

THE 

Issue 04

2020

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# REYKJAVÍK GRAPEVINE

# CORONA



## STAYHOME

WORLD TOUR

## 2020

EXTREMELY  
ONLINE

GIG GUIDE × CITY MAP × TRAVEL IDEAS × FOOD

# editorial

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**A note from the art director:** This is a temporary online-only redesign. As the issue will not be printed, the fonts are bigger, and we are not saving paper so we can allow ourselves more space, bigger pictures, and as much experimentation as we like. It's a new frontier! This issue is a bit messy. We pray forgiveness. We're still figuring out the kinks. Send your complaints to [sveinbjorn@grapevine.is](mailto:sveinbjorn@grapevine.is). Heart emoji, Sveinbjörn Pálsson, Art Director of The Reykjavík Grapevine.



**Hannah Jane Cohen** is based out of Iceland by way of New York. She's known for her love of Willa Ford, David Fos-

ter Wallace, and other such "intellectuals." Her visionary work is known for expanding the definitions of emotion, introspection, and above all else, taste.

Hannah is also the current Drag King of Iceland, Hans. Hannah is a Columbia alumni.



**Sveinbjörn**

**Pálsson** is our Art Director. He's responsible for the design of the magazine and the cover photography. When he's not working here, he DJs as Terrordisco,

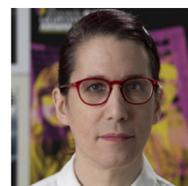
hosts the Funkþáturinn radio show, or sits at a table in a Laugardalur café, drinking copious amounts of coffee and thinking about fonts.



**Samuel O'Donnell** Sam is an English major from The United States. He has his Bachelor's Degree, and

keeps telling himself that this is the year he will begin pursuing his Master's. In his spare time, he enjoys playing video games, writing short horror stories,

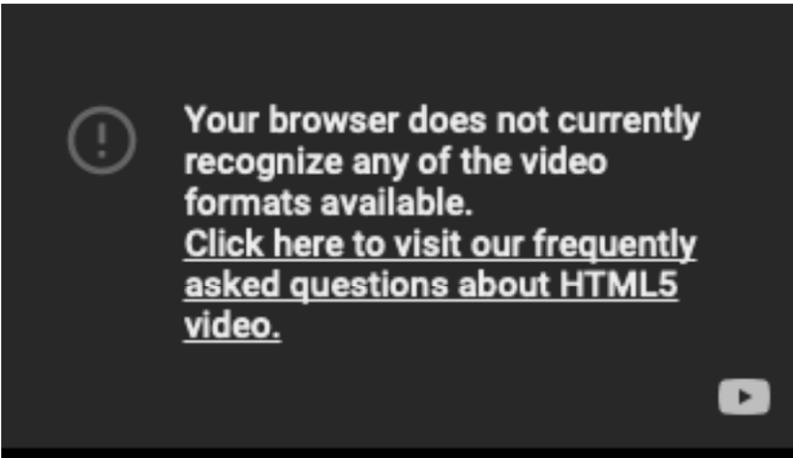
listening to all kinds of metal, and reading.



**Andie Sophia Fontaine** has lived in Iceland since

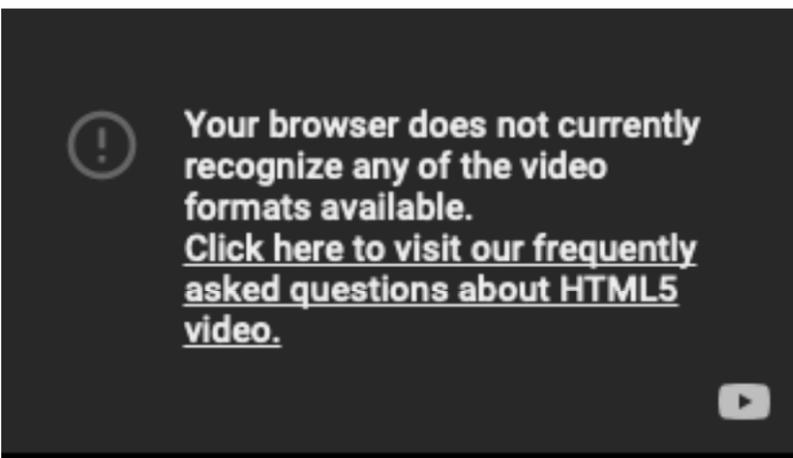
1999 and has been reporting since 2003. They were the first foreign-born member of the Icelandic Parliament, an experience they recommend for anyone who

# The Reykjavik Grapevine Playlist



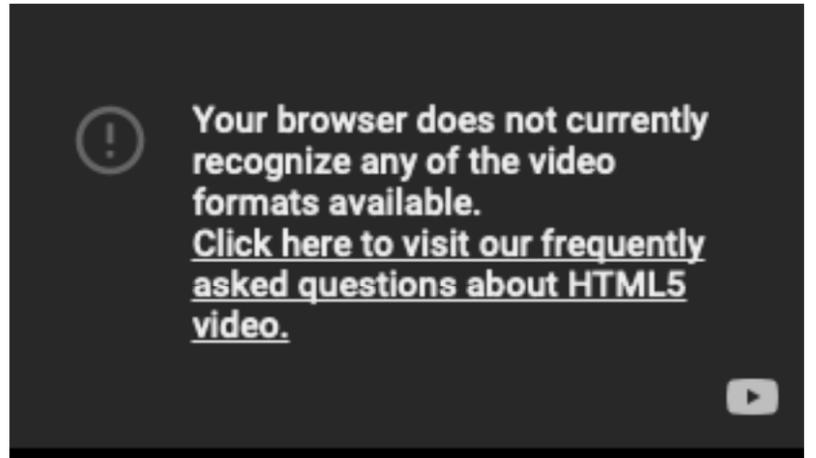
## Sam Smith- “To Die For (Ólafur Arnalds Remix)”

Ólafur Arnalds’ remix of Sam Smith’s single serves up a minimalistic take on the heartbreaking ballad. Slow, instrumental, and stripped of the beginning’s audio sample, it sounds like less of a remix than the original. A soft piano introduces Smith’s golden vocals. Cellos come in, honing on the tragic undertones while an electronic arpeggio plays in the background. It picks up before falling back to melancholic slowness at the end. **SPO**



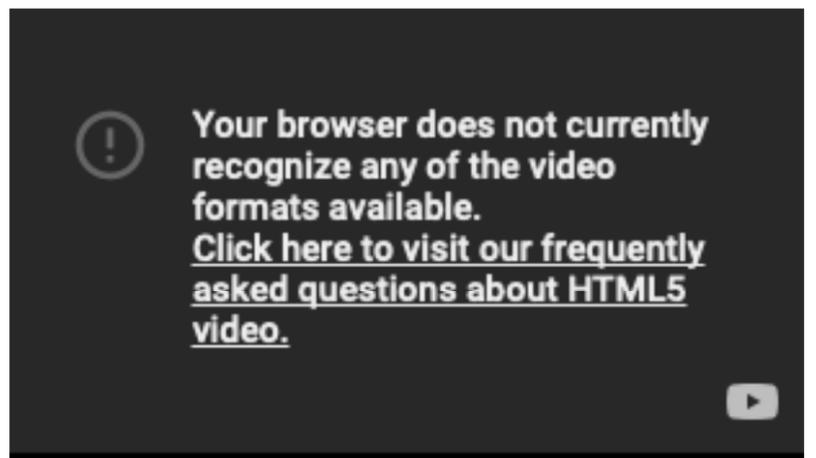
## GusGus - “Out of Place”

Legends of the Icelandic electronic scene, GusGus are back with a characteristically trancy new single. With multi-layered synths and smooth dreamy vocals, this track has an effortless feel to it. Don’t be surprised if you find yourself drifting off at your desk at work whilst listening. **PA**



## Jean-Philippe Rameau & Víkingur Ólafsson - “The Arts and the Hours”

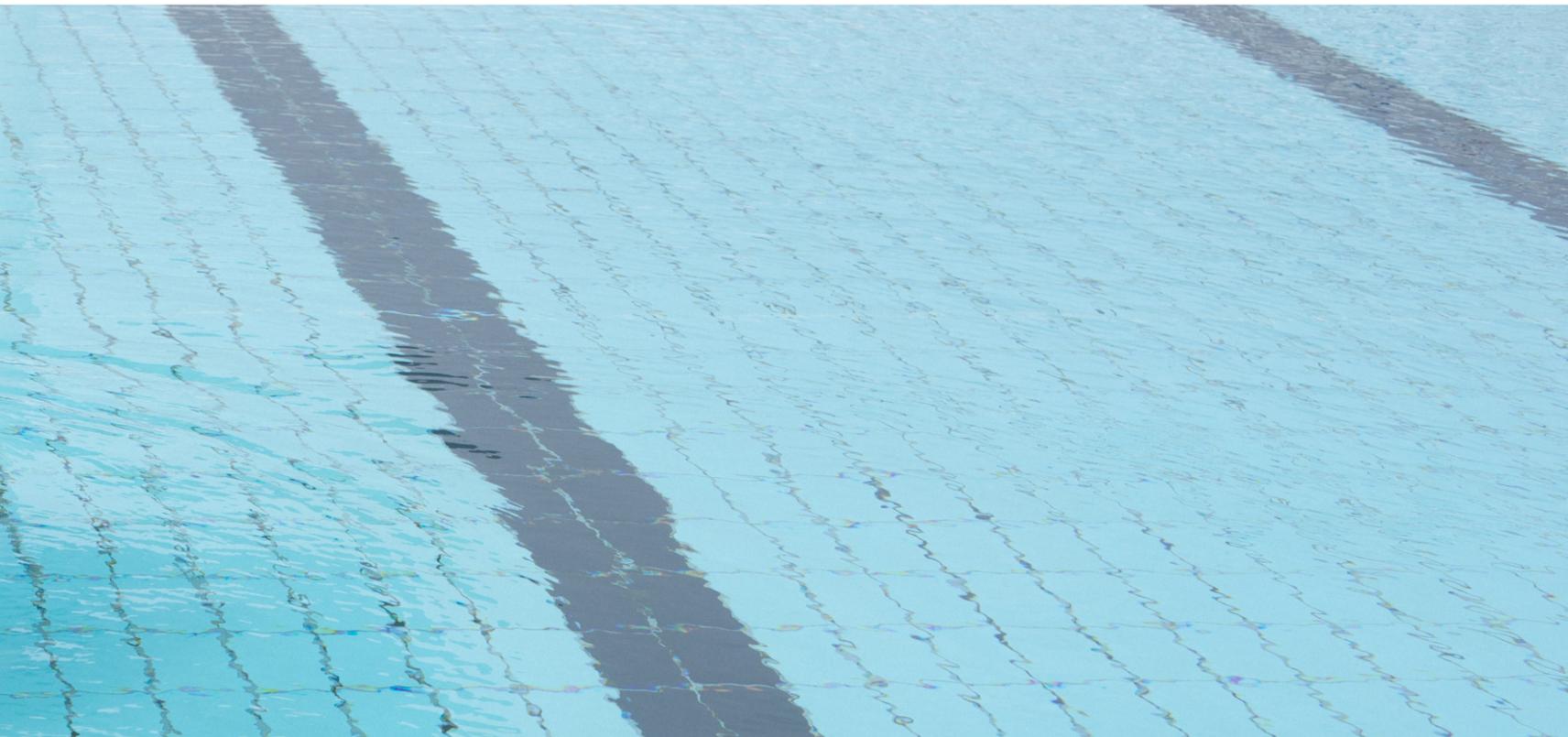
The perfect track for these anxiety-inducing times, Víkingur Ólafsson’s virtuoso piano playing will soothe even the most jangled nerves. Víkingur’s arrangement—transcribed from Rameau’s last opera ‘Les Boréades’—is the enchanting centerpiece on Víkingur’s soon-to-be-released album, which will pay homage to two French greats of the classical world—Rameau and Debussy. **PA**



## Sturla Atlas - “Hvert sem er”

Sturla’s all grown up! 101 Boys’ first breakout star is back with his fifth release and first solo outing since 2017. His nose for pop hooks and his silky smooth voice are still there but the tounge-in-cheek gangsta rap references are gone, and the trap beat has been replaced with an uptempo electropop beat, reminiscent of The Weeknd’s recent offerings. Somber but driving full steam ahead, just like you and me, baby. It’s a bunker banger. **SP**

# The Reykjavik Grapevine Playlist



Words: **Grapevine Staff**  
Photo: **Hrefna Björg**



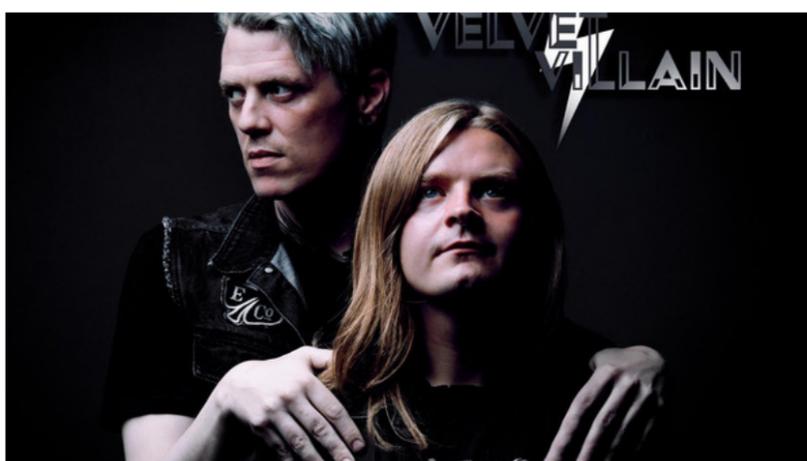
## Ásta - "Sykurbað" (no video available)

Our regular readers know that we absolutely love Ásta. Now, the eponymous song from her 2019 debut album is here with a particularly high production video, starring the singer herself. It's arguably the best track from the album, featuring a chord progression that spans the fretboard, and Ásta's distinctly angelic voice. This lady is seriously talented. **SPO**



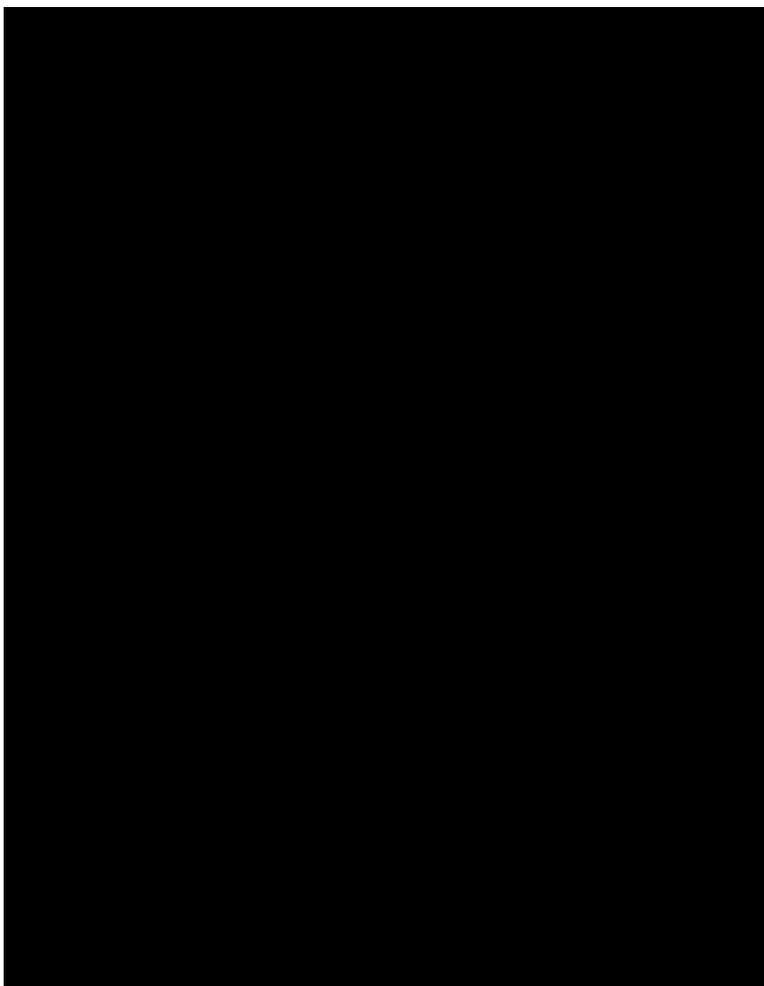
## Salóme Katrín - "Don't Take Me So Seriously"

Post-dreifing starlet Salóme Katrín has an important message in her debut single. The acoustic indie ballad is an easy-going and straight-forward imploration: "Don't take me so seriously. I'm not being real." Could this mean that the music she releases forthwith will be sillier? We hope so. **SPO**



## Velvet Villain - "I Wanna Know" (no video available)

This is my kind of music. A thick, heavily distorted riff and a persistent beat on an acoustic drum kit sets the tone for the whole song, which is warped, frustrated, and raw. Remember The White Stripes? It's a lot like The White Stripes. **SPO**



## ASK A HISTORIAN

# "What Is The Legacy Of Iceland's Red Stocking Women?"

In the spirit of International Women's Day, we asked **Ragnhildur Hólmeirsdóttir** from **Iceland's Women's History Archives** to fill us in on the legacy of some of Iceland's feistiest feminists.

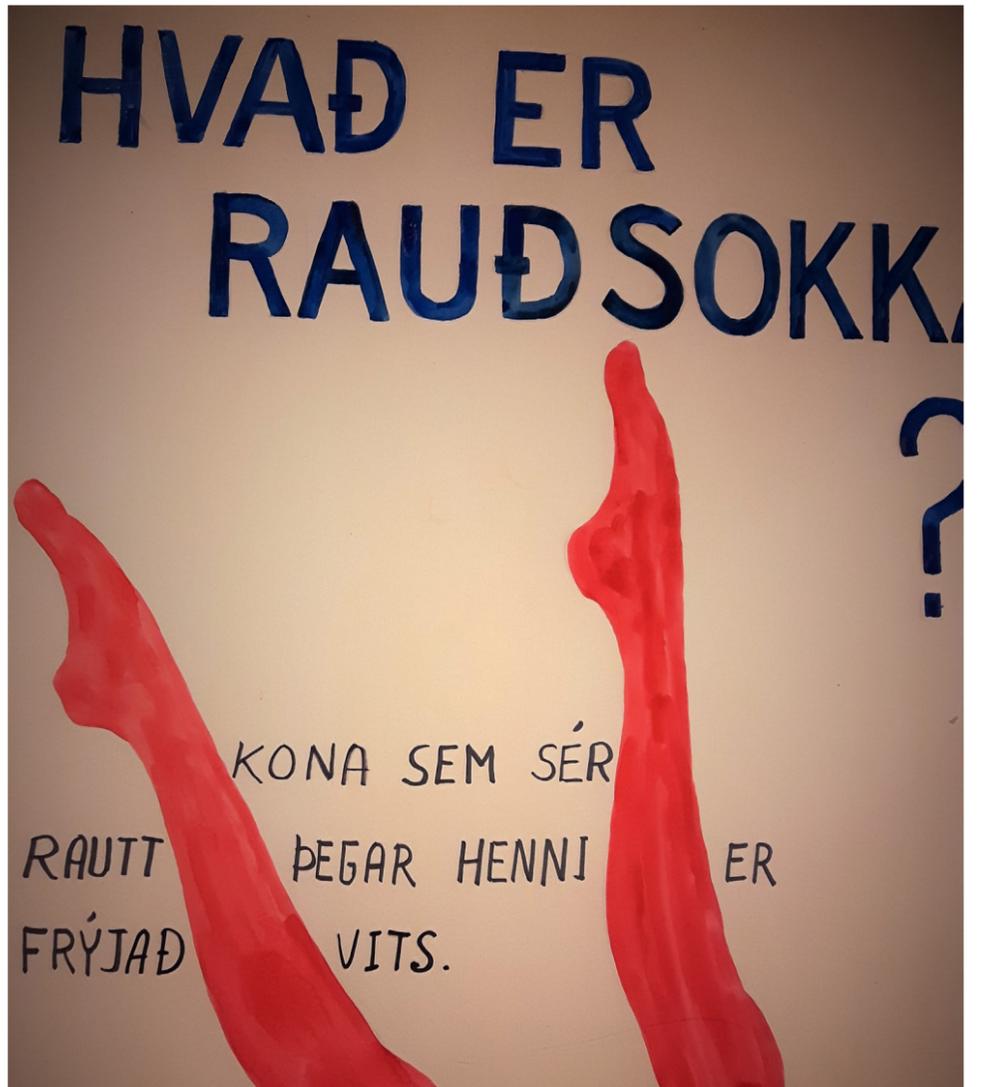
"On May 1st, 1970, the Icelandic Red Stocking Women made their first public appearance, marching through the streets and carrying a statue of a woman with the slogan: "Human being – not a marketing product."

The vision of the Red Stocking Movement was radical and some of their goals are still relevant in today's struggle for equality. One of their main goals was the right to abortion. A Red Stockings member sat on the parliamentary committee for new legislation concerning abortion and contraceptives in 1973. Their proposal sparked a heated debate, but was turned down for a more conservative law, which

was not replaced until 2019. The Red Stockings also campaigned for equal rights in the workplace, focusing on universal access to kindergarten education and whole-day school attendance. Their vision did not become a reality until the 1990s and there is still progress to be made.

The Red Stockings had an artistic, energetic approach to their cause and their public protests frequently caught the press' attention. In one famous example of this, they brought a live cow to a 1972 beauty contest. Partly thanks to this protest, beauty contests were temporarily halted in Iceland.

Finally, I must mention the **Women's Day Off** in 1975. This mass event was a joint effort by several women's organizations, but the idea first started circulating in the Red Stockings' meetings in 1970. The Women's Day Off was most recently repeated in 2018."



## FOOD OF ICELAND

# Sterkar Djúpur



*"Only a deeply twisted mind could look at an innocuous chocolate-coated liquorice ball and think 'you know what this needs? Seasoning'."*

Words **Poppy Askham**

Only a deeply twisted mind could look at an innocuous chocolate-coated liquorice ball and think you know what this needs? Seasoning. Or so I thought. Enter Sterkar Djúpur: the salt-and-pepper-covered sweet that has proven unfathomably popular with Iceland's candy connoisseurs. If you're unfortunate enough to be given one of these sweets, perhaps by a seemingly well-meaning colleague, first you'll be hit by an unexpected salty tang. The culprit? Ammonium Chloride. Apparently here in Iceland the compound isn't just a cough medicine or shampoo ingredient, it's also been a staple of the candy aisle since its 1930s popularisation. After the initial ammonia-based surprise has worn off, the sourness softens to reveal a peppery kick with subtle smoky undertones that perhaps fortunately doesn't quite live up to the sweets' flame-covered packaging. In the interest of full disclosure—I'm not a fan of the nation's favourite sweet (please don't deport me, ÚTL),

but I have to admit there's nothing like the taste of spicy salty ammoniac to make you appreciate liquorice. In fact, the sweets' chocolatey liquorice core is so beguiling that before you know it you've forgotten the initial unpleasantness and you find your hand reaching once again towards the packet, trapped in a self-destructive cycle that can only be broken when your fingers just find pepper dust and plastic. Bizarre as they may seem, Sterkar Djúpur are not the result of some improbable culinary accident. They're Freyja's (Iceland's oldest operating confectioner) answer to the Tyrkisk Peber craze that has taken Scandinavia's sweetshops by storm in recent years. Can't get enough of that distinctive spicy tang? Why not try some of Reykjavik's other spins on the trend—perhaps ice cream dipped in molten liquorice and rolled in pepper powder or perhaps an enticingly grey Tyrkisk Peber cheesecake?



# A Little Help Here!

Smá Hjálp bands small businesses together in the face of uncertainty

*“These are tough times for us all and we are all in this together, so we will only get through it by sticking together and supporting each other.”*

Words: **Hannah Jane Cohen**  
Photo: **Art Bicnick**

With the COVID-19 situation all but halting the Icelandic economy, many small independent businesses are in serious jeopardy. In order to help at-risk institutions, Anna Worthington De Matos, the founder of the Reykjavík Tool Library, created the website Smá Hjálp, shining a light on local businesses endangered by the crisis.

## Creating a platform

“The idea for Smá Hjálp came about when friends with small independent businesses started to voice their concerns about what would happen if we were made to close down or reduce services,” she explains. “The point of the website is to give a platform for those businesses to communicate directly to the customer how they can be helped and supported during this time.”

The coronavirus pandemic, with subsequent travel restrictions and gathering bans, has already profoundly changed many local businesses, particularly those that thrive on person-to-person contact, Anna emphasises. “What we do at the Tool Library is a circular economy and that means we need to share things to stay alive,” she says. “This is not a really good time for ‘sharing’ unless we are talking about kindness.”

“People are scared and worried about their financial situations over the next couple of months and that will affect their ability to also support us local small businesses,” she explains. “It will be a matter of them needing to save money vs. wanting to help us. These are very difficult times indeed.”

## Out-of-the-box thinking

Businesses are doing their part though, by adapting their services to better cater to customers in the current climate. “Restaurants and bars are offering delivery and

take-away, which is a great option, but this still means they will have less staff on,” Anna explains. “Others are selling gift cards that can be used at a different date in the near future.” She names vegan cake company Baunin as a good example of this.

Some, particularly non-profits, have opened up donation channels. For instance, Kattakafihúsið is accepting donations to take care of the cats. Others are thinking more out-of-the-box. “We at the Tool Library are trying to figure out a system where people can possibly pre-book their borrowings,” Anna explains. “We are working on it.”

## People over business

Aside from do-it-together solutions, what can the government actually do to protect small businesses? “Honestly, at this point I am not sure,” Anna answers. “Tax breaks might be a good idea for the time being, but I am at a loss. The government should prioritise people over business, but I also think they should prioritise small businesses over for-profit corporations that are going to be fine.”

Most of all, Anna believes that the instant catastrophic effect COVID-19 had on the Icelandic economy should be a wake up call. “If there was ever a time to start making significant systemic changes to the economy, this is it,” she says.

Current difficulties are sure to pass, but in the meantime, all the average person can do is try to prop each other up, which is the overall goal of Smá Hjálp. “If you like a place, like what they stand for and want to help them keep going, share their posts, pass on their information, like, comment and, if you can afford to, buy something,” Anna concludes. “These are tough times for us all and we are all in this together, so we will only get through it by sticking together and supporting each other.”





ART IN OUR TIME

# Diary Of An Artist In Quarantine

Óttar Norðfjörð journals a creative life in lockdown

Let's face it. These are strange times. We're in the midst of a global pandemic. Most of us are just trying to get by. Amid all of this confusion, Óttar Norðfjörð, novelist and head writer for 'The Valhalla Murders' ('Brot' in Iceland), has compiled his thoughts on the epidemic into a journal. Published in Mannlíf in Icelandic, the journal reveals the artist's experience surviving in these chaotic times.

## Stress and lockdown

Óttar lives in Spain with his wife and their two year old son. They have another baby on the way. While he and his family are healthy and safe, the entire country is currently on lockdown, meaning that people must stay inside except for absolute essentials.

Some people find this easy to deal with. "I'm a writer. I can work from home, in a way it's not different from my everyday life," Óttar says, adding that it's not as easy for his wife, who is a photographer and used to being outside. However, since she is 33 weeks pregnant, they have decided to keep her away from the general public until the baby is born. "She hasn't left the house now for twelve days," he says, "So I go out for food like a caveman."

## Catharsis

This situation has, naturally, resulted in an increase in stress. Initially, Óttar intended to write about the situation in the form of a novel as a coping mechanism. "Since I write novels and

screenplays, I thought fiction would make sense," he says. But every time he sat down to write the novel, he hit a wall. "I failed miserably in the first days," he admits. In the end, he decided he was too close to the crisis to write a fictional account of it. "I need distance. I need time away from this."

Around the same time, the editor of Mannlíf approached Óttar to pen a longread in the form of a diary about the life of an artist in quarantine. The diary format felt comfortable to him, and Óttar had a draft ready in half an hour. "I realised there was so much stuff going on in my head about this that I really needed to get out," he says. By the time the first draft was finished, he had to restrain himself from writing more. "I could have gone longer, but at the moment I feel like I got it out of my system."

## Fresh perspective

Besides sticking to word count, the biggest challenge for Óttar was trying to say something new. "There is so much stuff, memes, articles and blogs, and it's endless," he says, adding that he tried to bring some new perspective to the table. Since he is in Spain—a country on lockdown, with more than 4000 dead at the time of writing, and 56,188 infected—perhaps his account will serve as a warning for the Icelandic government to take the virus and its spread more seriously.

"Iceland feels like Spain felt two weeks ago," Óttar says. "I guess Iceland will be in our position in, I dunno, two weeks?" That's a chilling idea.



*“I have this moment like Nina in ‘Black Swan,’ where she does her best show ever but without a piece of glass in my stomach.”*



PERFECT DAY:

# Andreas Sigurgeirsson

Spectacular, totally unique, completely  
not ever been done before...

Andreas Sigurgeirsson is a dancer-extraordinaire who you can often see gracing the stage of the Iceland Dance Company and performing with Hatari. Here's how his perfect day in the city would unfold:

## First thing in the morning

---

Since I'm in a long-distance relationship, I would love to wake up quite early in the morning, with the early morning shimmer from the sun, spooning my boyfriend, kissing him lightly. My whole family would be in the kitchen, making breakfast, and we'd sit down and talk about a lot of stupid stuff, mostly laughing. Some nice Indonesian jazz plays in the background.

## Mid-morning

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After breakfast, my boyfriend and I go and take a walk in Öskjuhlíð, which is one of the few places within Reykjavík with trees. I'm half-Indonesian so I really like to be surrounded by trees, but in Iceland they are non-existent. Afterwards, we'd head to Naúthólsvík. It'd be a total rom-com situation—we have

the beach to ourselves and go skinny-dipping in the warm ocean. Then we kiss and hug in the hot tub.

## Lunch

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We go to my favourite place, Coooco's Nest, for a late brunch. I have the eggs florentine, which is very cliché, but I freaking love it. My friends are there, and we're planning a new art project, which is brilliant, incredible, amazing, show stopping, spectacular, never the same, totally unique, completely not ever been done before—that whole quote, you know.

Then, we notice in the news that the Icelandic government has stopped the eviction of asylum seeker children and their families, and the solution for the coronavirus is just devouring a huge vínarbrauð. At the same time, Bernie Sanders is elected President of the United States. We celebrate with a mimosa.

## Afternoon

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I would probably want to be alone with myself because I'm a huge loner and need time to myself. I love hiking so I'd go to Esja, put on my

headphones, and just walk very fast up the mountain. I tend to hike very fast and people can't keep up with me. Get those buns of steel, honey!

## Evening

---

Then I'd head to Borgarleikhúsið for a show, grabbing some salad from Local on the way. We'd be showing my all-time favourite piece, Black Marrow. It's packed and I have this moment like Nina in 'Black Swan,' where she does her best show ever. The whole artistic team surrounds me and are in awe and I say, "I was perfect," but without a piece of broken glass in my stomach.

## In the heat of the night

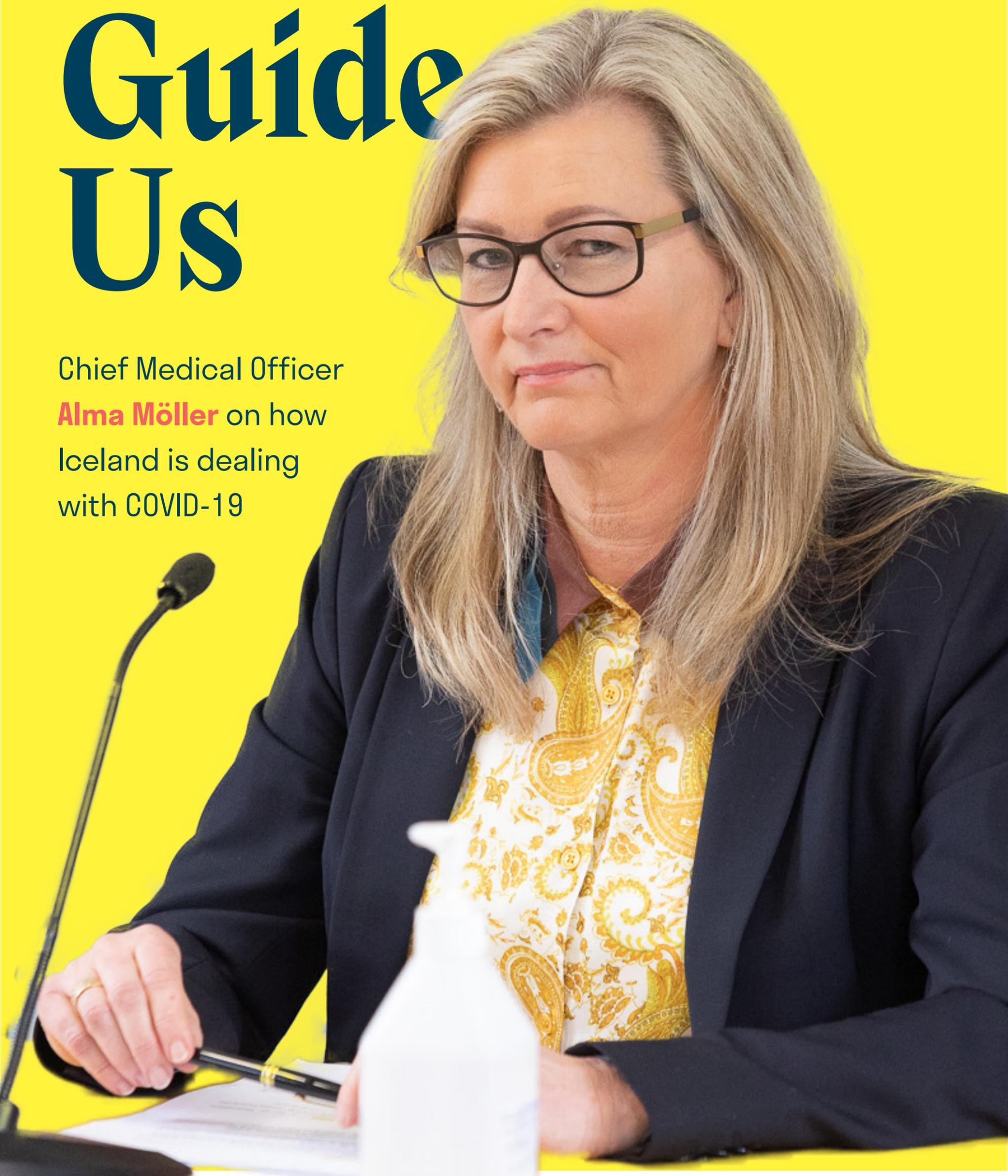
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After the show, me and my comrades celebrate with some champagne. We end up at Röntgen, my new favourite place, and we dance the fucking house down. Then, my boyfriend and I sneak away—like I always do—and tap into Kiki to get our gay songs on for an hour.

Then we'd go home and have sex until we die.

# Not Letting Panic Guide Us

Chief Medical Officer  
**Alma Möller** on how  
Iceland is dealing  
with COVID-19



As some countries close their borders, screenings and tests are either too expensive or impossible to get a hold of, and even some world leaders take up science-denying rhetoric, Iceland has distinguished itself in its fight against the spread of the novel coronavirus. This has involved a concerted effort by the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management, local and national authorities, and the office which oversees Iceland's healthcare system, the Directorate of Health.

As Chief Medical Officer Alma Möller heads this office, and has been at the front lines in Iceland's fight against the virus from the start. She's been a part of the daily press briefings that have kept the country informed, the screening and quarantine operations that have helped slow the virus' spread, and the creation of the information site—[covid.is](https://covid.is)—which is loaded with helpful resources in both Icelandic and English.

### Iceland's advantage

Contrary to what you might have heard elsewhere, the novel coronavirus is not like the flu; in many ways, it's worse.

"It's a new virus that we haven't seen before, and it's always cause for concern when a new epidemic arises," Alma tells us. "We know that this virus is more contagious than influenza, and we know that it results in more people becoming seriously ill. There isn't any vaccine or cure. We see what's happening in China and what's happening in northern Italy, and this has caused us concern and prompted us to take more extensive measures."

Iceland's edge in the fight against the novel coronavirus is a combination of both policy choices and its small size.

"What makes Iceland special is that we have this good civic protection system, and a good emergency response system," Alma says. "[Also good are] our small size, and how easy it is to reach people. It might also be good to be a small nation, as it can make the health care system more extensive and exact. Our response in Iceland has actually been growing a lot since the end of January, while other nations have maybe not taken any large-scale responses. We started by educating the general public, and have been doing so for a long time now. Then we've been trying to test for the virus early, and put people [who test positive] into isolation. We've tracked paths of transmission while having people go into home quarantine. Isolation is for people who test positive, and quarantine is for those who may have had contact with the virus without us yet knowing."

"Now we've gone a bit further in our response, by instituting this public gatherings ban," Alma explains, referring to the ban of gatherings of more than 100 people that went into effect on March 16th. It has since been amended to limit gatherings to no more than 20 people, maintaining a two metre distance between people at all times "We're also protecting those who are the most sensi-

tive to COVID-19; the elderly, and those with certain pre-existing medical conditions. We want to protect those from infection as best we can. All of these responses are to slow down the spread of this epidemic, so that we don't get many cases in just a few days."

Alma points out the oft-touted "flattening the curve" approach; that protective measures help keep the number of people treated within numbers that any given country's health care system can handle. This has been a central theme in the Icelandic response.

### The deCODE screenings

In mid-March, prior to a shortage of testing pins, deCODE Genetics was taking samples from roughly 1,000 Icelanders per day. Preliminary results from testing the general public indicate that the novel coronavirus is not widespread in the country, and could be as low as less than 1%. In fact, deCODE CEO Kári Stefánsson speculates that "it's likely that those who have reason to believe they may have contracted or come in contact with the virus are more likely to come to us."

Alma, for her part, remains cautiously optimistic.

"This is a small sample size that deCODE [has collected], but it indicates that under 1% of those in the greater Reykjavík area are carrying the virus," Alma says. "It's difficult to comment definitively at this time, but if this percentage bears out, then it's perhaps lower than we expected. This also encourages us to continue on with the same measures we've already been taking. It shows that they're working; that the virus isn't spreading out. So it would be wise to continue with what we've been doing; screening early, quarantining and isolating. It's just not known anywhere in the world what percentage of the general population has the virus; we only know how many people have gotten very ill. As it's a new epidemic, it's very important to get better information."

### The criticism

Alma emphasises that there are as yet no plans to increase or intensify the measures Icelandic authorities have already taken, saying, "This screening is ongoing and we've already done a great deal, and it's working, but we are continuously assessing the situation."

Not everyone has been satisfied, though. Across social media, armchair diagnosticians have called for Iceland to raise the threat level, take more drastic measures, or even shut its borders entirely. Alma advises that people look at the situation accurately and not lose their heads.

"I think the numbers that we have here [on rate of infection in the general population] don't support that criticism," she says. "But of course, we always welcome criticism, and continue to assess the situation. As things stand now, our measures have been working, and no decisions have been taken in a state of panic."

### Please don't break quarantine

Up until now, those who have been placed in quarantine have been advised to stay home. They are not kept in isolation—as has been said, isolation is for those who test positive, while quarantine is for those who may have caught the virus but are still waiting on results. There have been some dubious reports of people breaking quarantine, and at the time of this writing authorities have just announced that they will be doing phone checks to make sure people in quarantine stay home. In addition to breaking quarantine potentially endangering the general public, those who do so may face criminal penalties.

"There have been some tips to the police that someone has broken quarantine, and in a very few cases that has been the case," Alma tells us. If someone does break quarantine, then according to Icelandic law on infectious disease, it is possible to enforce penal law. But thus far we haven't had to do that, as people are in general doing well and listening to orders, as this is something everyone should do."

### "Our goal is to tell the truth"

Regardless of Iceland's effective approach, Alma maintains that the emphasis on personal responsibility is not unique to Iceland.

"We've maybe acted sooner in getting these health guidelines out to people, but I think this is the key component," she says. "And I think it's easy for us to get this information to the public, because we're so few. Our goal is to tell the truth,

and we make decisions based on the facts that we have. It's very easy to judge after the fact, but all the decisions we make are based on the best knowledge we have at that given time."

She also points out the website, [covid.is](https://covid.is), which is a veritable wealth of information on how to stay safe and keep others safe as well.

There's no telling how long this situation may last. Things may get better, and they may get worse. The situation changes from day to day. At the very least, however, Icelanders are not kept in the dark about the current state of things, they have full access to the country's health services, and all the information one might need is just a few clicks away.

*"Our goal is to tell the truth, and we make decisions based on the facts that we have. It's very easy to judge after the fact, but all the decisions we make are based on the best knowledge we have at that given time."*

