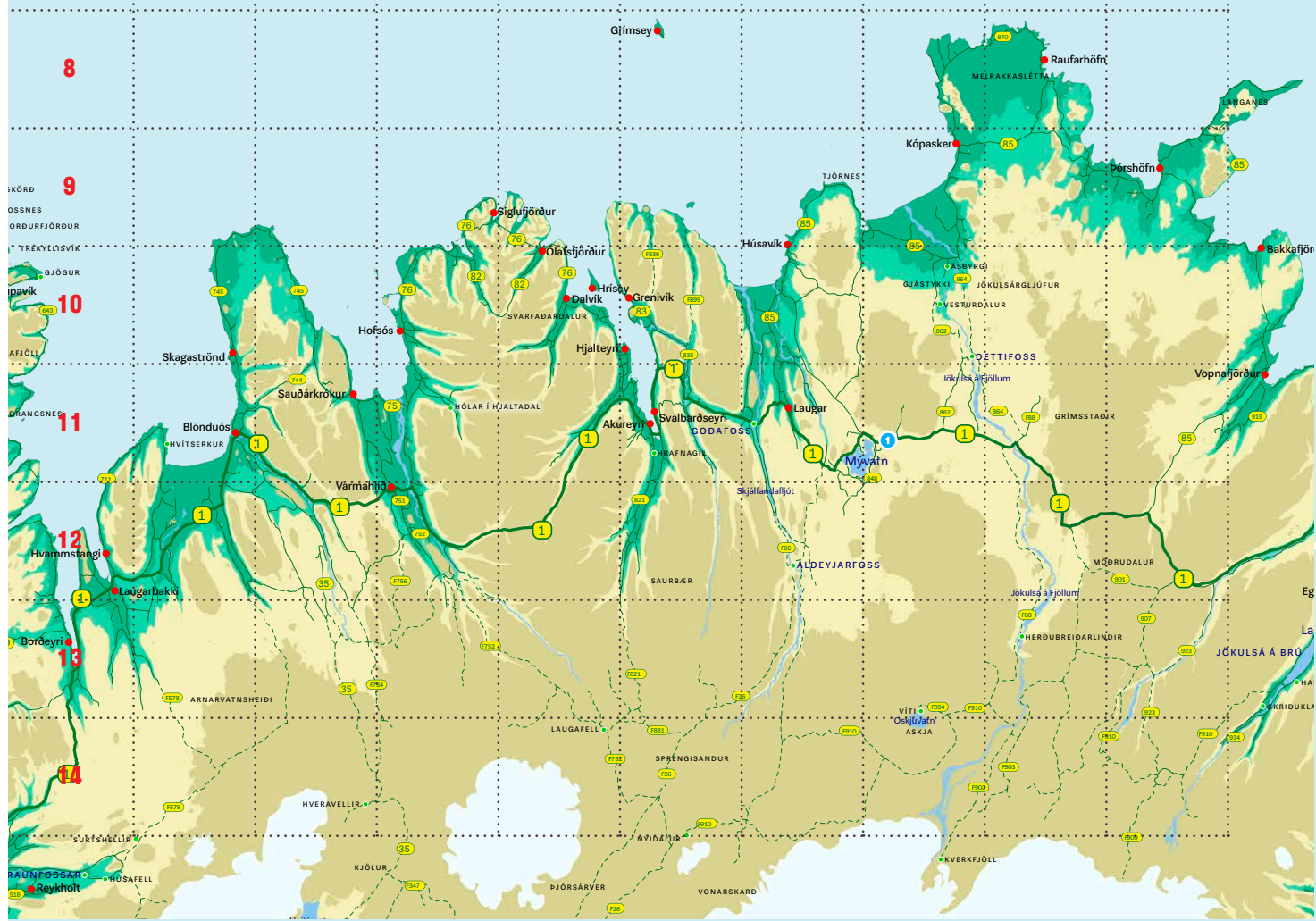
12

North Iceland is a bucket-list of must-experience majesty. As the capital of the north, Akureyri is Iceland's second-largest city and provides a fantastic base from which to explore fjords, the Arctic Ocean, and the volcanic desert. Travelling to the northern tip of Eyjafjörður delivers you to the once-rich herring village of Siglufjörður. Head east on the Diamond Circle to visit cetaceanophilic Húsavík, the volcanic fantasia of Lake Mývatn, and the glacial waterfall Dettifoss. In summer months, you have great access to the Icelandic highlands with highlights of Hveravellir's geothermal area and Askja caldera. The remote northeast is a coastal paradise for birdlife, well worth a visit for those craving rural beauty.

BEST OF ICELAND:

North

Lakes, lava, hikes,
herring and whales





Diving Centre: Strýtan

Hjalteyri, Nr. Akureyri

Info: strytan.is

In the ocean water of Eyjafjörður sits a submarine phenomenon. Strýtan and Arnarnesstrýtan are hydrothermal limestone chimneys, located in the Arctic Ocean at a depth of just 70 metres. They have formed from a mineral-rich freshwater hot spring bubbling through the seabed over the past 11,000 years. Hydrothermal chimneys are popular research sites as ecosystems for the earliest known life forms. Strýtan is among the top five cold-water dive sites worldwide for experienced recreational divers.

Map square: **F8**



Site: Krafla

Nr. Lake Mývatn

Info: northiceland.is

One of Iceland's most active volcanoes, Krafla erupted nine times between 1975 and 1984. Walk the still-smoking Leirhnjúkur lava field by the explosion crater Víti ('Hell' in Icelandic), teeming with vibrant moss and ribbons of bizarre lava formations. Nearby Krafla Geothermal Centre is a great way to learn about sustainable energy and geothermal power production. **H11**



Waterfall: Aldeyjarfoss

Sprengisandsleið

Aldeyjarfoss is a stunning 20m-high waterfall tumbling over ancient basalt columns, midway in the glacial river Skjálfandafhljót. The waterfall is positioned on the northern edge of the epic highland road Sprengisandur, and has been under threat of disappearing if potential hydropower dam construction is approved. It's a challenging drive that would need a 4x4 to do, but Geotravel runs private tours to make getting there easy. **G12**

USEFUL INFO

Grapevine on the North:

gpv.is/north

Our articles, info and guides for North Iceland

Tourist Information:

Visit North Iceland

Hafnarstræti 91, 600 Akureyri

northiceland.is

info@northiceland.is

Tel: +354 462 3300

Emergency services

Tel: 112 (national helpline)

Weather report

en.vedur.is

Recorded info: +354 902 0600

HOW TO GET THERE

By domestic airline:

Akureyri Airport (AEY)

Domestic and international flights

Eyjafjarðarbraut vestri, 600

Akureyri

Main airline operator:

www.airiceland.is

Tel: +354 570 3000

Other airlines:

norlandair.is

Tel: +354 424 4000

Húsavík Airport (HZK)

Domestic flights to and from

Reykjavík.

Main airline operator:

www.eagleair.is

Tel: +354 464 1300

By car:

Road conditions

www.road.is

Tel: 1777

(Summer hours: 08:00-16:00 /

Winter: 06:30-22:00)

By ferry:

From Akureyri to Grímsey and

Hrísey

Schedule & Info:

[visitakureyri.is/en/transport/](http://visitakureyri.is/en/transport/ferries)

ferries

By bus:

National Bus Network

www.bus.is

Tel: +354 540 2700



Island: Grímsey

Info: akureyri.is/grimsey-en

While North Iceland is almost entirely subarctic, its northernmost point is bisected by the Arctic Circle. Grímsey sits 40km north off of Iceland's mainland, the only opportunity to step foot into the Icelandic Arctic. With a human population less than one hundred people strong, the island's abundant inhabitants are birds—especially auks and gulls. **F8**



Site: The Arctic Henge

Raufarhöfn

Info: northiceland.is

Located near the remote northeast village of Raufarhöfn is Arctic Henge. Though it looks ancient, Arctic Henge is a newly constructed monument for Ásatrú practitioners who worship the old gods. Arctic Henge mimics its namesake by acting as a huge sundial. There are 72 stones, each named after a dwarf from the Eddas. **I8**



Museum: Icelandic Textile Centre

Árbraut 31, Blönduós

Info: textilemidstod.is

Break up the northwards drive in Blönduós with a visit to The Icelandic Textile Centre. You can tour the former women's school (run from 1879-1978). The Textile Centre is popular with textile and visual artists who knit, weave, embroider, and sew, so you never know who you'll encounter creating their next pièce de résistance. **B11**

Local Delights Advertisement: North



① Mývatn Nature Baths

Jarðbaðshólar, Mývatn

tel +354 464-4411

www.mnb.is

info@mnb.is

Begin with a relaxing dip in clouds of steam rising up from fissures deep into earth's surface and end with a luxurious bath in a pool of geothermal water, drawn from depths of up to 2500 meters. Mý-

vatn Nature Baths are perfect for those who enjoy close contact with nature and want to relax their body and soul in the warm natural waters, overlooking the scenery of lake Mývatn and the volcanic crater of Hverfjall.

Opening Hours:

Winter **10:00-22:00**

Summer **09:00-24:00**

It's best to book in advance at mnb.is



**Distance from
Reykjavík:**
478 km

How to get there:
Fly from Reykjavík or drive
Route One North then Route 85

Flights: eagleair.is

Accommodation: fosshotel.is

Whale watching: gentlegiants.is

North

Of Space, Whales And Antarctica

An enlightening and adventurous
weekend in Húsavík

Words & Photos: **John Rogers**

We land at Húsavík's tiny airport and step out into a brisk, frosty morning. In contrast with the short, grey autumn of Reykjavík, where the peak of Esja sits under a first icing-sugar dusting of light snow, the mountains of north Iceland are already gleaming, glossy and white. The line where the snow ends is so straight it could have been drawn with a ruler; every morning of our stay in the town, it will visibly inch down to-

wards ground level.

The airport is 11 kilometres from the town, in the crook of the wide, windblown Skjálfandi bay. We wait for the short luggage belt to grind into action, looking up taxi numbers for a ride into town. As suitcases start to appear, a young local woman standing behind us overhears us and offers a ride. Before we know it, we've hopped into her car and we're on the way. She's training to be a nurse and is based in Húsavík with

her family. She recommends that we go whale watching—although, she says, the season is coming to an end.

Giant red suits

After checking into our comfortable, minimalist room at the local Fosshotel, we take a walk around the quaint seaside town. There's an entire little village dedicated to whale watching on Húsavík's marina, with ticket offices, huts, and various piers and walkways leading up onto old-school wooden fishing boats and modern inflatable speed boats bobbing in the rippling ocean.

We're booked with Gentle Giants, a firm that started in 2001 when eleven locals banded together to restore a wooden-hulled fishing boat for whale watching in the bay. Today, there are all sorts of options on offer, from the sedate fishing boat tours, to a RIB speed boat tour. We're booked on the latter, and we pull on huge red boiler suits to protect us from the cold, our host and guide offers around seasickness medicine. "It's

been very choppy for the last few days," he says. "It was so windy, we couldn't even go out. But we were out this morning, and we had some luck."

Eleven o'clock!

We load onto the boat and each person gets a saddle-like standing seat, with handlebars to hang onto. We soon see why: the RIB boat bounces over the waves as we speed out to sea. People squeal as spray and seafoam fly overhead; Húsavík vanishes behind us over the rolling waves, and the rough, snow-capped mountains loom ever closer.

Whale watching, it turns out, is something of a group effort. As we bob around in the bay, our host explains over the crackling speakers that we should look out for the plume of water made when a whale surfaces to breathe; if one is spotted, we should shout out where, by the hands of the clock. Soon, a Belgian couple sitting at the prow scream out "Eleven o'clock!" The engine revs, and we zoom towards the sighting.



“The whale’s huge bulk glides just under the surface; we can make out the immense fins and the texture of its skin as it speeds through the water.”

Graceful bulk

At this point, I’ll admit that I’m a whale-watching sceptic. I’ve lived in Iceland for almost six years, and have never once been tempted to go. The appeal of floating around on the cold ocean to catch a glimpse of a dorsal fin, and maybe a tail, eluded me.

But suddenly, as we’re speeding along right above a humpback whale, I break out into a wide grin. The whale’s huge bulk glides just under the surface; we can make out the immense fins and the texture of its skin as it speeds gracefully through the water. It surfaces again, sending a huge spout of water over the boat, and arches its back; its giant grey tail rears up out of the water, metres high, and then it’s gone, plunging deep into the ocean.

Over the course of the next hour, we stalk this whale, and see several others, with various boats buzzing around trying not to crowd each other. The whales, we’re told, aren’t disturbed by the human presence, and can actually be playful and curious. As we finally turn back, I admit to my companion that it was a more enjoyable and eye opening experience than I could have imagined.

Festival surprise

After warming up with some seafood soup on the harbour, we go for a look around the town’s museums. There’s an excellent whale museum with huge, complete whale skeletons hanging in the space—all of which were beached, not hunted—and videos of whales singing, swimming, and manoeuvring gracefully under the surface. A wall diagram shows the evolution of whales, and there’s a room dedicated to the history of

Iceland’s thankfully all-but extinct whaling industry.

Just up the street is the Exploration Museum, which examines mankind’s exploration of extremes, whether it’s early geographical exploration, space, the deep sea, or the poles. The museum is closed, but a sign tells us the reason—it’s the weekend of the annual Explorers Festival, which is taking place around the corner.

Explorers unite

We arrive at the town museum having, sadly, missed a talk about the founding of an Icelandic Space Agency, and covering NASA’s continued use of Iceland as a habitat analogue for testing new equipment.

We do, however, catch an hour-long talk by David Concannon, who recounts the tale of being tasked by Jeff Bezos with finding the Apollo F-1 engines that propelled man to the moon for the first time. The engines were jettisoned during flight, and lost on the ocean floor—it took a huge operation to find and retrieve them. But David succeeded, and they’re now on display at the Seattle Museum of Flight in the United States. Clive Oppenheimer also speaks, giving a layman’s account of his thirteen field seasons spent studying Mount Erebus, a perpetually active volcano in Antarctica, and his theories about how lava systems work.

It’s an unexpected cherry on the cake of this trip to hear adventurers like these discussing their travels and travails. The sleepy village of Húsavík, it’s safe to say, has more to it than meets the eye, both at sea, and on dry land. 🍷

The Reykjavik Grapevine has years been travelling around Iceland for over 15 years. We’ve compiled the knowledge and experience we’ve accumulated over that time into a new booking engine at **go.grapevine.is**

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BEST OF ICELAND 2019

North

Chilling by the Arctic Circle

Best Accommodation



Sigló Hótel

Snorrargata 3, Siglufjörður

Fans of Scandi Noir may recognize Sigló Hotel from the Icelandic TV series 'Trapped.' Stately and on the harbour, the hotel boasts views onto the fjord, the mountains of the Tröllaskagi peninsula, and the Siglufjörður marina. Combining old Icelandic charm in its décor with Nordic luxury, each spacious room has a view onto the sea. With a fireplace indoors and a hot tub by the harbour, it's comfort and romance incarnate. **Map square: B9**

Runner Up

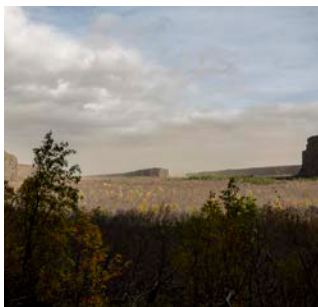


Fosshotel Mývatn

Grímsstaðir, Skútustaðahreppur

Fosshotel Mývatn aims to rhyme with its breathtaking namesake lake. The hotel's architecture features larch wood, a grass roof, and floor-to-ceiling windows in the restaurant, inviting in panoramic views. Our panel remarked that Fosshotel Mývatn is "immaculate—lovely design, unobtrusive on the landscape, and with a fabulous lake view from the breakfast room." **G11**

Budget Pick



Ásbyrgi Campground

Ásbyrgi, Kópasker

Sleep in the hoofprint of Óðinn's eight-legged horse Sleipnir. Steeped in Ásatrú mythology and well-equipped with showers, the campsite at Ásbyrgi is a quiet spot to slumber in the northern tip of Vatnajökull National Park. Our panellist recommends to "go on a walk late before sleeping—magical!" **H10**

Best Meal



Rub23

Kaupvangsstræti 6, Akureyri

Rub23 is a renowned seafood restaurant showcasing a large array of local catch and sushi. They're also the North's go-to for steak—whether it's tenderloin beef or Atlantic Wolffish. Try one of their "festivals" (a.k.a. tasting menus) for a true foodstravaganza. One panellist reports that "Rub23 has a fancy-feeling interior with warm service, and you can order your preferred main ingredient with different spiced 'rubs' as the flavouring." **F11**

Runner Up



Vogafjós

Vogafjós, Mývatn

Near the shore of Lake Mývatn is the charming restaurant Vogafjós. Located at a working farm, the restaurant produces its own mozzarella. Other local ingredients include smoked trout and hot-spring-baked rye bread. You can even watch the cows being milked while you dine. After your meal, pet a calf or try the fresh milk. **H11**



Siglunes

Lækjargata 10, Siglufjörður

Be transported to Africa while in North Iceland. Chef Jaouad Hbib conjures Moroccan-style dishes using local Icelandic ingredients. The menu is updated daily, but you can anticipate mouth-watering lamb, chicken, fish, and vegetarian tagines. Menus often also feature homemade cheese, dates, oranges, and salads flavoured with mint and rose. **D9**

Best Café



Café Berlin

Skipagata 4, Akureyri

There's no better place than Café Berlin for a Sunday morning brunch. From the classic eggs and bacon to more Instagrammable options like poached eggs and avocado toast, this place has everything your heart (and stomach) might desire. You can add warm waffles for a small additional fee. Enjoy some people-watching with a hot coffee—you'll feel right at home. **F11**

Runners Up



Gísli, Eiríkur, Helgi Kaffihús

Grundargata, Dalvík

Café or museum? Bar or concert venue? This cool stop is named after the historic and storied brothers Gísli, Eiríkur and Helgi who roamed the region. The café is decorated with antique farm treasures and paintings of the brothers. The Kaffihús' delicious menu offers the best of North Iceland's home-cooking. **E10**



Bláa Kannan

Hafnarstræti 96, Akureyri

Spaciously laid out with a menu for all tastes, Bláa Kannan is the ideal place to people-watch in downtown Akureyri. It opens for breakfast and sleeps after a night-cap. Bread is fresh-baked daily. One panellist remarked that Bláa Kannan is "simply the best—beautiful, beautiful building, very Icelandic, nice atmosphere, good coffee, also vegan cakes." **F11**

Must-See Spot



Mývatn-Laxá Conservation Area *Mývatn*

Experience this spectacular volcanic nature reserve, nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Mývatn is the fourth-largest freshwater lake in Iceland, and easily the most otherworldly. You'll find unusual geologic and volcanic features, including pseudocraters and lava pillars. The lake itself is the summer home of fifteen migratory boreal and arctic duck species, and the only European breeding ground for Barrow's goldeneye ducks. Extremely rare and endangered moss balls known as marimo also inhabit the lakebed. **G11-H11**

Best Bathing Spot



Hofsós Swimming Pool *Hofsósbraut, Hofsós*

Hands-down our panel's favourite, Hofsós Swimming Pool was praised for its spectacular views across the North Atlantic to the island Drangey. Built into the hillside and designed by the same architect as the Blue Lagoon, Hofsós includes a 25m pool, hot pots, and a sauna. "I love the relaxing atmosphere," said the panel. "It's priced like a municipal pool, but this amazing bathing spot is a design classic with an infinity pool that makes you feel like you're swimming into the horizon." **D10**

Best Hike



Kverkfjöll *Vatnajökull National Park*

Iceland's largest geothermal area meets Europe's largest ice cap. An advanced pick for serious hikers, start your hike at the northeast corner of Vatnajökull. You'll pass between two glacial tongues, famed for the constant volcanic activity below them, threatening eruption. Along the way, visit wild mud pools and hot springs. Kverkfjöll also features the genesis of Jökulsá á Fjöllum, the glacial river from which Dettifoss tumbles in the north. As this route is deep in the Highlands, paths are only accessible July to September. **H14**

Best Road Trip



Diamond Circle *All around the north*

This powerhouse road trip features the best of the north. Visit Húsavík, famed for its whale-watching tours and Whale Museum. Continue to Ásbyrgi, canyon of the Norse gods. Take in the roaring power of Dettifoss, Europe's most voluminous waterfall. Explore the volcanic region of Lake Mývatn, replete with rare-in-the-world volcanic formations (pseudocraters) and critters (marimo a.k.a. moss balls). As one panellist exulted, "It has been called the Diamond Circle because the landscape is like a multiplication of beauty." **G9-H11**

Runners Up



Dettifoss *Vatnajökull National Park*

The most powerful waterfall in Europe, Dettifoss tumbles 193 m³/s of glacial river over its lip. Our panellists recommend visiting the nearby hexagonal basalt columns at Hljóðaklettur, and the horseshoe-shaped canyon Ásbyrgi. Test your vocals at each site to resound with the deep bass of Dettifoss or echo off the walls of Hljóðaklettur and Ásbyrgi. **H10**

Runners Up



Mývatn Nature Baths *Jarðbaðshólar, Mývatn*

The striking blue hue of Mývatn Nature Baths' geothermal water invites calm just by looking at it. This lagoon is situated in the fragile lava ecosystem surrounding Lake Mývatn. While the lagoon itself ranges in temperatures between 36°C to 40°C, the steam baths clock in at 50°C, with near-100% humidity. **H11**

Runner Up



Tröllaskagi *Near Siglufjörður*

With the highest mountains in North Iceland (towering over 1400m), Tröllaskagi offers gorgeous views of the Arctic Ocean and a variety of hiking terrains. For an easy option, consider Svarfaðardalur Nature Reserve as your target destination. Time your hike on summer nights when the sun reaches the surface of the sea. **E9**

Runners Up



The Highlands *Central Iceland*

Accessible only in summer months, the Highlands are a vast volcanic desert populated by glaciers, geothermal hot spots, gushing rivers (some of which you'll have to carefully cross) and stunning mountains. The Kjölur road threads down to the west, and the Sprengisandur road to the east. Both are rough and unpaved, requiring a rugged 4x4. **All around**



Hveravellir *Kjölur, The Highlands*

Translating from Icelandic as 'Hot Spring Fields,' Hveravellir is a highland wonderland accessible by bus or via summer and winter tours. Enjoy a bath in the natural hot spring as you gaze at sky-blue water and smoking fumaroles. Between the glaciers Hofsjökull and Langjökull, this is a geothermal oasis in the volcanic desert. **C14**



Geosea Sea Baths *Vitaslóð 1, Húsavík*

Bathe in Geosea's geothermally heated seawater with views onto the mountains surrounding Skjálfandi Bay. The serpentine architecture of this spa will invite a supple sigh from your spine as you relax. Skjálfandi Bay is one of the best to spot whales around Iceland, so keep your eyes on the water. **G9**

Easy Option



Leirhnjúkur *Near Mývatn*

Start your hike at Leirhnjúkur Mountain and make your way towards the nature baths in Mývatn. You'll experience hot springs, boiling mud pools and fumaroles in this volcanic region. Our panel says, "The nature completely changes from volcanic fields to green Icelandic trees and nature. Drop by the Nature Baths afterwards!" **H11**



Langanes Peninsula *Northeast Iceland*

The northeasternmost point in Iceland, Langanes translates from Icelandic as "Long Peninsula." This remote region is perfect for watching puffins, gannets, and guillemots live their best seabird lives. You'll even find a ghost town: Skálar! If you're seeking "off the beaten path" as a hallmark of your road trip, Langanes is your answer. **J8**

BEST OF ICELAND 2019

North

The reset button for the soul

Best Tour



Whale Watching

Various providers

Our panellists were unanimous: whale watching in Eyjafjörður or Skjálfandi Bay is the best tour North Iceland has to offer. While nothing is guaranteed, it's possible to spot humpback whales, blue whales, minke whales, dolphins, harbour porpoises and more cetacean life during a cruise on the Arctic Ocean. Seabirds, including puffins, Arctic terns and eider ducks, may also be seen. Boat tours are available from Akureyri, Dalvík, Grenivík, Hauganes, Hjalteyri and the "whale capital" of Húsavík. **Map square: G9**

Runner Up



Askja & Holuhraun by Superjeep
Various providers

A trip to the Askja caldera and the Holuhraun lava field in the volcanic desert is a life-changing experience. Askja is a 50 km² volcanic crater filled with freshwater, forming the deepest lake in the country at 217 metres. Holuhraun is Iceland's youngest lava field, still cooling from the eruption of 2014-15. **H14**

Runner Up



Mývatn Day Tours
Various providers

Book a day trip north of the wall to Lake Mývatn, where 'Game of Thrones' was filmed. On the eastern shore, you can hike through the lava field of Dimmuborgir to an elf church. Krafla volcano is a few kilometres east, as is the stunning Hverir geothermal field, where hot springs, fumaroles and mud pools abound. **G11-H11**

Best Museum or Gallery



The Herring Era Museum
Snorrögata 10, Siglufjörður

The only Icelandic winner of the European Museum Award, the Herring Era Museum in Siglufjörður is Iceland's largest maritime museum. One panellist described The Herring Era Museum as "an amazing artwork, where you are tele-transported to the past and the excitement of the great herring rush in Sigló." Another panellist enthused, "Awesome museum covering 'the herring adventures' that made this small town one of the richest in the world." **B9**

Runners Up



Akureyri Art Museum
Kaupvangsstræti 8-12, Akureyri

Refurbished last year during its 25th anniversary, this world-class art gallery features contemporary exhibitions by local and international artists. In 2019 and 2020, Iceland's Venice Biennale representative Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir (a.k.a. Shoplifter) will exhibit work here. Akureyri Art Museum is also home to AI, an annual international performance art festival. **F11**



The Húsavík Whale Museum
Hafnarstétt 1, Húsavík

The Húsavík Whale Museum is the perfect partner to the town's popular whale watching tours. The museum emphasises North Atlantic whale species through exhibitions on whale evolution, biology and ecology. There is also the option to learn about the history of the whale industry in Iceland. **G9**

Best Bar



R5 Micro Bar
Ráðhústorg 5, 600 Akureyri

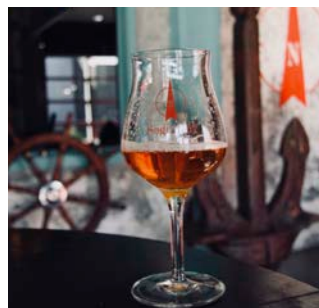
With an expansive selection of craft beer, R5 is your cozy local in the North. R5 prides itself on its high quality and professionalism, which shines through in the passionate bar staff. Their taps pour a diverse array of ales from Icelandic breweries. Our panel raves that this is the "ideal place to have a beer or wine with friends and just sit down and chat." Time your visit with a weekly concert for an extra treat. **F11**

Runners Up



Akureyri Backpackers
Hafnarstræti 98, Akureyri

Akureyri Backpackers is full of "amazing people and cosy surroundings" according to our panel. With a relaxed and international atmosphere, it's an unpretentious spot to enjoy a cold beverage after a long day of adventuring. In addition to its bar, Backpackers also has affordable accommodation for those seeking the hostel experience. **F11**



Segull 67 Brewery
Vetrarbraut 8-10, Siglufjörður

There are a variety of breweries that offer enticing experiences, including the Beer Spa and Kaldi Brewery. Siglufjörður's Segull 67 is a family-owned craft microbrewery in a renovated fish factory. While not a traditional bar or a place to shoot the shit with locals, our panel raved about the tour and the taste. **B9**



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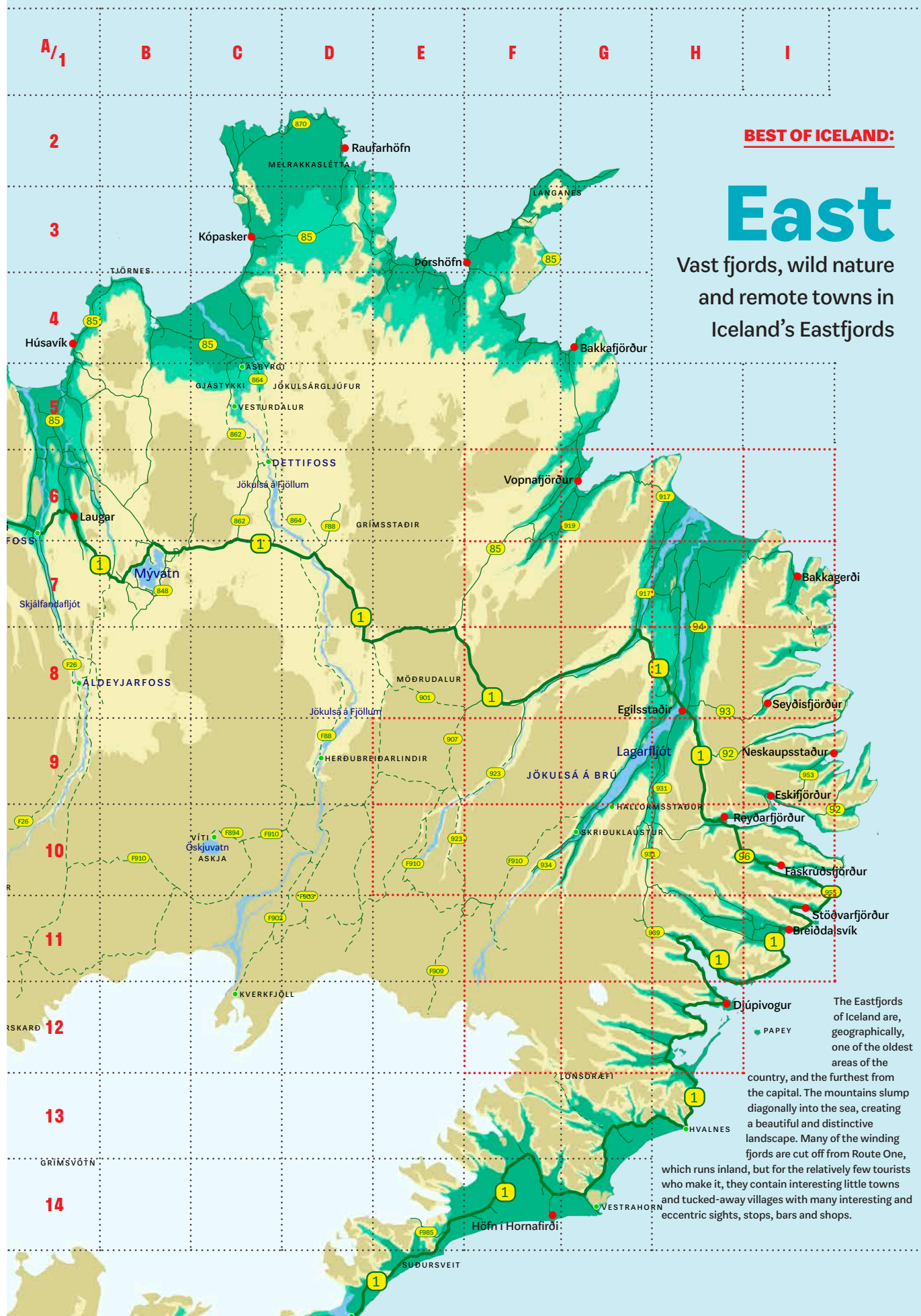

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BEST OF ICELAND:

East

Vast fjords, wild nature
and remote towns in
Iceland's Eastfjords

The Eastfjords
of Iceland are,
geographically,
one of the oldest
areas of the

country, and the furthest from
the capital. The mountains slump
diagonally into the sea, creating
a beautiful and distinctive
landscape. Many of the winding
fjords are cut off from Route One,

which runs inland, but for the relatively few tourists
who make it, they contain interesting little towns
and tucked-away villages with many interesting and
eccentric sights, stops, bars and shops.



Mountain Pass: Öxi

Mountain road, Lagarfljót to Berufjörður

It's closed for much of the winter, but this high mountain dirt road offers some absolutely stunning views of those old, scored, scraped east-coast mountains slanting down into the sea. Grip the wheel tight, take it slow and stop for a break at every viewpoint. Check road.is if the weather is poor or changeable, and only go if you're in a decent car and up for some white-knuckle driving. **Map square: G10-H11**



Event: National Forest Day

Hallormsstaður

The east of Iceland is famous for its forests. While they might not contain any giant redwoods or ancient oaks, there's a spruce, piney selection of woods for you wander through. An event for the whole family is when National Forest Day is celebrated in Hallormsstaður. The festivities feature loads of (free) food, a 14-kilometre forest run, the Lumberjack National Championship, concerts and fun activities for children. Go get a lungful of oxygen and celebrate our quiet arboreal friends. **G10**



Festivals: Lunga, Polar & Bræðslan

Seyðisfjörður, Stöðvarfjörður & Bakkagerði respectively

Music and art festivals throughout the region highlight a youthful growing cultural community in the East. Spaced throughout the summer, these varied events host up-and-coming artists, cutting edge musicians, residencies and workshops that feed the emerging scenes. Check lunga.is, braedslan.is and polarstodvarfjodur.wixsite.com for info. **I7-11**



Museum: Petra's Stone Collection

Stöðvarfjörður

Steinasafn Petru is a museum dedicated to the life's work of a late great local of Stöðvarfjörður whose hobby of collecting precious and pretty minerals from the area spawned this vast rock collection. Still run by Petra's descendants, take your time to feel those crystal vibes. On a summer's day, it's a blissful place to hang out. There's a café, a nice garden, and a chance to pick up a stone or two for yourself. **H10-11**



Brewpub: Beljandi Brewery

Breiðdalsvík
info: facebook.com/beljandibrugghus

The countryside isn't famous for its bars, but the fairly recent arrival of Beljandi Brewery is looking to change that. This Breiðsdalsvík brew pub more than deserves a visit. The atmosphere is wonderful, the views are amazing and, like the waterfall it's named after, Beljandi keeps the good stuff flowing. If you can't make it out East, visit them at Mathöll Höfða in Reykjavík. **I11**



Road Trip: Reyðarfjörður

Route 92 from Reyðarfjörður to Eskifjörður and Neskaupsstaður.

This long fjord holds the small towns of Reyðarfjörður—which has a few surprising apartment blocks for smelter workers—and the more picturesque Eskifjörður. The end of the road is Neskaupsstaður which boasts a great pool, the Hildibrand Hotel, an excellent town museum with a taxidermy diorama and crystal collection, and boat trips out into Norðfjörður. If you end up spending some serious time there, you can take a multi-day hike out into the “abandoned fjords” of the area to truly get away from it all. **H10-19**

USEFUL INFO

Grapevine on the East:
gpv.is/east
Our articles, info and guides for East Iceland

Tourist Information:
East Iceland Regional Information Centre
700 Egilsstaðir, Iceland
www.east.is
info@east.is
Tel: +354 471 2320

Emergency services
Tel: 112 (national helpline)

Weather report
en.vedur.is
Recorded info: +354 902 0600

HOW TO GET THERE

By domestic airline:

Egilsstaðir (EGS)
Flights from Reykjavík.
Sunnudalsvegur, Egilsstaðir

Main airline operator:
www.airiceland.is
Tel: +354 424 4020

Smaller airports

Þórshöfn, from Akureyri with Norlandair (norlandair.is)
Hornafjörður, from Reykjavík with Eagle Air (eagleair.is)
Vopnafjörður, from Akureyri with Norlandair (norlandair.is)

By ferry

The Smyril Line Ferry travels between Seyðisfjörður and the Faroe Islands & Denmark once a week
Schedule & Info:
www.smyrilline.com

By car:

Road conditions
www.road.is
Tel: 1777
(Summer hours: 08:00-16:00 / Winter: 06:30-22:00)

By bus:

National Bus Network
www.bus.is
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BEST OF ICELAND 2019

East

If west is the best, east is a... feast?

Best Accommodation



Wilderness Centre

Fljótsdalur

Ever wondered how it would be to live like Icelanders of yore? Well, you can experience it at the Wilderness Center. They offer authentic old-style accommodation that sends you back in time—whether you want to become a landowner, a farmer, or just an ordinary person. Every detail has been considered by the charming hosts. There's a range of trips and activities on offer, and you'll have access to a bath house with a sauna.

Map square: E10

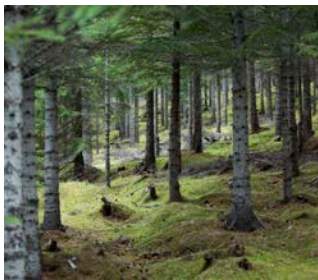
Fancy Option



Fosshotel Fáskrúðsfjörður
Hafnargata 11-15, Fáskrúðsfjörður

A beautiful, historic hotel in the old hospital in Fáskrúðsfjörður, which was originally built to service French fishermen. Their cultural impact remains in the small museum, and the more-than-decent wine list. The hotel itself is a delight—charming, cosy, and a welcome change from the Nordic minimalist zeitgeist. **I10**

Budget Pick



Hallormsstaðaskógur Campsite
Fjarðarbraut 37a, Stöðvarfjörður

These two campsites—Atlavík and Höfðavík—are located in the largest Icelandic forest, covering an area of 740 hectares, right by the famed Lagarfljót lake. Quiet-seeking travellers can listen to the rich birdlife, walk in the forest, sit on the banks of the lake and look out for the infamous Lagarfljót Worm. Blissful. **I11**

Best Meal



Norð Austur
Nordurgata 2, Seyðisfjörður

This restaurant in the remotely cool fjord is reputed to make the best sushi in Iceland. This is what happens when you import expert chefs from overseas and let them run wild with fresh Icelandic seafood. “The sizzling salmon, served on a hot stone, was so good I almost cried,” said the panel. It’s worth the drive from Egilsstaðir to enjoy this quality cuisine—local fisherman deliver unusual catches to the restaurant, so expect some curious specials. Summer only—check ahead for opening hours. **I8**

Runners Up



Vallanes Organic Farm
Vallanes, Egilsstaðir

Home of Móðir Jörð, the Icelandic brand that produces organic vegetable-based products. The food is always fresh, tasty, local, vegetarian or vegan, and seasonal. Enjoy it in a newly built house made entirely of Icelandic wood, or in the greenhouse whilst chatting with the owners. **G9**



Síreksstaðir Farm
Síreksstaðir, Sunnudalur

At this family-run farm restaurant, every dish on the menu is made up of fresh homegrown vegetables and free range meat. Their organic home-cooked meals are made with love—and also some serious know-how. “Happy just tastes better,” enthused the panel. **F7**

Must-See Spot



Mjóifjörður
Mjóifjörður, Fjarðabyggð

One of the most remote fjords in the East, the drive to Mjóifjörður is an adventure in itself. Following the steep slopes down to a tiny village of about 20 inhabitants also provides you with astonishing views of the surrounding mountains and the beautiful Klifbrekkufossar waterfalls. Also highly recommended is a trip to the Dalatangi lighthouse. Don’t rush it: life out East is slow, so sink into the rhythm and enjoy it all the more. **I7**

Runner Up



Kárahnjúkar Dam
The Highlands

It’s not the most beautiful place in Iceland, but seeing the country’s largest and most notorious hydroelectric dam is an impressive and sobering experience. After driving across a dusty Highland desert, the hard lines of the dam appear from the wilderness like an alien spacecraft, or a remnant of a lost civilisation. **E10**



Hellisheiði Eystri
Off Route One towards Vopnafjörður

This road is not for the faint-hearted, or reckless drivers—but if you’re prepared to cry your eyes out for a good view, this is a must. The dirt track crosses some alarmingly high scree slopes, and on a clear day offers views north all the way to Langanes, and south over to the glorious Dyrfjöll. **H13**



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BEST OF ICELAND 2019

East

Never go to the Highlands in a Yaris

Best Bathing Spot



Laugarvalladalur Geothermal Pool

Laugarvalladalur Valley

It's always nice to take a dip in a natural hot pool, but this bathing spot takes the experience to the next level. In what feels like the middle of nowhere, is this green oasis with a natural geothermal pool and stream. Not only can you sit in hot water and chill (not literally), you can even take a shower under the hot waterfall! It's quite a challenge to get to, but so worth it. **Map square: E10**

Runner Up



Selárlaug
Selárdalur, Vopnafjörður

This remote country pool is like a time capsule. It feels like the quintessential old-school Icelandic pool. You have to drive there, and it's perched on the edge of a gushing river—the changing rooms, pool and hot pots are basic and unpretentious, but it's just unforgettable. **G6**

Runner Up



Neskaupstaður Pool
Miðstræti 23, Neskaupstaður

Neskaupstaður pool is small, but it has everything you need—a steam room, hot pots and a swimming pool—with the added bonus of an epic mountain view right across the fjord. Also, the town is so quiet it's never crowded, so ease your worries away as chilled out locals chit-chat around you. **I10**

Best Hike



Stóruð
Borgarfjörður eystri

This hike, starting from Vatnsskarð, takes approximately 6 hours to complete. After a long trek up the valley, you come to a stunning maze of huge broken rocks that have tumbled down from Dyrfjöll, leaving a vast horseshoe-shaped cleft in the mountains above. The biggest reward, though, is Stóruð itself — gigantic boulders surrounded by unearthly turquoise water. It's one of the most striking places in all of Iceland. **I7**

Easy Option



Waterfall Lane
Seyðisfjörður

From Seyðisfjörður town, hike through some pleasant countryside to the Neðri-Stafur rock stratum, passing lots of beautiful waterfalls. "You ascend a series of cliffs, like a staircase made for a giant," said the panel. At the top, you get a stunning view of Seyðisfjörður. Try to reach Vestdalsvatn lake, which is frozen almost year-round. **I8**

Advanced option



Víknaslóðir
Borgarfjörður Eystri to Seyðisfjörður

If you're up for an ambitious five-day hike, this "trail of the inlets" has all the awe-inspiring scenery you could want. This epic hike winds its way around deserted coves, less-travelled valleys and abandoned fjords of the impressive and undulating East Iceland coastline, delivering you to the lovely town of Seyðisfjörður. **I8-I9**

Best Road Trip



Borgarfjörður Eystri
Borgarfjörður Eystri, Eastfjords

This drive is as scenic as it is pleasant. You start off driving towards the wide black beach of Sandur, curving right into the mountains; soon, you're looking down across the East Iceland coastline from high above. You swoop down into an all-but abandoned valley, where there are a few interesting stops, before winding around a sheer scree slope on a dirt track, arriving at one of the cutest towns in Iceland as your reward. **I7**

Runners Up



Möðrudalsöræfi
Route One, Eastfjords to North East

Whatever the weather or the time of day or night, this area will always be enchantingly or hauntingly beautiful. "I drive this route regularly and it never gets boring," said the panel. "Suddenly you're in the Highlands—usually all by yourself—and you realise it's just you and the trolls up there." **E8**

Easy Option



Öxi & Lagarfjót
Route 939, Berufjörður to Lagarfjót

During the summer months, ascending the steep peaks of the Öxi pass from Berufjörður is breathtaking, adrenaline-inducing, and not for the faint of heart. Descending to Lagarfjót, you can use the remaining daylight to circle the lake or drive to the Kárahnjúkar dam, checking out the Laugarfell hot pot on the way." **G11**



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BEST OF ICELAND 2019

East

Where the mountains slump into the sea

Best Tour



Wilderness Centre

Fljótsdalur

This fantastic base camp has it all—accommodation in a beautifully renovated, historic house, a restaurant, a museum, and best of all, warm hosts who'll help you fill your time with anything from stargazing to bike-rides, hikes, or driving up into the Highlands. They offer day tours, escorted adventures and tailor made trips to all the sites and activities of this tucked away corner of East Iceland. It's also the perfect base camp between excursions. **Map square: F10**

Runner Up



Sea Kayaking
Seyðisfjörður

Experience this gorgeous fjord from the water. "I did a tour a few years ago and it was the most calming and wonderful experience," said the panel. "The sun was shining and the fjord was like a glass of still water." Pick a nice day and you're in for a real treat. **I8**

Runner Up



Papey Sailing
Djúpivogur

Tours on the Gísli í Papey ferry are offered daily throughout the summer. The trip takes you to Papey Island, with its bird-cliffs and seals, and the possibility to hike up to see the oldest and smallest wooden church in the country. It's great for a relaxed and easy going afternoon tour. **H12**

Best Museum/Gallery



Skaftfell
Austurvegur 42, Seyðisfjörður

This far-flung cultural outpost maintains a year-round arts programme in a tiny eastern town, with a surprising and cutting-edge programme that relates to the town's artistic history. It's probably the best place in the East to see some contemporary art from both local and international artists. On the ground floor, there is also a café-bistro-bar with great pizzas, local beers and a small library. There's an events programme with lectures and concerts in the summertime, too. **I8**

Runners Up



Snæfellsstofa
Skriðuklaustur, Egilsstaðir

This visitor centre located in the first BREEAM certified—meaning it's sustainably built—building in Iceland offers a great exhibition about the Eastern part of the Vatnajökull National Park, and its fauna, flora and geological development. It's a perfect place to spend a rainy day and organize your trip as the staff is always ready to give advice. **H8**



Bustarfell
Bustarfell, Hofsfárdalur

Just outside Vopnafjörður, is this really informative and charming little museum. It's a window into the lives of many generations who lived and worked on the farm and it's run by the last generation who lived there. "And they have stories, I tell ya," said the panel. **F7**

Best Café



Fjóshornið
Egilsstaðir 1, Egilsstaðir

When you have high coffee standards, sometimes you desire more than the basic drip variety, which is often the only option in the East. But at Fjóshornið, they know how to make the good stuff. The atmosphere is more than welcoming, you can sit either inside in a cosy "living room" or on the sunny terrace. The selection of home-made cakes is great, and the place is also a dairy farm, so you can take home some fresh skyr, cheese or meat. **H8**

Runners Up



Klausturkaffi
Fljótsdalsvegur, Skriðuklaustur

This curious little café worth a stop because of their outstanding cake buffet. You can eat as much of the delicious home-made cake and freshly fried kleinur as you please from the buffet table, and there are savoury delicacies on offer, too. The lunch buffet will fill you up for the rest of your road trip. **G10**



Havari
Nr. Djúpivogur, Berufjörður

Havari is a farmstead run by the singer of Prins Póló Svavar Pétur Eysteinnsson and his wife Berglind Hasler. Their fun spirit runs through Havari, which is a hostel, working farm, music venue, and fantastic little café with snacks, cakes and soups. Sleep there, party there, eat there—the decision is yours. **H11**



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