

The Reykjavik Grapevine City Awards

2021 **Best Of**
Reykjavík

Dining

Take-Away Is The
New Dining In

Drinking

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You Do Too

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Something Old,
Something New

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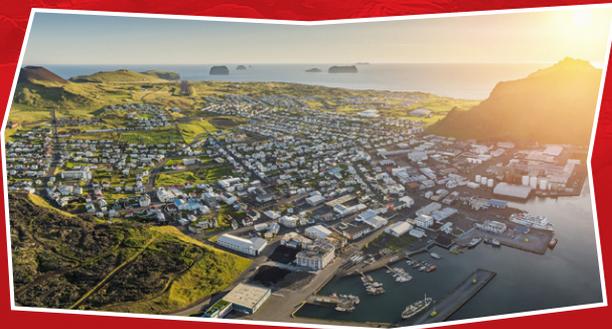
Mývatn on Your Own

Exploring the Lake Mývatn area and the natural wonders of North Iceland.



Vestmannaeyjar in Just One Day

The volcano island of Heimaey (Home island) in the Westman Islands archipelago.



Ice Caves and the Diamond Beach

Explore the thrilling ice caves of Vatnajökull and Jökulsárlón's glittering diamond beach.



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AN INTRODUCTION

Best of Reykjavík:



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Celebrating Our New Normal

What a year! We at the Grapevine have travelled abroad extensively, given each other lots of hugs, and, of course, partied until the early hours at the plethora of live shows and events around town. What more could we ask for from our dear capital?

We're joking, of course. But while the past 18 months (and counting) have certainly dampened our spirits, that doesn't mean that Reykjavík hasn't put its best foot forward to cheer us up, so, after long delays, here are our much-anticipated Best Of Reykjavík 2021 awards. Looking for the best place to stock up on local design, sip a cocktail or enjoy some Thai eats? You've picked up the right paper.

Some categories have been modified and others have been added in keeping with our New Normal, but overall, these awards made us and our expert panels realise how grateful we are for this delightful city we live in. From vegan Vietnamese to a gas-station gallery and Greek donuts, the pandemic didn't stop Reykjavík from bursting forth with delightful new eccentricities and we couldn't be more jazzed.

Along with the winners, you'll also find profiles on **Chickpea** (p.20), our favourite falafel spot, as well as **Skuggabaldur** (p.29), downtown's newest jazz bar. We also have guides to **Reykjavík's top galleries** (p.39), **the city's newest**

post-pandemic places (p. 22), as well as perhaps **the most extensive guide to Reykjavík's tattoo artists ever written** (p. 33). Yes, we at the Grapevine are bad boys who like showcasing our devotion to anchors and our mothers right on our skin.

While you're here, be sure to pick up a copy of our flagship publication, **The Reykjavík Grapevine**—it's packed with news, culture and info on the top events in town.

If you're on a budget, download our **Appy Hour** and **Happening** apps for cheap booze and event listings. Finally, keep an eye out for our **Best of Iceland** magazine to read what's worth checking out in the countryside. We also love to hear from you on Twitter, so hit us up at **@rvkgrapevine**. No MLMs though. We are already boss babes.

You would also do well to support our journalism by booking any tours you're interested in—in Reykjavík or anywhere else in the country—through our booking site, **gotravel.grapevine.is**. We're an independent publication and we'd like to stay that way.

Thanks for reading and remember to love your neighbour.

Hannah Jane Cohen
Editor, Best Of Reykjavík

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Farmers Market

— ICELAND —



OUR STORES IN REYKJAVÍK: FARMERS & FRIENDS



Laugavegur 37



Hólmastóð 2 / Grandi

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Kaffi Coffee

Vín Wine

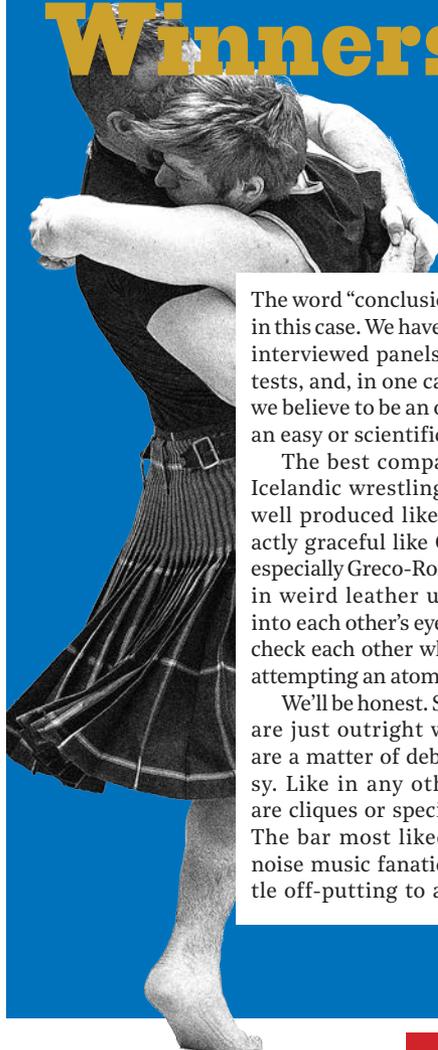
Matur Food



MIKKI REFUR COFFEE & WINE
Good things for good people

THE AWARDS:

How We Picked the Winners



The word “conclusion” is a little strong in this case. We have argued, fought and interviewed panels, tried blind taste-tests, and, in one case, consulted what we believe to be an oracle. This was not an easy or scientific endeavour.

The best comparison is glíma, or Icelandic wrestling. It’s not flashy or well produced like WWE. It’s not exactly graceful like Olympic wrestling, especially Greco-Roman. It’s two people in weird leather underwear, staring into each other’s eyes and trying to hip-check each other while simultaneously attempting an atomic wedge.

We’ll be honest. Some of the winners are just outright winners, but some are a matter of debate and controversy. Like in any other country, there are cliques or special interest groups. The bar most liked by a 22-year-old noise music fanatic might seem a little off-putting to a bespectacled jazz

enthusiast. We’re not saying those two groups can’t overlap. Maybe they can. Jazz people are good at improvising and noise music definitely needs more fans.

The thing is, this is a guide. It’s a work in progress. It’s an attempt at letting people know where we think they should go. We didn’t all agree on everything, so the runners-up could end up being more palatable to you, and the winners could be your third favourite. Yikes.

If this lack of certainty is too much for you: imagine being the original tourist to Iceland. A wandering tax-evader from Norway who decides to settle on a rock almost uninhabited by animal life. A land that occasionally explodes, with geysers that burst scalding sulphur-scented water from the ground like a cannon ball at Satan’s pool party. It’s the kind of place where people would invent glíma.

THE GUIDE-GUIDE

How To Spot The Winners

Look out for these stickers of recommendation, which we’ve handed out to this year’s winners. They indicate your best option, whether you’re looking for shopping, dining, drinking or fun days out in Reykjavík. We at the Grapevine know what’s best!

Also, these are the stickers from our previous “Best Of” selections, given to winners from prior years. 🍇



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Dining

Burgers, bases, breads and bowls

While the pandemic shows no sign of abating, Iceland's food and beverage industry seems to be surging ahead on a combination of hope, optimism and high spirits despite the many challenges posed by COVID. In a year full of uncertainties, restaurants old and new showed us what resilience looks like. Take-away took on a whole new meaning with at-home meal kits being offered up by celebrated chefs, marked-down menus becoming commonplace and spirited underground deliveries brightened many evenings.

Our expert panel of gourmards were hand-picked for their dedication to food—these people eat out way more than one should and can sift the mojo from the mayo with ease. While it has been a difficult year, the winners rose to the challenge, and how! Adversity does bring out the best in some and this year we are delighted to shine light on our out-of-town superstars who often eclipse their Reykjavík counterparts by miles. So sit tight, and let us help you navigate these gastronomic waters, be it the hottest burger in town or the most memorable dining experience of your life.

Best Burger



Yuzu

Hverfisgata 44

What sets Yuzu apart from the rest in this hotly contested category is the overall joy of sinking your teeth into a juicy burger that also feels surprisingly light. What we look for is a well balanced, well proportioned burger and our baseline reference is a cheeseburger or the simplest burger on the menu. At Yuzu, the burgers are easy to hold; the smashed patty is a good balance of crust to juicy insides, the meat is well seasoned and well rested (important!), the cheese is melty and—the most important criteria in Iceland—it's thoughtfully sauced. Yuzu has struck that sweet spot by offering an 'islensk sjoppuborgari' for those that like their burgers drenched in sauce, a la Island, leaving the rest of the burgers a grease-free affair.

Runners-Up

Hamborgarabúlla Tómasar Multiple locations

You can count on good old Búllan for a solid burger. The Búllan burger is a comfort burger, it's the one you know and crave on a Tuesday night, the one you can take the kids out for, it's the one that rarely disappoints. As the resident Burgerman insisted, 'you can try all other burgers, but this is the one you come back to.' A lil' birdie on our panel whispers that, 'the Tommi-owned Höfði location is excellent with kids', while another swore by the Geirsgata location for the 'Steak Burger'. Also worth trying are the Tuesday 1190 ISK deals.

Hagavagninn Hofsvallagata

A dip in Vesturbærjarlaug should include a coffee at Kaffi Vest, some rummaging at Melabúðin and a burger pit-stop at Hagavagninn after. The first to introduce the 'smash burger' style burgers to Reykjavík, these burgers are the "most well-proportioned, balanced burgers out there," observed the panel. Years later, they are still the only ones with a pitch-perfect smash patty as well.

Best Vegan Burger



Junkyard

Skeifan 13a

The vegan community is vociferous and growing. And when they tell you that these are the burgers to beat, you sit up and listen. At the Grapevine, we take our job seriously, so of course, we put this claim to the test. And they were right. Junkyard's in-house patties are a welcome relief from all the processed Oumph! and other meat substitutes that abound—it's a savoury, smoky seitan patty with grit and bite (we suspect there is some smoked paprika lending an added smokiness). The sauces are all made in-house, too! Our panel described it as "juicy, sloppy and the perfect Sunday take-away burger."

Runners-Up



BioBorgari Vesturgata 12

BioBorgari is unapologetic about their Earth-friendly, small batch, slow living approach to food. So it's no surprise that their vegan burger embodies that same spirit. With zero processed fillers, their grain-bean-lentil patties are earthy without feeling too healthy, a complaint staunch vegans express often. Sure the pesto recalls a distant panini, but we'll admit that it has grown on us.



Jömm Kringlan 4-12

"There is nothing artisanal about it, and that's a part of the attraction," our panel said in summing up Jömm's burger. "A simple, clean, classic burger," Jömm's burgers are modelled along the lines of an Icelandic sjoppuborgari (dive bar burger)—greasy, sweaty and perfect for when junk food craving hits.

Best Pizza



Flatey

Multiple locations

Leaving old and aspiring pizzerias in the dust, Flatey is as spirited in spreading that Neopolitan gospel as the day they first opened. Weaning a country raised on pizza-chain pies is no small feat. And to convert them to artisanal, hand-made, scratch dough pies is a whole other thing. The Margherita continues to be a panel favourite, seeing as it is a study in classic Napoli pizza—simply seasoned San Marzano tomatoes, milky mozzarella, a good glug of olive oil and fresh basil.

Runner-Up



The Coooco's Nest Grandagarður 23

Coooco's was slinging sourdough pizzas long before it was fashionable in Reykjavík. Regulars swear by their pies, topped with a balanced repertoire of flavours that scream fine-dining nuance. Take, for example, their hot honey and hazelnut pie that has over the years taken on many avatars, home-made ricotta to stretchy mozzarella, caramelised onions to salty salami—each iteration a delight. Their 'Vegan Surprise' take extends to pizzas as well and you are in for a Cali-Italian treat whatever pie you order.

Newcomer



Pluto Pizza Hagamelur 67

Pluto Pizza quietly opened doors without much fanfare at the peak of the pandemic. However, this neighbourhood pizzeria's NY style slices quickly became the hot order. As one of our panellists rightly noted, "It is great take-away pizza, stays intact for 2-3 days, even better the day after!" and the price point of just over 2000 ISK for an 18" pie is a steal.

Best Bakery



Sandholt / Deig Workshop

Joint Winners

Sandholt Laugavegur 36

Still showing the young guns how it's done is this grand dame of all things baked. In addition to their famed sourdough, the mini tarts, cakes and butter laminated viennoiserie are similarly sought after. What you may not know is that Sandholt offers a token system of sorts, allowing customers to skip the long lines by placing their orders for a later pick up at their convenience. We highly recommend their sandwiches to go, or if you can manage to get a spot at the cafe, finish things on a sweet note with a slice of their tropical mango, passion fruit, coconut cake.



Deig Workshop Tryggvagata 18

In a city with a bakery to brag about on every street corner, this saturated category is hotly contested. Throw a pandemic into the mix and we are talking about a populace craving copious amounts of butter, sugar and starch. Deig tackled that challenge and how! They also somehow took time to innovate; delivering handmade doughnuts filled with a cornucopia of delights, like the recent pistachio-mascarpone number, Polish doughnuts with rosehip marmalade for Fat Tuesday or the unforgettable cruller bollur that brought all of Reykjavik to its knees around Bolludagur.

Runner-Up



Brauð & Co. Multiple locations

The wicked curse of expansion woes has struck our favourite bakery, but fret not! While the kanill croissant snúður can be a hit or miss, their classic snúðurs continue to be as stellar as always. The granola is always a winner, but we are currently nursing a soft spot for their custardy vinabrauð.

Best Thai



Ban Thai

Laugavegur 130

"It is their way, and no other way," our panel notes wryly about Ban Thai's cut approach to adjusting spice levels (no, they don't do it) or warm service, (no, don't come looking for that, either). That said, an institution doesn't rest on its laurels and Ban Thai isn't showing any signs of slowing down. Sure, their appetizers might sometimes miss the mark and leave you wondering if they have lost their mojo. But as a die-hard panellist expands, "stick to what they do best, which is Southern Thai fare, and you are in for an experience."

Runners-Up



Mai Thai Laugavegur 118

Does Mai Thai make their curries from scratch? Probably not. Do they make the best Pad Thai in town? A resounding yes. But in a city full of purportedly cheap Thai restaurants kowtowing to their sweet chilli sauce-ketchup loving fan base, Mai Thai stands tall for using pre-soaked noodles cooked to order, with that distinctive trifecta of fish sauce-tamarind-palm sugar singing through. Lunch orders, dine-in or take-away, Mai Thai handles it all with aplomb.



Krua Thai Skólavörðustígur 21

Krua Thai might not enjoy the same popularity they once did, but their loyalists still swear by their fragrant curries, generous portions and attentive service. One panellist noted that their deep fried shrimp, a curious staple across Thai restaurants in the city, is better than most and that the vegetarian and vegan dishes pack quite a punch.

Best Chinese



Fine

Rauðarárstígur 33

"I'm always there," confesses one of our panellists. And that isn't surprising given that this Sichuanese restaurant packs a wallop of flavour, heat and textural delight in each of their selections. A fine Fine hack shares another, is to get the Black Soybean Pork to dunk into the Oil Spill Noodles—slinky hand cut noodles and a classic oil dressing—a satisfying vegan dish on its own, takes a few notches up if you are a meat eater. Other panel favourites include a superb cumin lamb, pepper beef and their hand pleated dumplings. During the pandemic, the restaurant stepped up to offer weekly specials at a hard to beat price, and they continue to do so with their lunch offers. Most dishes are vegan and lactose free (just ask), making this little gem accessible to everyone.

Runners-Up



Fönix Bildshöfði 12

There isn't a better fish fragrant eggplant in town and the Mapo Tofu sans meat is what tofu aspires to be. These dishes at Fönix always arrive at your table scaldingly hot, the eggplants fried to silky perfection, the tofu enticingly jiggly. These delights also happen to be vegan! Family-run Fönix has something for everyone. The lunch buffet is also a notch above similar fare. If your idea of Chinese food is the pallid fare at Ricki Chan, boy are you in for a ride at Fönix.

Newcomer

Fine Take-Away Helluhraun 22, Hafnarfjörður

At a time when Fine decided to close their Rauðarárstígur location briefly at the peak of the pandemic, they didn't leave their customers wanting. Instead they opened a take-away only outpost in Hafnarfjörður with a dedicated menu. The ease of ordering, fair pricing and selection available without sacrificing any of the flavours we have come to associate with Fine, makes this one of our favourites. While the many dumplings are always a treat, we recommend the famed Hong shao rou pork, a festive dish made accessible.

Best Traditional Icelandic Food



Café Loki

Lokastígur 28

Long before Icelandic food was considered cool, this unassuming cafe was unabashedly celebrating tradition. From the classic farm-style kjötsúpa (lamb soup, although we recommend trying the rye bread soup as well—it's part what the heck, part dessert, but all delicious) to herring and plökkfiskur, everything is a throwback to how the island once ate. The carrot-cake doppekganger Freyja is a trout brauðterta (savory sandwich cake) that is retro yet tasty. And for those writing their own tales of bravado, there is fermented shark to be washed down with Brennivín—a convenient platter for bragging rights.

Runners-Up



Kaffi Vagninn Grandagarður 10

Iceland's oldest running restaurant, Kaffivagninn's enviable location by the harbour is best enjoyed on a sunny day, out on the deck, a cold brew in one hand and a mighty slice of brauðterta in the other. Portions are very much sailor sized, and the plökkfiskur is a throwback to amma's place, with one portion enough to feed two full-grown adults. Other Icelandic classics like fiskibollur and schnitzel are also on offer. The place continues to draw patrons from morning coffees to the popular evening shift, only made better by a slice of their homemade cake.



Prir Frakkar Baldursgata 14

Prir Frakkar had its strong sense of Icelandic food culture on display long before it was fashionable. This restaurant has not let anything sway them from tradition—you'll spot everything on the menu, from foal and blackbird, to cod throats and plökkfiskur, which will all remain long in your memory. A visit to this place underlines the fact that good old-fashioned Icelandic cooking can be all kinds of memorable.

BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2021

Dining

Iceland's not cheap, so it had better be good

Best Coffeehouse



Reykjavik Roasters

Ásmundarsalur, Brautarholt 2, Kárástíg 1

With baristas all hired from the Portlandia school of underground coffee makers, service at Reykjavik Roasters makes you wonder if this is universal barista behaviour or just Scandinavian pain writ large. However, the expertly roasted beans make for wily cups of coffee that keep you coming back for more, even if the baristas refuse to remember your order after years of patronage. If caffeine isn't your poison, then they have a large selection of teas brewed to perfection, chia puddings and sandwich options. Whether you are looking to have a small meeting, catch up with a friend, or get quality solo-time in, one of the many Roasters locations have you covered with drink, bite and terse baristas.

Runner-Up



Emilie's Reykjavik Hverfisgata 98

"I was shocked to learn their excellent snuður is also vegan!" exclaimed a panellist, a reaction not that uncommon if you've been to Emilie's for their baked goods and coffee. This café mignon is still going strong on their street corner, satisfying customers with their friendly service, vegan and non-vegan scones, cinnamon rolls, cakes and muffins. We've had a couple of underbaked mishaps but we're willing to forgive these faux pas for their overall cosy cafe vibe.

Newcomer



Mikki Refur Hverfisgata 18

If you are a militant coffee drinker like our panellists, you'd be pleased to know that new wine bar Mikki Refur cuts the mustard on the caffeine front. Taking off where Bismút left off when it comes to quality and handling of luxurious coffee, Ben Boorman and his crew are meticulous when it comes to their coffees and serve a mean cup every time, whether to-go or in-house. Also, post coffee drinking, the natural wines, simple menu and atmosphere can take you into the wee hours of the night.

Best Sushi



Sushi Social

Pingholtsstræti 5

An homage to Icelandic sushi, this is where classic sushi meets our love for sauces. And it is still a happy union. Sushi Social's pandemic platters also proved popular as take-away treats and with restrictions being lifted, their rainbow hued tropical drinks, and affable service no matter how noisy your dining group is all make for a winning dinner here. We recommend asking for a side of locally grown Icelandic wasabi to really kick things up a notch.

Runner-Up



Fiskmarkaðurinn Aðalstræti 12

Fishmarket might have closed its doors for a good part of the pandemic, but they did offer an excellent take-away sushi platter at their sister restaurant Grillmarket. When they did resume operations, their sushi game was taken up a notch, a noticeable difference from when they last dropped off our list. This year, they've upped their rice game, the cuts of fish are noticeably beautiful and they straddle that Icelandic-Japanese sushi interpretation wonderfully. In fact, we'd recommend their volcano lobster roll over others in town for a taste of Icelandic sushi done right.

Newcomer



Umami Sushi + Bar Borgartún 29

Umami has an ambitious chef behind its operations offering guests fresh, made-on-site sushi that is notches above supermarket sushi but not quite fine dining fare. It is an easy going, light on the pocket, light on your stomach fare. A welcome addition to the sushi scene, we are watching this one to see if they'll topple the old guard.

Best Vegan Meal



SONO matseljur

Sæmundargata 11

Situated in the stunning Nordic House by renowned architect Alvar Aalto, this spunky little what-should've-been-a-pop-up-but-became-a-fixture venture by two non-chefs with a deep abiding love for food, serves up a vegetarian-vegan feast brimming with colour, freshness and vitality of peak season produce. Conceived around the idea of 'mezze', the sharing platters are an ode to Icelandic nature in both choice of ingredients as well as flavours. Foraged herbs, berries, fruits, stems and flowers are all commanded to service resulting in a fun, not-just-salads affair that also serves as a reminder that good vegan food is beyond batter-fried cauliflower.

Runner-Up

Sumac Grill + Drinks Laugavegur 28

Sumac's vegan dishes have a strong following amongst local vegans. A festive atmosphere combined with Middle Eastern inspired flavours makes for a winning combo as cuisines from these parts are mostly vegan-vegetarian without much effort. We especially love the grilled oyster mushrooms over a bed of hummus and the grilled cauliflower which has recently made way for a cabbage version. We recommend ordering family style to try everything in the true spirit of the restaurant's inspiration.

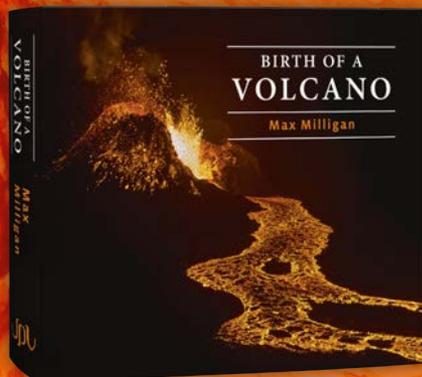
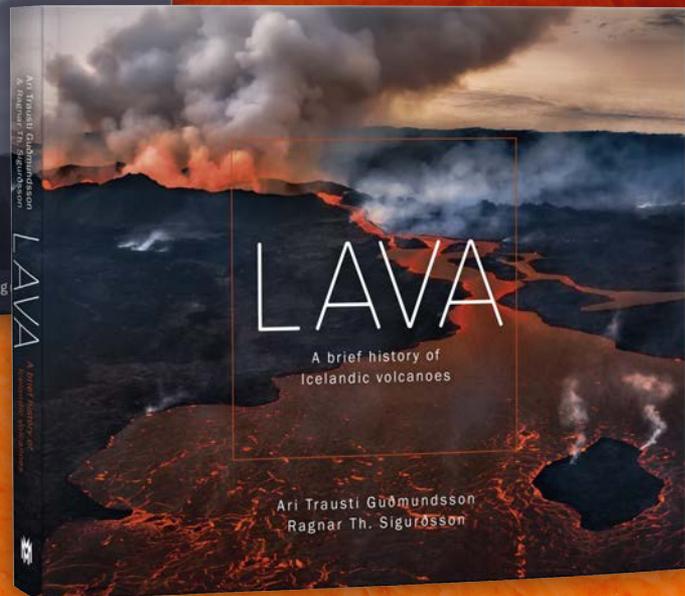
Newcomer



Vegan World Peace Aðalstræti 2

Serving up vegan versions of Southeast Asian classics, Vegan World Peace has quickly made a name for itself as one of the most popular vegan restaurants in town. SE Asia has a long history of vegan 'mock meats', especially by Buddhist monks in employing a meat alternative using soy and wheat substitutes. The Vietnamese Banh Mi is a staple order at the Grapevine offices and the wide range of mock fish, meats and tofu preparations means that both vegans and non-vegans will find something exciting to feast on.

ALL ABOUT VOLCANOES



Three different perspectives on the stunning and fierce beauty of the Icelandic volcanoes

The new eruption in Geldingadalur being the star of the show



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BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2021

Dining

From fancy meals to family fun

Best Goddamn Restaurant**Austur-Indíafélagið & La Primavera**

Joint Winners

Austur-Indíafélagið, Hverfisgata 56

Showing Iceland what down-to-earth hospitality looks like is the grand dame of all restaurants, Austur-Indíafélagið. Over two decades old now, this is where many Icelanders discovered their first taste of palyas, pickles and pollichathu. It doesn't matter if you are new to Indian cuisine or a seasoned consumer of curries, this place makes you feel welcome with its warm embrace of fresh spices, high quality local produce, nuanced balance of flavours and deft ability to marry Indian know-how with local preferences—case in point, their braised meats have just enough bite for cutlery-wielding patrons. The tandoori grilled chicken is redolent with the heady pungency of mustard oil in the marinade; the stuffed kulchas (leavened breads) are singed with smoke and pregnant with crumbly paneer and onions; the dal is smacked with a garlic tempering, perfect for stirring into warm steamed rice. The unparalleled service gobsmacks you with the realisation that good service isn't a unicorn on this island. Whether you're celebrating a milestone, or simply want to treat yourself to dining out done right, dinner at Austur India never disappoints.

La Primavera, Grandagarður 20

Another decades-old institution, La Primavera has been resurrected twice now and is absolutely at its peak. Highlighting regional Italian delights, chef Leifur Kolbeinsson has his finger on the pulse of what makes restaurants great. Eschewing of-the-moment penchant for all things fermented, foraged or frivolous, the focus instead is on coaxing intense flavours with peak-season produce, few ingredients, and an honesty that is rare to come by. The asparagus this season was served with a scattering of trout roe and a silky veloute, monk fish was served on the bone with a textbook shellfish sauce and creamy mashed potatoes we couldn't get enough of. The pannacotta jiggles like the inside of a woman's thigh, and the Basque-style cheesecake elicits groans of pleasure. Service is endearingly attentive and the place changes character between lunch and dinner, so even if you were to eat here a whole day you'd still find reason to come back over and over.

Best Place For A Fancy Meal**Dill**

Laugavegur 59

If you want to spoil yourself silly at Iceland's only Michelin-starred restaurant, then Dill is the place to be. Every detail is thought through—the cloth napkins, the stemware, gorgeous handmade ceramics, heck, even the playlist is attuned to the dining room's moods. Dill's circular kitchen philosophy starts you off with an ever-changing take on savoury broth made from veggie scraps, signature snacks that tease flavour profiles from seemingly mundane ingredients, candy floss-esque shredded dried fish and wafer thin meat croquettes. The wine pairing has recently come into its own with a young sommelier who previously worked at Pujol, making waves with his natural wine choices that we'd otherwise not have considered. Despite a challenging year, Dill continues to be a beacon of fine dining in Iceland.

Runners-Up**Sumac Grill + Drinks
Laugavegur 28**

With its distressed walls, worn timber floors and a charred smokiness infusing the air, Sumac makes for an enjoyable evening out. The bartenders are seemingly in competition with the kitchen, slinging beautiful cocktails with mysterious names and unafraid to riff on Icelandic childhood memories. The food is perfect for sharing and we recommend making a meal of the small plates mezze-style.

**Eiriksson Brasserie
Laugavegur 77**

Locals love to lounge at Eiriksson's private dining rooms or hang out by their long bar and people watch. Either way, the extensive menu, spanning pizzas and pastas to steaks, is sure to have something for everyone. And to truly gild that lily, there's always caviar and foie gras.

Best Family Restaurant**Osushi**

Tryggvagata 13

Kids' Choice

Dining out can be a stressful affair during the pandemic. Eating out with kids, more so. At Osushi, young diners don't have to wait for their food at all, which explains the popularity of this place with young families. The sushi conveyor belt provides plenty of visual stimulation, piques an interest in all the colourful food on offer and is the perfect blend of small bites, choices to please the picky eater and the adventurous mini gourmand. The quick turnover means the sushi was made minutes ago, a win-win in a land of cold rolls. At a time when parenting goals are lost over screen time, a place like Osushi is a gentle reminder to forego screens and be present. Chopstick skills, introspection and well fed kids? Hard to beat really.

Parents' Choice**Kaffi Lækur
Laugarnesvegur 74a**

Kaffi Lækur has always been popular with families for their child friendliness, which is front and centre in the layout of the cafe, a food menu that is great for splitting with kids and the patient, reassuring service that understands all too well the challenges of dining out with younger wards. With the recent addition of the outdoor play space, this charming outpost is well worth a visit.

Runner-Up**Klambrar Bistro
Háteigsvegur 31-33**

"A slice of cake and culture," is how our panel describes this stunning coffee house/bistro in the heart of Reykjavík. Housed in the architecturally gorgeous Kjarvalsstaðir art gallery, renovations in recent years have only added to the cafe's light-washed appeal. The adjoining "art room" is a welcome scribble and scream space for young toddlers, and there is enough crawl space around to explore while parents can eat. And when the sun shines, chalk and water games in the courtyards outside make for the ideal family outing.



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Dining

A lobster lunch with no credit crunch

Best Value for Money



Sægreifinn

Geirsgata 8

The famed lobster soup place in Iceland that everyone talks about is also one of the best value-for-money restaurants in the country. The pandemic forced a temporary closure, with the restaurant dabbling in home deliveries and take-aways. Thankfully, they are back in business now. At lunch, you can treat yourself to a chunky lobster soup and their signature seafood skewers—choose from mainstays like salmon, cod and haddock, to fresh scallops, shrimp and other fish you wouldn't otherwise see on menus. All this for just 2000 ISK!

Runners-Up



Deig Tryggvagata 18

Deig's 'Poor Man's Offer' is as good as it gets on this abnormally expensive island. For 1000 ISK you can choose a handmade bagel with the filling of your choice—from simple butter and cheese, to more substantial options like tuna salad—a doughnut and a drink. We challenge you to find a better deal!



Flatus Skúlagata 28

Kex hostel is no run-of-the-mill backpacker hostel. A lively bar with DJ sets and concerts—plus a kitchen dishing out thin-crust pizzas and beer—makes this one of our favourite places to grab a slice and see what's current in Reykjavík. The lunch offer for a beer and pizza is 1200 ISK and 2000 ISK respectively. A steal, however you look at it!

Best Brunch



The Cocoo's Nest

Grandagarður 23

It's with good reason that this family-run restaurant has made such a strong impact on the local brunch scene. Cocoo's continues to be the most brunch-y brunch in town. The pancakes are American perfection. That award-winning sourdough is put to good use under poached eggs bathed in a silky hollandaise tickled with blue cheese, the wreck-your-bank-account avocado toast, or just simply grilled and served alongside an omelette that feeds six. We kid, but only partially. Iris, one of the owners, insists people leave well fed and stuffed. And even though Luna Florens extends the seating availability, it's best to make a reservation.

Runners-Up



Bastard Brew & Food Vegamótastíg 4

Party hard and brunch harder may well be a Reykjavík motto going by the popularity of this meal. The pandemic certainly dampened the party front, which might explain the flocking hordes at the Bastard's bottomless brunch. For a fixed amount you can eat and drink to your heart's content, and choose from a staggering menu that spans everything from tacos, to eggs to order, to cocktails and desserts. Be warned; the place does carry the undertones of weekend debauchery.



BrewDog Reykjavík Frakkastígur 8

Two bars making it to our brunch list? Hear us out. BrewDog may be known for their beers and bro dude vibes elsewhere, but what sets them apart here is their food lab madly at work churning out in-house fermented hot sauces, sausages and other meaty concoctions that warrant a visit. Their weekend brunches are extremely family-friendly, with the waiters happily obliging requests for stacks of pancakes for hungry kids.

Best Seafood



Fish Company

Vesturgata 2a

For the definitive seafood experience in Reykjavík, you'd be hard pressed to find a better restaurant than Fiskfelagið. Their globally inspired tasting menus are a great way to try the best that Icelandic waters have to offer, from Atlantic cod served Japanese style to harissa-stocked wolffish. The sushi platter makes a great lunch. The fish of the day is usually a generous pan fried dish with a luscious sauce, making it so much more than just a lunch affair. We also love their version of a shrimp salad that others emulate, but none gets as fresh and light as Fiskfelagið does.

Runners-Up



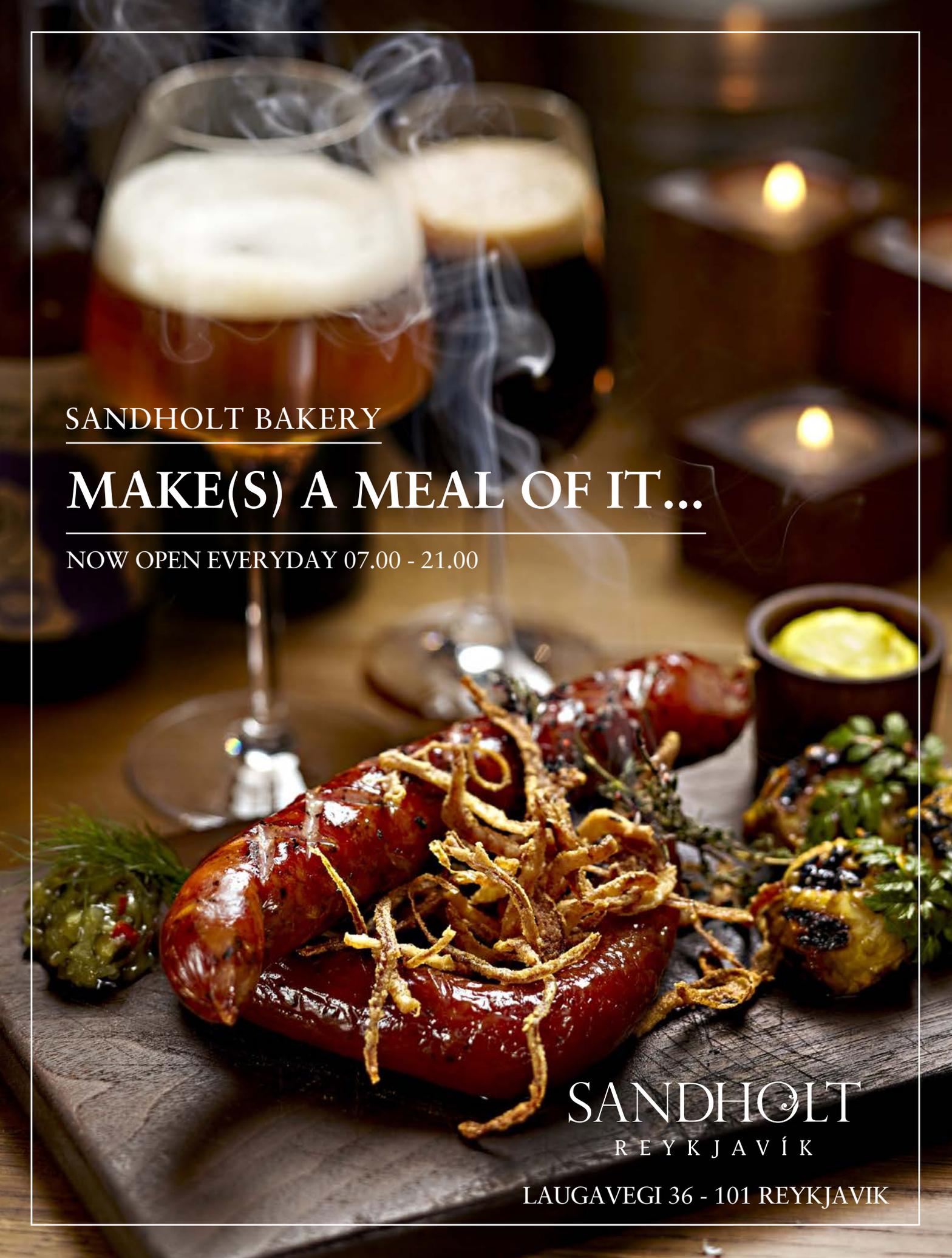
Fiskmarkaðurinn Aðalstræti 12

Chef Hrefna Sætran's first restaurant is the place to try Icelandic seafood served up in a Japanese-inspired fashion. Not quite traditional, Fish Market, (as it is popularly known), serves up food that is a treat for your eyes as much as your mouth. The robata grilled salmon is a beautifully prepared hunk of salmon with creamy grains. The lightly salted cod—a menu staple—is dotted with green apple, a fresh touch on a dish that can otherwise be overwhelming. The cocktails are fun, (there is a Lucky Charms inspired drink, and a spicy Wasabi Mule with fresh local wasabi), and the service attentive.



Hipstur Höfði Mathöll & Borg 29

How Hipstur keeps churning out dish after banging dish with machine-like precision is a marvel to the panel. Now with another outpost at the Borg 29 food hall, this restaurant's fish of the day is a much sought after dish second only to the decadent but misleadingly named 'shrimp bread'. Homemade bread topped with succulent shrimp, beautifully dressed salad of coriander and chervil is more than the sum of its parts.



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Best Lunch Place



Hipstur

Höfði Mathöll & Borg 29

If you are looking for a light yet satiating meal that isn't just an insipid salad or clammy sushi rolls straight from the cooler, look no further than Hipstur. Despite being restaurant dishes, the entire menu is a bright, springy affair with dressed-to-order salads of herbs and greens sitting atop tender fish, stir fried mushrooms or meat, sharpened with the twang of fresh grated horseradish that rests atop a house-made slice of bread. They know their customers well, and are one of the few places where a lunch order means swift service without sacrificing flavour. Heck, they'll even customise your order if you are a prim-suited banker and don't want onion breath.

Runners-Up



Fjallkonan

Hafnarstræti 1-3

If the weather is good, there are few spots to dine outside and feel the sun on your skin like Fjallkonan. The menu is a disparate affair with everything from hummus to truffle fries to piri-piri chicken to Eton mess. But somehow they make it work and we recommend the small courses that are generous and make for a quick lunch.

Newcomer



Chickpea

Hallveigarstigur 1

All heart and sunshine, this brand new vegetarian outpost is a firm Grapevine favourite and, judging by their packed premises, others concur. Sourdough pitas and flatbreads encase crunchy fried falafel, and various salads and pickled toppings make for a satisfying lunch that fuels you through the day.

Best Food-On-The-Go



Mandi

Veltusund 3b

We might as well just call this "The Mandi category". Whether it's their full-flavored meats, or their extensive vegan options, this Syrian kebab place has Reykjavík's heart. Crispy falafels, lamb shawarmas, teeny desserts, or a pack of ciggies; Mandi's got you. The classic chicken shawarma is great, yes, but we also love the Mandi kofta with a lamb seekh kebab and dollops of spicy shatta. The rolls are handy, well-packed and make for a great snack on the go, or a hurried meal.

Newcomers



Chickpea

Hallveigarstigur 1

You know what's better than eating one of their warm pitas or rolls? Getting one to go. While we understand the popularity of their falafel stuffed classic, consider the sabich—grilled eggplant with hummus, hard boiled eggs (which you can skip to make vegan), and crunchy salad, it travels well, has no crunch to lose and is deeply satisfying.



Maika'i

Kolagata 1, Hagasmári 1

We tend to be a few years too late on trends here in Iceland. But when something does gain popularity, we do it in spades. Maika'i is Reykjavík's only acai bowl bar, offering this Brazilian superfood fruit as smoothie bowls topped with an assortment of nut butters, seeds, fruit and to take the edge off all that 'healthy oxidants', chocolate chips.

Best Place To Go With A Group Of Friends



Apotek

Austurstræti 16

Apotek is one of those rare places in Reykjavík that go effortlessly from business lunches to high tea to pre-dinner cocktail hour to languorous dinners, without skipping a beat. Choose from the excellent fish of the day at lunch, a tower of petit fours and finger sandwiches at high tea. Pair it with bubbly if you and your friends are feeling extra indulgent, or let your hair down with their award-winning cocktails. What makes Apotek tick is that it welcomes everyone, regardless of age or preferences, and that is what makes it a winner in our books.

Runners-Up



Forréttabarninn

Nýlendugata 14

This often overlooked spacious appetizer bar doesn't just serve small courses. The cavernous rooms are perfect for pandemic socialising, the music never reaches deafening levels, there is enough variety to keep the vegans, non-vegans and everything-in-betweeners happy. The drinks don't hurt either.



Vinstúkan Tíu Sopar

Laugavegur 27

Whether you are a group of five or sixteen, this bustling wine bar can accommodate you and all your friends' preferences for drinks and snacks, while delivering surprises. If you are a light drinker, they have several bottles open each night, if you wanna host a whole shindig, "they'll cater a tailored-to-your-budget experience, complete with wine tastings, private room experience et al". The only downside is that teetotalers are left wanting for choice.

Best Newcomer



Dragon Dimsum

Bergstaðastræti 4

When the owners of Ramen Momo and Makake joined forces with the chef owners of Mat Bar, it was bound to be an explosion of flavours. Handmade dumpling know-how from the former and fine dining flourishes from the latter have translated to a Chinese-inspired fusion menu that offers Reykjavík a taste of dim sum culture. The erroneously named xiaolongbao—really a steamed bun filled with an unctuous, savoury beef filling—has only got better since their opening. As a nod to our love for sauces, the dumpling baskets arrive dressed in one of three sauces that are spunky and acidic enough to cut through the richness. Take-away is available, but really dining in is the best way to experience these dumplings.

Runners-Up



Hosiló

Hverfisgata 12

You may be forgiven for not knowing this under-the-radar restaurant that quietly popped up in what once used to be Dill. With a small, eclectic menu that changes weekly, Númi, Atli and Aðalsteinn pride themselves on their fresh produce and good, honest food. Regulars swear that whatever comes out of the kitchen is inspired, fresh and enjoyable. A rotating menu not tethered by cuisine can make for a dizzying challenge, but Hosiló is making it through a pandemic no less. If that isn't a seal of approval of their efforts, then what is?

Chickpea

Hallveigarstigur 1

Despite its contested origins—it's been claimed by every country in the Levant at this point—the falafel at Chickpea appear closest to the Palestinian variety. It's classic bright green with herbs, and the beetroot number is earthy, slightly sweet and fittingly Nordic. There is an entire salad bar's worth of salads, toppings and sauces—the mango aioli, tomato mayo and adjika, (a nod to the Moldovian roots of the owners). It's all delicately wrapped in their homemade sourdough pita, a far cry from the stale, dense curse that afflicts the country's standard pita supply. Wash it down with a tall glass of their homemade kombucha and finish with one of their sweet bites for a wholly satisfying affair.

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Best Ice Cream

Joint Winners



Gæta Gelato

Aðalstræti 6

Far too many scoop shops claim to serve gelato but there is only one gelateria in Reykjavík: Gæta Gelato. Hailing from a line of maestro gelatieri, the Gæta family marries the best Icelandic ingredients with top line produce from Italy for an unmissable treat. Piedmontese hazelnuts and Sicilian pistachios are swirled and churned to creamy perfection. This fast-melting treat is only made better by the fact that Gæta's crispy, thin cones are coated in chocolate sauce for a surprise ending and that you can choose two flavours in a single scoop! They tell us that salted caramel and Óreo are their bestsellers, but we recommend getting the fior di latte, anything with ricotta and pairing it with a fruity gelati or a nutty number



Skúbb

Laugarásvegur 1

Nothing quite says "live in the moment" like a melty cone of luscious ice cream. Did you know that Skúbb only uses milk from Biobú, an organic local farm, and that they have now partnered up? Did you know they are the shop most indistinguishable between vegan and dairy scoops? That is how vibrant and intense each scoop is at Skúbb. With a small curated selection that reflects the seasons, this imaginarium of joy churns everything from tomatoes to licorice roots into ice cream. We didn't think they could actually improve, but the pandemic seems to have put a spring in their step and their ice creams have never been better.

Newcomer

Ómnom, Hólmáslóð 4

Does award winning, world famous, chocolate brand Ómnom, now also do ice creams? Ómnom's covid weekend treat now permanent fixture elevates milky vanilla soft serve to kawaii artform. Sure they don't make their own ice cream but it is a welcome blank canvas for their gourmet toppings and flourishes - dark Tanzanian chocolate sauce hidden under torched marshmallow fluff, cookies & cream panda eared cuteness begging to be admired, tuille swans, passion fruit-coffee-liquorice sauces and crumbles make for a textural treat.

Best Tasting Menu



Óx Reykjavík

Inside Sumac, Laugavegur 28

There is a sense of theatre and intimate dinner party vibe at Óx, Iceland's only chef's table experience that seats a mere dozen guests each night. Everything unfolds in full view against a backdrop of chef Þráinn's grandfather's restored kitchenette. The old and the new commingle gently here, exploding in bursts of brilliance, be it the deft handling of pristine produce, like sweet morsels of fresh local shrimp over a marigold puree, or the 2-day cured langoustine with a briny broth that carries the scent of the oceans. Techniques and ingredients continue their dance, the experience heightened by the wine pairing. The juice pairing is also a grown up affair, with house made kombuchas brewed from fruit, tea and herbs. "By the time the red wine rolls around, guests are on their way to being friends," the chefs admit. It is true, midway through the 16-course extravaganza, you are now engaged in banter with guests from across the world, all here creating these gastronomic memories together. Once the dust settles, it's time to leave and you do so a tad bit shaken as you walk out from the tiny timber cabin into bustling Sumac.

Runners-Up

Dill, Laugavegur 59

In a difficult year, more so for fine dining establishments, Dill has managed to keep expectations high and delivered on them. Chef Gunnar Karl's new menu may not have the gay abandon of his pre-Agern days, but it is a tasting experience that is brimming with surprises. The courses are well paced, with a focus on vegetables and sustainable seafood. The meat, when it does make an appearance, is portioned to truly enjoy every bite versus the palate fatigue of a full steak. The wine pairing has never been better and we'd even venture to say the kitchen should rise to this challenge and bring back the drama of yore.

Matur og Drykkur, Grandagarður 2

Matur og Drykkur's struggles—caused by the absence of a chef willing to take it by the horns—have often been evident on its plates. Finally those ghosts have been laid to rest, and new chef Helga has switched the restaurant entirely to a tasting menu format. Classic—sometimes forgotten—Icelandic recipes are presented through a modern lens, including childhood favourites like blood sausage. Rice pudding is reinterpreted as a creamy ice cream, and cocktails embody the same spirit of renaissance. This is a makeover of a once-loved favourite which we look forward to experiencing more of.

Best Lamb



Sumac Grill + Drinks

Laugavegur 28

If you, like us, can't stop singing the praises of Icelandic lamb, then you should know that dining on lacklustre cuts of meat drowning in sauce does not do justice to the wild roaming sheep of Iceland. Sumac is, at the moment, one of the few places—if not the only place—that cooks lamb with none of that sous-vide nonsense. Sure, sous-vide makes for tender, uniformly cooked meat, but an unpretentious, well-cooked lamb rib from the grill—kissed with smoke and licked by flame—is pretty hard to top. Sumac does just that and they serve it with blistered grapes, a splash of thinned down muhammara and lentils. It's a dish you can't get enough of and, thankfully, the restaurant hasn't dared to take it off the menu. Psst, we know this is the lamb category, but if they do have it, definitely try the Icelandic goat meat from Háfell farm. Sublime.

Runners-Up



Apotek Kitchen + Bar Austurstræti 16

Whatever lamb is being served here, rest assured it'll be a meal to remember. With experienced chefs who share an unbridled passion for meat and fire, all the plates come out perfectly executed. Their love for lamb is reflected in the three different lamb dishes on the menu; choose from a lamb tartare, rump steak or an Instagram-worthy rack.



Grillmarkaðurinn Lækjargata 2a

Lamb chops definitely are the photogenic cut of the meat world. Besides the fact that meat cooked on the bone makes for juicier meat and stellar presentation, Grillmarket nestles their generous chops amongst sweet grilled carrots and potatoes, making for a scrumptious treat.

Best Covid-Takeaway



Ramen Momo

Tryggvagata 16

Ramen Momo has always had its pulse on what's hot. Be it introducing ramen to the country or making kimchi a household condiment, they've been ahead of the curve in anticipating changes and making quick-footed changes. Even the pandemic couldn't dampen their spirits in this regard and the restaurant quickly changed to abandoning their bring-your-own container for a bit, and offered a 'Ramen at home' kit instead. Beautifully packed topping, sunny yolked tamago included, prepared broth ready to be warmed again, and nests of noodles that could be cooked when you got home served as a reminder of better times to come.

Runners-Up



Eiriksson Brasserie Laugavegur 77

Eiriksson Brasserie seemingly didn't bat an eye when they had to switch to take-away mode and continue to offer their pandemic offer of 30% off menu prices for take-away. The steak and pasta travel surprisingly well, so if you are in the mood for a little midweek decadence, why not indulge?

Newcomer



La Barceloneta www.labarceloneta.is

'If you cannot go to Spain, Spain will come to you' seems to be the motto of La Barceloneta, which is named after the popular neighbourhood in Barcelona where many of the founders behind this venture hail from. Door delivery is woefully inadequate in Reykjavík and, seizing this opportunity, the sprightly team not only delivers steaming hot pans of paella to your doorstep, they even pick up the dang dishes the next day! Prices all inclusive! If that isn't a service to get behind, we don't know what is. If you want to expand the Spanish experience further, add on the creamy croquetas and gluten free fried calamari.

Best Food Hall



Hlemmur Mathöll

Laugavegur 107

The OG food hall in town, Hlemmur Mathöll had to briefly shut its doors at the peak of the pandemic. But as things returned to normal, so did the hustle and bustle at this small yet powerful space. Whether it's the curated champagne selection at Kröst, the gastropub take on Icelandic cuisine at the Michelin Bib-awarded Skál, hearty Vietnamese pho or some Napoli pizza or artisanal gelato, this is the best place to sample a cross-section of Icelandic restaurant fare and not have to worry about reservations and wait lists.

Runner-Up



Mathöll Höfða Bildshöfði 9

For many a Reykvíkingur, anything outside a five minute driving distance constitutes 'out there' or 'faraway'. So it is no surprise then that seemingly every postcode can claim a food hall or two. The industrial neighbourhood Höfði however is a popular lunch spot given its catchment of workers. Choose from the mushroom bread at Hipstur, spicy Indian curries at Indican or Icelandic style pizzas at Flatbakan. There is something for everyone.

Newcomer



Borg29 Borgartún 29

The latest addition to a growing roster of food halls is Borg29. As well as offering an excuse to be warm indoors and try several foods, Borg29 takes it one step further by offering slivers of ocean views. New outposts of Hipstur, Yuzu, the Iready popular Bál, plus pizzas and pastas, all vye for your attention.

Best Soup - Winter



Ramen Momo

Tryggvagata 16

The country's first ramen bar has gone from strength to strength. With a philosophy of using as many local ingredients as possible, Ramen Momo's menu has matured to include deeply flavourful broths, the proof of which lies even in the kid's ramen—pork and chicken bone broth with the undertones of briny kelp. The tonkotsu is richer than it used to be, although we suspect that the local palate still favours a less fatty version compared to the Japanese original. Regardless, what keeps us coming back is the tantanmen, the Japanese take on Chinese dandan noodles, both the vegan and pork version are stellar. Recently, they offered a summer brothless ramen, allowing their excellent handmade, organic noodles to shine. Made to a traditional recipe, the noodles are delightfully springy, the noodles are delightfully springy, chewy and feel luxurious, each strand coated with a savory, umami rich chilli dressing. If this'd be a staple, perhaps as a warm dish, the lines out their door would be longer than they already are.

Runners-Up



The Coocoo's Nest Grandagarður 23

Everybody knows that for luscious, from scratch, chock full of goodness soups, Coocoo's is the place. Almost always vegan as well, these soups are creamy, hearty and warm you up from the inside out. If the sun isn't out, and you need a hug from a bowl, Coocoo's lunch soups are where it's at. Be warned that all the soups come with a slice of their award-winning sourdough bread. You can also get a half-soup, half-sandwich deal to get the best of both worlds.

Hi Noodle Frakkastigur 9

Another panel favourite that made it through the pandemic, Hi Noodle's menu is almost similar to the other ramen bar. Consistency has been a bit of a challenge for them, but their dandan noodles continue to beckon. Our only complaint would be that the portions run a little small, and we'd like more of their broth!

Out Of Town Honourable Mentions

Best Sushi



Norð Austur

Norðurgata 2, Seyðisfjörður

When a seasonal sushi-only restaurant consistently dishes out roll after sushi roll with an eye for meticulous detail—the just right balance of vinegar in the rice cooked to delicate perfection held together by lightness and hope it banishes the ghosts of pre-made cold rolls of claggy, overcooked rice often peddled as sushi. Eating at Norð Austur is a sublime experience of just how good sushi can be. Using local fish, this East Iceland gem is worth the travel. This is sushi that will please the ultraconservative and turn pylsu-sushi lovers to appreciate the culinary beauty of shima saba, salmon belly cooked on hot rocks, and the joys of raw fresh shrimp, scallops and uni, sweet as fruit. Norð Austur rightly deserves the accolades and is the only sushi restaurant from Iceland to be recognised by the White Guide.

Best Seafood



Tjöruhúsið

Hafnarstræti 1, 400 Ísafjörður

This restaurant's claim to deserved fame is their signature fish-in-a-pan buffet offering that is more than a buffet and, as you learn once you taste the food, it is more than just fish in a pan. Quiveringly fresh seafood is cooked to perfection, often in copious amounts of butter in a variety of ways. There's the classic lightly salted cod in a creamy mushroom sauce and grapes (yes, it works!), plaice with caramelised onions, lemons and capers, a peppery plockfiskur that puts the rest to shame and the legendary 'fried gellur'—if there is only one dish you try here, make it these cod throats: they arrive blisteringly hot, and disappear almost instantaneously, such is their popularity. They also do a lunch service sans the theatre, and gellur. Covid has also meant that there is a tureen of fish soup on each table, a measure we hope they retain.

Best Goddamn Restaurant



Slippurinn

Strandvegur 76, Vestmannaeyjar

If your plan to drive around Iceland does not include a meal at Slippurinn in Vestmannaeyjar, why bother visiting Iceland at all, our panel quipped. They're not exaggerating. The experience of dining at this summer-only family restaurant, helmed by celebrated chef Gíslí Matthías, starts even before you enter the dining room. The ferry to the volcanic archipelago sets the tone for everything to follow—briny sea air, cawing seagulls overhead that rise to frenzy as you get closer to the main island, the mountainous shards of rocky outcrops heralding the beginning of your gastronomic adventure; it is all very dramatic and fittingly so. New Nordic may be what most associate with Icelandic cuisine, but Gíslí ushered in the 'Slow Food' ethos centered around local, hero ingredients and produce that weren't just new to the travelling diner but to Icelanders as well. The langoustine soup screams shellfish richness, the cod wings are, by now, iconic, the foraged beach herb salad, seasonal guillemot eggs, cocktails and drinks that celebrate stolen backyard rhubarb, wild chervil, beach mustard, oyster leaves recreate the island of Vestmannaeyjar on your plate and leave an indelible memory. The White Guide recognises this, but so do those who've dined here. So what are you waiting for?



DINING

The Birth Of Chickpea

Bringing a homely touch to downtown dining

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

Tucked next to downtown's Kronan supermarket is Chickpea, a bijoux vegetarian eatery that opened in the midst of the pandemic. Walk too fast and you might miss it, but step inside and you'll be treated to a warm, inviting restaurant whose heart lies in freshly made falafel.

The birth of Chickpea

Maria Maximciuc started Chickpea along with her husband Artiom Drusca and their best friend Veaceslav Sirghii. The couple moved to Iceland from Moldova nine years ago after falling in love with the country on what was supposed to be a short trip.

Since coming to Reykjavik, Maria has had a few differ-

ent jobs, but in the back of her mind, she always wanted to start a restaurant. And so, when she found herself out of work at the beginning of the pandemic, she took it as a sign to finally make her dreams come true.

"I remember my husband said, 'So isn't it the best time to finally do what we want to do?'" she says, laughing. "And so we started looking for a location."

The restaurant was always going to be based around falafel, Maria explains. "My husband loves falafel. He was always making it from scratch for friends and they'd say, 'Oh my god, it's so good! You should open a restaurant!'" she says. Heeding their friends' advice wasn't a stretch

— Artiom is a professional chef, and he and Veaceslav have worked in the industry for many years at restaurants such as Coo-coo's Nest. "And here in Reykjavik," Maria continues, "you really couldn't get that good falafel made from scratch anywhere."

And so Chickpea was born. "I knew that the food was going to be great, but it was just as important to find a good location. We didn't want it to be on the main street. No, we wanted to do this for the locals and not focus on the tourists," she says lightly.

The soul of Chickpea

Without a doubt, the little eatery has achieved its goal. When I arrive, it's in the midst of the bustling lunch rush. And though there are few seats—even fewer right now due to gathering restrictions—all are taken up by those happily munching on pitas or salads.

The portions are generous, I note, the moment my falafel and salad land in front of me. I've opted for the spicy version of the falafel, with kimchi and their crispy chickpea salad. Upon first bite, I know immediately that

absolutely everything—from the aforementioned falafel to the delicate pita to the tangy kimchi—is freshly made, and I can't help but take a moment to savour it. Hey, it's not every day you're treated to such a tantalising trio.

"Every morning, the boys come here to start making the dough and baking the bread and then we make the falafel base," Maria explains, smiling. And many of the ingredients, she emphasises, are locally sourced. She then explains where the kimchi recipe comes from—it's a family secret, given to Maria and Artiom by Frenee, a dear friend of theirs from Taiwan.

Mindful cooking

The falafel very much brings to mind the fresh bites you'll find on the carts of the Middle East—and the salad is equally fresh. While large, neither are particularly heavy and though I'm undeniably full after my meal, I'm still energetic. I'm particularly excited to try more of their salads in the coming weeks. The downtown area currently doesn't have a dedicated salad place—but Chickpea could easily fill that niche.

"We love the zero waste ideology and have a mindful kitchen," Maria says. "We're offering biodegradable packaging with all the food taken away and are using environmentally friendly soaps and cleaning products inside."

As I leave, I note they also have homemade kombucha on offer. And while I kick myself a bit that I didn't grab a glass to pair with my meal, I'm pretty confident I'll be back soon, so it seems Maria was right when she said they made this place for the locals.

"This is our soul. All of our hearts are here," Maria concludes. "Chickpea is made for us and the customers to enjoy." ☺

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BEST ICE CREAM*

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2019



CONSECUTIVE

2018



YEARS



LAUGARÁSVEGI 1

*Best Ice Cream according to Reykjavik Grapevine

Einstök Bar
Laugavegur 2

Sipping the frosty brews at Einstök Bar would make one believe they were sourced from the waters of a Viking's private backyard glacier. After the success of their beer lounge in Akureyri, Einstök expanded to the heart of Reykjavík for city-dwellers and passers-through to sample their range of award-winning beers and seasonal brews. Try the Arctic Berry Ale—a refreshing summer witbier, topped with juicy bilberries hand-picked near the Arctic Circle.

Sæta Húsið
Laugavegur 6

If you've been drooling over that luscious Thai-rolled ice cream on Instagram, we have good news! Sæta Húsið opened up shop in the heart of Reykjavík in May and is ready to serve deliciously fresh rolled ice cream, mixed with all sorts of candy and fruit. Our souls are ready for more treats—especially if it's ice cream!

Maika'i

Hafnartorg, Kolagata 1

Want to feel like you're in the tropics while soaking up Iceland's take on sunshine? Stop by Maika'i for an açai bowl, covered in the toppings of your summer dreams. You can also grab a bowl at Smáralind on a rainy day while still taking a trip to the southern hemisphere.

La Poblana
Laugavegur 2

La Poblana is the brainchild of Carlos Guaernos and has quickly garnered a reputation 'round town as *the* place for world-class tacos. There's long been a dearth of Mexican food in this city, but



NEW IN TOWN

Post-Pandemic Relevance

Baking bread and binging 'Tiger King' are still cool, right?

Words: **Andie Sophia Fontaine, Alina Maurer, Brittnee Kiner & Hannah Jane Cohen**

COVID-19 might have killed our desire for handshakes, video chats and bats, but that doesn't mean the optimists at the Grapevine won't find its silver lining. The pandemic hit our local economy hard, but there were many exciting arrivals to the city over the past year. Writers Andie, Alina, Brittnee and Hannah Jane—the official Grapevine welcome wagon—pick their favourites.

finally you can stuff yourself with all the carnitas you desire. We thank you, 2021. Our waistlines and wallets do not.

Vegan World Peace
Aðalstræti 2

What sounds like a call to battle is actually an urban chic, plant-

based Vietnamese restaurant. Creative, unusual and exotic dishes convince even the ardent meat lover. Everything—including the peking duck and prawns—is vegan. It's not only impressive to the taste buds, it's also candy for the eyes.

Chikin

Laugavegur 48

This ain't your mama's KFC. No, Chikin—Reykjavík's first dedicated hot chicken and bao joint—manages to be at once totally sophisticated foodie cuisine and also food that'll definitely fill the hole in your soul you usually quench with a spicy Twister (and then hate yourself for). So grab some chicken with pickled dannon, shiitake mushrooms, miso mayo and lots of other delicacies. And then love yourself.

Loo.Koo.Mas
Laugavegur 30

Sure, donuts are cool, but have you ever had loukoumas? These Greek "donuts"—more accurately described as fried dough, traditionally drizzled with honey, cinnamon and sesame seeds—are a light, crispy, airy treat that you can pick up at Loo.koo.mas. Served with a homespun charm, loukoumas are fried to order, always fresh, and make for a great snack while enjoying some window shopping. We recommend the chocolate and cream topping—yum!

Y Gallery
Hamraborg 12

An abandoned Olís gas station in a Hamraborg parking garage has found unexpected new life as Y Gallery. Created by collaborators Sigurður Atli Sigurðsson and Olga Lilja Ólafsdóttir, the space seeks to bring art straight to the public—or to their cars. Stop by the carpark, or walk from the nearby Hamraborg bus station, and get some culture in a new-found space. 🍷

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BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2021

Drinking

Tipsy or wasted, the choice is yours

The pandemic restrictions certainly shook up the Reykjavík bar scene in 2020, but that doesn't mean that our favourite drinking institutions didn't do everything they could to create a safe environment to assuage COVID-19 anxieties. In fact, the past year saw a plethora of new spots opening and old classics keeping the spirit of the city alive. Because let's be real: Icelanders love to drink. In fact, there is probably nothing Icelanders like doing more than drinking, which could be why this country doesn't have a space program. But hey—we've done pretty well at vaccinations.

Best Goddamn Bar



Röntgen

Hverfisgata 12

The panel's unanimous choice for the Best Goddamn Bar was obvious: Röntgen. This place has it all. "You can go there in the beginning of the night, the middle of the night, or end the night there. It has everything from a rowdy downstairs dance floor to a chillier upstairs area to mingle," one panellist gushed. "And their DJs are really flexible—they always play based on the mood of the crowd. Not all bars are so good at that!" Yes, despite only appearing on the downtown market a short time ago, the place has quickly dominated the Reykjavík bar scene, with a fashionable clientele and environment that has proved one thing: This place is here to stay. "They also have Peroni on draft," another panellist laughed. "Is that enough for a win from me?" It is. We bow down, Röntgen.

Runners-Up



**Kaffibarinn
Bergstaðastræti 1**

Ahh... Kaffibarinn. While many Reykjavík bars come and go and redecorate and rename and put on bells and whistles, Kaffibarinn has stayed the course for almost three decades—because it's just a really good, reliable place. It plays host to Reykjavík's artistic intellectuals, creative talents and downtown characters, consistently putting on a show. You'll never have a boring night at KB. It's no ordinary watering hole.



**Prikið
Bankastræti 12**

Prikið is the bar version of the "I'm going to bed early tonight vs. me at 3 a.m." meme. At 22:00 you'll have a bunch of regulars relaxing at the bar sipping brews, but arrive at 3:00 and it's Project X. Don't ever miss their concerts—you probably won't find a crazier crowd than a rap show at Prikið.

Best Place To Start The Night



Kaldi

Laugavegur 20b

Our panel spanned many ages and partying-styles, so the passion we saw for Kaldi means that it really does appeal to everyone. "Look, when you want to start the night in a place where you can sit with your friends, drink in a really classy, beautiful environment with a great seating area and friendly staff, Kaldi is it," one panellist said. The crowd gets rather lively later on, so coming early means you get to enjoy their fine selection of Kaldi beers—at Happy Hour prices. "It's also nice to be in a place where you have so many generations, rather than having just one type of person at a bar," one concluded. Bonus: They also have a nice smoking area for you nicotine-heads.

Runner-Up



**Vinstúkan Tiú Sopar
Laugavegur 27**

Any self-respecting partier knows that the best time to enjoy wine is early in the night, before you've ingested so much that you can no longer appreciate the intricacies of the bouquet. Enter Vinstúkan Tiú Sopar, a cosy basement bar that manages to be totally inviting while maintaining a sophisticated edge. Trust the bartenders here: They'll know what you want.

Newcomer



**Skuggabaldur
Pósthússtræti 9**

If it's a sunny day, Skuggabaldur is the place to be. Chill out, get a little Vitamin D, watch people flitting about Austurvöllur and appreciate some jazz, which everyone knows is the best way to get a little party energy before hitting one of the rowdier late night Reykjavík dance floors. Win-win.

Best Place To End The Night



Kiki Queer Bar

Laugavegur 22

"Queer spaces are so important," one queer member of the panel explained. "So sometimes I wish Kiki Queer Bar wasn't so great so it'd still just be us! But that said, it was created as a safe space and I think Kiki is really setting the standard there. Now more bars are following suit!" Our panel was unanimous that there's no better or more welcoming late-night dance floor than the pumping upstairs hub of Reykjavík's resident queer space, which plays the greatest dance hits of the past 30 years and attracts a clientele that is ready to let loose. You know, those "OH MY GOD I LOVE THIS SONG" tracks you need to listen to late at night? Yes, we mean "Euphoria" by Loreen, and you can bet they will play it twice.

Runners-Up



**Röntgen
Hverfisgata 12**

What else can we say about Röntgen? It's basically got everything you need. You can sit at the tables and chat, or join in on the crazier fun downstairs. This place has quickly become the go-to place in Reykjavík and it's a sure-fire bet that any late night there will be wild.



**Kaffibarinn
Bergstaðastræti 1**

There is a reason that Kaffibarinn is still here and still full of dedicated regulars. At night, you'll find the crowd gets rowdy, the convos get interesting and the dance floor gets sweaty in the most wonderful way. Basically—if you want to see local artists and intellectuals lose their minds, go here.

Best Sports Bar



American Bar

Austurstræti 8

For the fourth—yes, FOURTH—year in a row, American Bar is the champion of our sports bar category. But let's be frank, if sports are what you're looking for, what better place than the namesake of the land that honours athletes like an Icelandic sailor does Bubbi Morthens? For those apprehensive about entering a place called "American Bar" trust us: This place is more "Let's take shots to Lynard Skynard!" than "Build that wall!" Friendly and down to earth, they've got big screens, a nice selection of beer and—get this—wings!

Runners-Up



Lebowski Bar

Laugavegur 20a
Honour "The Dude" at this laid-back, unpretentious locale that offers the best of both worlds during sports games. Some people will get rowdy; others will stay chill, so you're certain to find your crowd while savouring a great burger. If you're feeling fancy, order a White Russian.



English Pub

Austurstræti 12
If it's football you're hankering for, go to those that know it best: the English. This pub serves up a dark wooden Anglo-kitsch interior, a long bar with plenty of staff and loads of comfortable seating, and—best of all—a plethora of screens. Make sure to yell loudly and berate players when they miss the penalty—you wanted an authentic pub experience, right?

Best Craft Bar



Session Craft Bar

Bankastræti 14

If our panel had to describe Session Craft Bar in one word, it'd be "current." The comfortable drinking hole features a rotating roster of local and guest craft beers that runs the gamut of flavours. "Session has this beer geek etiquette, which is really relevant," one panellist raved. "Basically, it's for beer pervs." But along with its fetish for hops, the bar is also a perfect perch for people watching, making it a well-rounded space that's sure to wow even the most discerning of ale-ophiles and their brew-oblivious friends. We'll see you there.

Runners-Up



BrewDog

Frakkastigur 8
I think no one expects to love BrewDog as much as they do, considering Reykjavik's notorious aversion to chains. That said, it's a place that stays on your mind. The Scottish outpost offers low-lit booths, communal tables, sofa seating and a thriving list of beers with something for everyone. Their brunch is also fantastic and there's all-you-can-eat wings and cauliflower wings on Wednesdays. C'mon. You can't say no to that.



Skúli Craft Bar

Aðalstræti 9
"For me, Skúli Craft Bar has the best overall atmosphere," one panellist said. "They have that woody, softly-lit, sit-down-and-chat vibe and they were one of the first proper craft bars in Iceland. Lovely selection of beers and occasional events for connoisseurs like tastings of rare, authentic lambics." Note: They are also a hidden gem for outdoor seating.

Best Wine Bar



Vínstúkan Tíu Sopar

Laugavegur 27

Every oenophile—wine connoisseur, for the uninitiated—knows that to truly appreciate wine, it's imperative to find a cosy, inviting environment where you can feel truly comfortable indulging in some undertones. Vínstúkan Tíu Sopar has perfected this. "For me, this is the perfect bar. It's my place. You walk in and their selection is just crazy. Maybe you arrived just wanting a glass of white and suddenly you're sharing a bottle of orange wine and it's just delicious. The bartenders know what to recommend and they are also just so friendly! I always feel like they're drinking with me," one panel member laughed. (Note: They are not.)

Runners-Up



Port 9

Veghúsastigur 9
If you're looking for a well-rounded international wine bar, Port 9 should have you covered. It's notorious for being the best date place in Reykjavik. C'mon, it's an intimate, hidden wine bar? What else would you expect?

Newcomer



Mikki Refur

Hverfisgata 18
Newcomer Mikki Refur offers an imported selection of natural wines that truly show off their mastery of wine curation. "They cater to both those that know a lot about wine and those that just want to try new and exciting things," one panellist said. "It has a boutique vibe in that respect. It feels like you're in London."

Best Place For Cocktails



Jungle Cocktail Bar

Austurstræti 9

The cocktail culture in Iceland has been growing massively from year-to-year, but the unanimous front-runner for the entire panel this year was Jungle. Leather sofas, jungle plants, and high ceilings decorate the beautiful old building, making it almost reminiscent of some London gentlemen's adventurer club. (Without the stuffiness and bigotry). Their ever-changing menu has seen a number of inventive cocktails bringing together ingredients like beetroot and coffee or brennivín and absinthe. "They even have a proper, well-designed website, unlike most bars on the planet," one panel member observed. "They really are just, in one word, phenomenal. I would go there everyday if my wallet allowed me!" Another agreed.

Runner-Up



Apotek

Austurstræti 16
The one. The only. Apótek. The spacious, upscale restaurant is a stalwart in the local cocktail scene. "Their bartenders have always been strong. They know what they are doing. It's just a classic and you won't be disappointed," one panellist said. We agree.

Newcomer



Stereo

Skólavörðustigur 8
Three words: cocktails on tap. That's what you get at newcomer Stereo. Run by the minds behind Session Craft Bar, the place quickly became a favourite of the city's cocktail enthusiasts. "It's just so new in Iceland and I hope it will catch on. It's a rough space that almost feels like an abandoned factory in the best way and it has a great view," one said. "Cocktails on tap will be the new normal soon, I think. And they're doing it now. Plus, their negroni is just perfection."

Drinking

Why have just one happy hour when you can have nine?

Best Place For Live Music



Gaukurinn

Tryggvagata 22

With dim lights, leather sofas, gender-neutral bathrooms and free tampons, Gaukurinn is the preferred hangout for the unorthodox Reykvingur, so if you're looking for like-minded peeps in the alt and queer scene, here you go. The old-school haunt underwent a change in ownership this year, which saw a large renovation of the formerly-grunge locale as well as an ambitious focus on showcasing emerging talent. Now they've got concerts almost every night—while being very strict on following all pandemic regulations—with everything from heavy metal fests to quieter indie and bumping techno. They're really the only bar to regularly have such shows, which we must commend them for and many of our favourite Icelandic acts—from Hatari to Power Paladin—played their early gigs there. "Their karaoke nights are also legendary because people take it so seriously," one panel member laughed. "It's not just drunk women singing Britney. People really perform."

Runner-Up



KEX Skúlagata 28

KEX is back! Yes, it's reopened with a bang, featuring a fantastic roster of shows over the past few months. The stage is small, which creates a rather intimate vibe for such a large space, but they seem to always get whatever band or group is most talked about at the moment. "The vibe in the crowd is always good," the panel determined. "I'm excited to see how they keep this up. They really have some momentum."

Newcomer



Post-húsið Skeljanes 21

Post-húsið isn't a bar—it's the new venue made by Reykjavík's favourite DIT collective Post-dreifing. The place defines the term 'group effort', with everyone chipping in to make the formerly industrial space one of the most exciting new venues in the city. Every show they do is full of passion and they're constantly upgrading the place, so trust us, if you want to see the best-and-brightest of the scene, this is where to go. We love u, Post. DIT 4eva.

Best Happy Hour



Bravó

Laugavegur 22

Bravó: a dark room with amber-toned light, simple furniture, and cosy bohemian pillows tossed along the window seating. Their happy hour—perhaps the most extensive in the city—starts at 14:00 every weekday and 12:00 on the weekend, with drinks priced from 750 ISK. "I feel like it's always Happy Hour at Bravó, right?" one panel member laughed. At night, the place can get a bit rowdy—you know, because it's Reykjavík. "They have what I'd consider to be the best sound system in Reykjavík right now, so it's also quite a good place to start the night, even if happy hour is over," the panel concluded.

Runners-Up



Spánski Ingólfsstræti 8

Spánski is one of the best spots in the city for an after-work drink, or a quick early date. The ambiance is comfortable and the space feels straight out of the cobblestone streets of Europe—a far cry from our foggy city. Happy hour is from 15:00 to 19:00 with wines from 750 ISK, which allows you to try out their fantastic selection without stress on the wallet. "The owner is also so extroverted and fun," one panel member raved. "You can have some great conversations with him. I'd go there just for that—happy hour or no happy hour."



Kaffibrennslan Laugavegur 21

A classic happy hour favourite of the Grapevine, Kaffibrennslan is smack dab in the centre of town, so you can easily pop in for a quick one, or stay and drink the evening away; it's just a cool, casual, calm place with friendly staff, good beers and tasty snacks. From 16:00 to 20:00, stop by for beers from 650 ISK and wine (including Rosé!) from 790 ISK. Get an outdoor seat for maximum enjoyment.

Best Newcomer Bar



Skuggabaldur

Pósthússtræti 9

It's rare that a bar elicits as much excitement as new jazz haunt Skuggabaldur. But since its opening, it's basically blown up and was unanimously voted the best Newcomer by our rather diverse panel. "It's a great place to sit outside; they've got really nice jazz music. You need to go on Monday, when they have Mánudjazz, which used to be at Húrra. It's so nice," said a panel member. "Yes, they're bringing something that Reykjavík needed," another panellist agreed. "We needed a jazz bar that was committed to doing jazz (and all that that entails) well, but this place has cracked the code. [The building it's in has] been a rather cursed spot, but I remember when I first walked in, I thought 'This is what was born to be here.'"

Runners-Up



Mál og Menning Laugavegur 18

Turning a large, shuttered book store into a cosy music venue and bar was a rather bold choice, and it's not a stretch to say that many doubted the team behind the revamped Mál og Menning would do it well. That said, naysayers were proved wrong by the fantastic bar, which has already proved itself with a fantastic lineup of acts—and a great selection of novels. "It's a great addition to our venue scene," the panel declared. "And it's so beautiful and classy. It makes sense."



Mikki Refur Hverfisgata 18

Ahh—Mikki Refur. It's a place that can do it all. The bright café/bar has got an expert selection of beer, wine and appetativos and a prime location that makes it a great place to start the night—or bring a date. "I didn't know what to expect when I went there," one panellist recalled. "But I do know when I sat down I thought, 'This whole place feels like the next step in Icelandic bars.' It's what we needed downtown. It's friendly."

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BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2021

Drinking

Pro-tip: Try the drinks!

The pandemic restrictions certainly shook up the Reykjavík bar scene in 2020, but that doesn't mean that our favourite drinking institutions didn't do everything they could to create a safe environment to assuage their COVID-19 anxiety. In fact, the past year saw a plethora of new spots opening and old classics keeping the spirit of the city alive. Because let's be real: Icelanders love to drink. In fact, there is probably nothing Icelanders like doing more than drinking, which could be why this country doesn't have a space program. But hey—we've done pretty well at vaccinations.

Best Outdoor Drinking



Fjallkonan

Hafnarstræti 1-3

Day drinking in the summer is all about angles and here's our Fjallkonan Fantasy: Last night, things got a little wild at Kaffibarinn, so at 15:00 four gal pals meet up to recap the craziness while indulging in some classy hairs of the dog. Obviously, this means cocktails, and there's nowhere better to grab 'em (while enjoying the summer sun) than outside Fjallkonan. There, the four gal pals—a redhead lawyer, a Manolo-clad sex columnist, an uptight art dealer and a slut—sip on cotton candy gin/grapefruit fusions, matcha fused alcohol and, for the slut, an espresso martini, while celebrating female friendship and expensive handbags. We couldn't help but wonder... is this what summer is all about?

Runners-Up



Loft Bankastræti 7

Loft Hostel's balcony is legendary, which is why we cannot be more jazzed that they've re-opened. Their slice of sunny terrace overlooking Bankastræti is heads and shoulders above most of the al fresco drinking spots in Reykjavík, not least because it's on the roof. It's a very popular after-work choice, so arrive early to get a table.

Petersen Svitan Ingólfsstræti 2a

Petersen Svitan has that ritzy New York rooftop vibe you don't often find in Reykjavík. The bar is totally massive with an unparalleled view across the harbour and all the open sun one could wish for. "If there's a sunny day, absolutely everyone will be there," one panel member raved, calling it, "basically a daytime seen-and-be-seen kind of place." The cocktails are good, the couches luxurious, and again, you're sitting on top of the gorgeous Gamla Bió—go there and feel fancier than everyone else.

Best Date Place



Port 9

Veghúsastígur 9

"It's very intimate," our panel decreed. "If you're looking for a quiet place to really get to know someone, Port 9 is the most romantic spot." Cozy and tucked away with a secretive vibe, this wine bar solves the age-old problem in Reykjavík: Where can I go for a date where I won't be bothered by a ton of people I know who will later inundate me with texts about my new paramour? Ah, détendez vous, mes amis, for sitting at Port 9 feels like you're away from the rest of the world and there seems to be an unspoken bond of letting each other be. So sit, have a glass and get to flirting. At Port 9, every language is the language of love—even ugly languages like Danish.

Runners-Up



Bió Paradís Hverfisgata 52

Bió Paradís might not be your first thought for a date, but it was one of the favourites of the panel. "It's such a friendly environment," one panellist raved. "Grab a beer with someone early in the night. It's such a positive place to start the night at." Whether you catch a movie or not, the cosy environment of Bió Paradís is a great place to see if you're compatible with someone and want to continue the night somewhere else—or hey, speed things along and just head home.



Luna Flórens Grandagarður 25

Part flower-child, part spiritual and with a whole lot of whimsy thrown into the mix, this cosy and hand-crafted bar is so intimate it makes you wanna spend the day musing about geodes and tarot card readings. If you're looking to properly get to know a flame—you are astrologically compatible with, of course—grab a house cocktail, a slice of vegan cake and explore your lunar cycle

Best Kept Secret



12 Tónar

Skólavörðustígur 15

12 Tónar's small bar has managed to fly under many people's radars, despite being one of the most unique spots in the city, with a selection of fantastic Reykjavík Brewing Company beers and an equally fantastic roster of DJs and music acts to accompany them. "It feels like you're in a small pub in Berlin," one panel member raved. "The emphasis is so much on the quality of the music. It's a place for vinyl and music lovers, so it's the perfect place for someone who is looking for a spot to sit and appreciate the finer elements of music and beer." The outside area ain't too shabby either.

Newcomer



Bál (Borg29) Borgartún 29

Bál Vin og Grill is located in the Borg29 food hall and, in addition to serving up absolutely delicious food, their wine list is unparalleled. "It's really hard to compare it with anywhere else in the city," explains one panellist. "The environment is rather casual but you've got just such an incredible wine selection—it's better than what you'd find at high-end restaurants. And of course, it's good to get a few little things to eat along with it." We'd recommend their beer tartare.



Aldamót Kirkjutorg 4

"Can we not put this down because I don't want people to know about it?" one panel member laughed. Aldamót, which took over the former Klaustur space, was a popular pandemic-spot, due to its fantastic safety adherence and safe ambiance. "It's super cosy and they have great drinks." The spot, which is both totally classy and totally inviting, is never too busy or too empty—Aldamót is, above all else, a sweet spot.



GALLERY GUIDE

The Gospel Of Galleries

Art 1:01 GV - Get inspired downtown, ye plebs

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

Jesus Christ (a figure you might be familiar with from art history), there are a lot of new galleries in Reykjavik right now. It used to be easy to write this gallery guide, but there are so many great spaces, the article has evolved into a list with a sentence or two about each. Hey, at least that's better than only having like two live music venues left, right? Guys...?

i8

Tryggvagata 16, 101 Reykjavik
From 2015 to our most recent award ceremony, i8 has consistently been named the Best Art Gallery at the Grapevine's annual Best Of Reykjavik awards. Expect to see conceptual cutting-edge displays from art superstars at this downtown spot. That said, there's always a sense of fun running through the gallery's roster, so don't be afraid this is some elite art hoity-toity academic institution. #i8ForEvery1

Hverfisgallerí

Hverfisgata 4, 101 Reykjavik
If I had to use just one word to describe Hverfisgallerí, it'd be 'ambitious.' Every artist they represent—from the kaleidoscopic Davíð Örn Halldórsson to the

bad stitch himself Loji Höskuldsson—consistently keep topping themselves. If there were a gallery that “rises and grinds”—40 hours a day—it's this one.

Berg Contemporary Klapparstigur 16, 101 Reykjavik

Berg is the number one go-to stop for those looking to quench their thirst for contemporary art. They've nailed that delightful, all-encompassing contemporary art experience and you always leave feeling somewhat rejuvenated and smarter. Skip the pool. Head to Berg.

FLÆÐI

Vesturgata 17, Reykjavik
2020 saw the return of FLÆÐI and many happy tears en-

sued. If you're looking for up-and-coming, alternative, bourgeoisie-elite-gallery-culture-smashing artists, exhibitions, concerts, events and more, head to Vesturgata. If you're lucky, there might be some erotic food art on call.

Gallery Port

Laugavegur 23, 101 Reykjavik
We've long referred to Gallery Port as the dive bar of the Icelandic art scene, in that they are extremely cool and in-the-know and you'd just kind of want to hang out with them—if the cosy gallery were a living person. The Laugavegur space serves up gritty, unusual, eclectic art by people who are extremely cool, in-the-know, and who you'd just kind of want to hang out inside of if they

were a gallery. (We're a passionate magazine.)

Pula

Hverfisgata 34 (entrance from Laugavegur)

This new kid on the block burst onto the scene with a—pardon our French—really fucking good series of exhibitions this year. Seriously, can we hire whoever books for them? And this year they showcased the likes of Sigurður Ámundason, Anna Maggý, Kristín Morthens and more... Jeez, calm down. As if we weren't already fucking impressed.

Núllið

Bankastræti 0, 101 Reykjavik
Núllið—winner of our 2020 Hidden Gem award—has their finger on the underground art pulse of Reykjavik. To be fair, it's probably because they are underground. The gallery focuses on new, evocative and subversive Icelandic artists and showcases many people's first exhibitions. Núllið, please change your name to milljónir.

Ásmundarsalur

Freyjugata 41, 101 Reykjavik

Is Ásmundarsalur really a gallery? No, but considering the fantastic exhibitions and workshops they hold, we'd posit it's basically a gallery that also does other non-gallery things (potentially a long-term piece of performance art). We particularly enjoyed Halldór Eldjárn's plant machine this year, but we love every unexpected thing Ásmundarsalur presents.

The Marshall House: Kling og Bang/Living Art Museum

Grandagarður 20, Reykjavik

If you haven't heard of Kling og Bang or the Living Art Museum, thank God you're reading this guide as you clearly have no idea what you're doing with your life and probably don't even know you're in Reykjavik. You are. And there is a place called the Marshall House and inside are two of the best galleries in the city and no matter what exhibit or installation they have on the roster, expect something ambitious and unique—from makeshift karaoke rooms to gardens covered in bees. 🐝

Shopping

We at the Grapevine couldn't be more excited about the future of Icelandic design. It seems that every year the scene grows exponentially, with more and more artists taking centre stage and shops showcasing the crème de la crème of our little island. To our delight, the pandemic didn't change a thing—in fact, the competition for our 2021 Best of Reykjavík Shopping awards was particularly fierce. After long discussions with our beloved panel members, we are proud to present our winners. From sustainable ceramics to high-end lopapeysur to obscure Björk b-sides, this country is more than just volcanoes and waterfalls. (No shade to volcanoes and waterfalls, but you can't wear them or put them on your shelf, right?) So without further ado, here's your essential guide to shopping in Reykjavík. Enjoy—responsibly, of course.

Best Goddamn Store



Kiosk

Grandagarður 35

"It was so important that this store came back and that we keep it alive," one panel member said of Kiosk. It's a concept we agree with, which is why we are honoured to present Kiosk with the 2021 Best of Reykjavík award for the Best Goddamn Store in the city. From its roots in the downtown scene, Kiosk now resides in Grandi, playing host to the best and brightest of local Icelandic fashion design. Featuring only a handful of artists at a time selling their wares, the shopping experience at Kiosk is so personal that you can even chat with the designer while you try on their garments. Moreover, the shop showcases just how devoutly diverse and fantastic the scene really is. It's an underrated gem and it's important that we cultivate it. "With Kiosk, people can once again connect with new Icelandic designers physically and the fashion scene has been reborn. It's a beautiful concept. This scene is small, young and blossoming and we need it. Never forget that." We won't, and we're proud to say: "We need you,* Kiosk. Welcome back."

Runners-Up

Fischer Fischersund

Fischer has created a shopping experience unlike any other. An aesthetic wonder, walking into this store is like entering a sensory paradise, treading the line between a shop and a design space. From incense and packaging-free shampoo to natural face masks and perfumes, Fischer is memorable above all else.

Farmers Market Laugavegur 37 & Hólmáslóð 2

From men's clothing to women's clothing to clothing for those that don't identify as either, Farmers Market will impress. This polished heritage brand showcases 'Icelandicana' at its best, with high-class takes on traditional Nordic styles. They're a long-time Grapevine favourite and will be for many years to come.

Best Design Store



Rammagerðin

Skólavörðustígur 12

Skólavörðustígur's Rammagerðin is as close to a supergroup of Icelandic designers as you are going to find outside of some weird design-focused comic book multiverse. Go there to pick up everything from Studio Flétta's hand-stamped candlesticks to Ragna Ragnarsdóttir's ethereal ceramics to Fischer's earthly fragrances to Urð's delectable cosmetics. Seriously—who does their curatorial? Whoever it is deserves a raise. Anyway, Rammagerðin was a clear, unequivocal winner in this category. They've stepped up their game and the game of all Icelandic design stores.

Newcomers



FÓLK Reykjavík Hafnartorg

This exhibition space/store opened up in Hafnartorg only months ago. It features a selection of Icelandic sustainable product design—a focus that must be applauded, especially given our current climate. "They have a vision, one that's needed. They're doing such good work," our panel decided. Bravó FÓLK. Welcome to the awards.



Mikado Reykjavík & Pastel Flower Studio Hverfisgata 50

Pastel Flower Studio and Mikado Reykjavík share the same Hverfisgata storefront, which, with that combo, could easily be renamed "Heaven." Pastel, of course, is a Grapevine favourite, having won numerous awards for their stunning, primal flower design. The addition of Mikado, though, adds a new element of apotheosis to this, with a well-curated bunch of Icelandic and foreign design. What else could you want?

Best Fashion Boutique



Yeoman

Laugavegur 7

Hildur Yeoman has dressed everyone from R'n'B goddess GDRN to the swan lady herself, Björk, and recent Grammy/BAFTA/Emmy/Oscar award winner Hildur Guðnadóttir. She was also just in Vogue for heaven's sake. Basically the patron saint of modern Icelandic fashion, Yeoman is known for her dreamy patterns, lush textures, spacey bodycons and beautiful tailoring. Her new large Laugavegur store is the perfect showroom for her fantastical wears. "She's a creative queen," one panellist raved. "And this summer, she had DJs and concerts at her store and she's just become this cultural Mecca. Every time I am downtown, I stop by and I usually want everything in the store. She's my go-to."

Runners-Up



Stefánsbúð/p3 Laugavegur 7

Stefánsbúð showcases quirky designers of all shapes and sizes. It exemplifies the word "boutique" with a zany selection of high end pieces that are guaranteed to stand out in the streets. Our panel would also like to applaud them on their fantastic DesignMarch exhibition.



Rokk og Rómantik Laugavegur 62

The muted tones of Nordic fashion don't usually mesh with roses, chains and lace dresses, which is why the gothic haven of Rokk og Rómantik is so needed in this city. "It's just so unapologetically goth," said one panel member. Another agreed. "They have a good mix of very extreme stuff along with more wearable gothy things, which means it's fun for both day and night. It's not afraid to be extreme."

Shopping

Stuff is better than money anyway

Best Clothing Store



Farmers Market

Laugavegur 37 & Hólmaslóð 2

“Farmers Market is just an establishment in Iceland at this point,” one panel member raved. “When you think of Icelandic fashion, you think about a certain style and that’s the style Farmers Market mastered. In fact, you could say they are one of the pioneers of it.” Yes, while many brands have claimed the throne of traditional Icelandic style, but perhaps no brand has done it so luxuriously as Farmers Market. With references to the past wrapped up in modern silhouettes and opulent fabrics, Farmers Market serves up traditional Scandinavian fashion for the modern age.

Runners-Up



Aftur Laugavegur 45

“The red thread of Icelandic design right now is sustainability and Aftur has been doing that for longer than anyone else,” our panel determined. Aftur’s pieces are entirely repurposed, with a punky vibe that makes them ideal for anyone obsessed with the darker sides of street style. Her dresses are particularly stunning.



66°North, Laugavegur 17-19, Bankastræti 5 & More

You probably haven’t heard of this small underground brand, which has slid under the radar for too long. Just kidding. It’s 66°North—a brand that’s basically as Icelandic as an old man standing on a porch, staring sadly at a bunch of sheep. Anything from this heritage brand promises to be both fantastic quality, incredibly durable and also very stylish; a trio you just can’t beat.

Best Second-Hand Store



Wasteland

Ingólfsstræti 5

“Wasteland is always my go-to if I’m looking for some old gems,” one panellist raved of the Danish franchise. “I don’t know why, but I always find something there!” True, the shop is full of so many styles that it can often seem overwhelming, but the organisation of the place makes walking through it feel like entering a maze of everything you dream your closet would be, from modern neutral stables to 80s-style statement pieces. For super á la mode downtown Reykjavík looks, this is the go-to. Wasteland doesn’t follow trends, they set them.

Runner-Up



Bergstaðastræti Red Cross Skólavörðustígur 12

The Red Cross is always a fun time, for you never know what you’ll find at these charity shops. That said, the one at Bergstaðastræti was a particular favourite of the panel. “It’s a well-curated vintage shop,” one panellist decreed. “It’s a favourite of mine when I’m doing the second-hand rounds.”

Newcomer



Hringekjan Þrúnnartún 2

Hringekjan translates to ‘carousel’ and it’s an apt name for the new spot, because to say this vintage store has a ‘rotating’ selection would be an understatement. Similar to a consignment shop, Hringekjan is a space where people can rent out spaces to sell their own clothes and accessories. It’s the most eco-friendly way to keep your closet fresh, which, in light of our current world, is something we should all do more of.

Best Place To Buy A Wool Sweater



Handprjónasamband Islands

Skólavörðustígur 19

Are you surprised? You shouldn’t be. Once again, Handprjónasamband Islands has taken top prize. Stacked from floor to ceiling with cosy woolly goodness, the store offers sweaters, gloves and more, in every colour of the rainbow. It’s the real-deal—every beloved lopapeysa there was sourced and knitted directly in the country, potentially by a loving grandma who also makes great kjótsupa and spouts bits of wisdom. Because really, that’s the type of vibe you get from this place. How’s that for an authentic experience?

Runners-Up



MAGNEA

Kiosk, Grandagarður 35

MAGNEA, which you can find at our Best Goddamn Store Kiosk, takes Icelandic wool to the next level, turning the touchstone material into gorgeous, modern works of art. Her coats (yes, it’s not technically a sweater) are made of 100% Icelandic wool and made in the city. This is something new in the world of Icelandic wool, and for that, MAGNEA must be applauded.



Farmers Market Laugavegur 37 & Hólmaslóð 2

For a more stylish take on the Icelandic sweater, look no further than Farmers Market. Their designs update the traditional lopapeysa into a fitted and distinctly high-street getup. Pair it with fitted trousers and heels and you’ll blend in at any Scandinavian fashion event.

Best Homeware Shop



NORR11

Hverfisgata 18

NORR11—what else can you say? This homeware store is so gorgeous that it almost feels like a gallery or set for an elite Nordic drama. With a meticulously picked selection, NORR11 embodies the most delicate elements of Nordic design, full of pieces with such adeptness of form and composition that they almost elicit some ASMR tingles. While yes, it is expensive, even if you can't afford it, the shop is worth a trip for the inspiration alone. "It's a nice space and a beautiful store and when you walk in, you know that they really know what they are doing. They are absolute experts at interior design," our panel concluded.

Runners-Up



nomad. Frakkastigur 8f

"They are just my favourite!," one panel member raved of the Laugavegur shop. Located on the main street, nomad. offers a lovely selection of homeware, design knick-knacks and notably, a fantastic selection of coffee table books. They also often have photo exhibitions in their basement. Basically, it's the whole package.



Hrim Kringlan

Hrim has a certain *je ne sais quoi* about it that creates some seriously devoted customers. The store has an eclectic mix of neutral Nordic style design along with some OTT international brands—a combo you don't find in many places. We are particularly fans of their products by Italian designer Seletti, who is as colourful and bright as they come. Just the thing to brighten up the end of the summer.

Best Bookstore



Eymundsson

Austurstræti 18

Eymundsson is a classic bookstore, offering up the newest in Icelandic writing and international titles. It has the rare characteristic of being perfectly curated for both locals and tourists, so if you're a traveller looking to get an illustrated edition of the Sagas, or a Reykjavík kid hoping to pick up the definitely-going-to-be-released upcoming Kingkiller sequel, this would be the place to find it. Notably, they stock all the English translations of the latest Icelandic novels, so next time you read about a cool book in the Grapevine, head there to pick it up. The café ain't bad either!

Runners-Up



Bóksala Stúdenta Sæmundargata 4

Located within the main building of Háskóli Íslands, the university bookstore runs the gamut from speciality academic texts to classics, new fiction, notebooks and much more. Another plus? The on-site coffee shop serves up what are potentially the fairest priced coffees in town, as does the Háskóli Íslands cafeteria next door.



Forlagið Fiskislóð 39

Forlagið is Iceland's largest book publisher and at their special bookstore, you can pick up all your favourites—not only from Forlagið, but all the other local publishers as well. We stan a queen that works for the greater good of their industry, don't we? Yes we do. Also, the bookstore is massive. Seriously. Don't go in there during a fire.

BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2021

Shopping

Stuff is better than money anyway

Best Record Store



Lucky Records

Rauðarárstigur 10

Lucky Records is the punky, underground horse of the Reykjavík scene. It's one of those shops that is easy to get lost in—expect to spend an entire afternoon perusing their selection. Notably, the store is very much in touch with the local underground. Basically any Icelandic release—no matter how big or small—will be sold there and trust and believe, their shopkeepers will know them in and out, along with the entirety of the Icelandic post-techo-deep-house-power-metal scene of the late 80s or something equally mystifying.

Runners-Up



Geisladiskabúð Valda Laugavegur 64

The first time one of our panel members was in Geisladiskabúð Valda, they found an illegal Japanese knockoff compilation album of a rather obscure Finnish metal band made in the early 2000s. Tell me any other place in Reykjavík you could find that. You can't. No, there's nothing quite like the obscurities of Geisladiskabúð Valda.



Smekkleysa SM // Bad Taste Hjartatorg, Hverfisgata 32

New location, baby! Yes, Smekkleysa has taken root in Hjartatorg, bringing a sense of danger, coolness and, of course, bad taste back to the square. Their goal is "World Domination or Death", so if your idea of world domination is soundtracked by the Sugar-cubes, múm or Mínus, you'll fit in great.



Reykjavík Record Shop Klapparstigur 35

A place created by music nerds, for music nerds. Reykjavík Record Shop is a curated heaven, full of the crème de la crème of music, be it contemporary or classic. They've got a polished vibe to suit the modern audiophile. In fact, it's perhaps a good place to meet a partner if you are looking for a modern audiophile.



NEW IN TOWN

Where To Get Your Grapevine Tattoo

Just get our logo! We love free advertising!

Words: **Hannah Jane Cohen**

The last few years have seen a boom of tattoo parlours around Reykjavik. In fact, there's now so many that we literally don't have the space to feature them all here, but here's a diverse selection of what the smokey city has to offer. (Email that GV ink to grapevine@grapevine.is)

Íslenzka Húðflúrstofan @icelandtattoo Ingólfsstræti 3

This classic shop caters to all styles, with a roster of artists that serve up everything from realism to new-school and more—and it's all done beautifully. We'd particularly recommend the hand-poked pieces by Habba, Reykjavik's resident witch-stave-runic genius. Not only are they gorgeously ornate in that straight-out-of-800-AD-way, but they might also save you from evil spirits.

White Hill Tattoo @whitehilltattoo Laugavegur 25

For illustrative, watercolour and similarly bright and ethereal works, head to White Hill. Marlena (formerly of Sweet Hell) is

a master of this stuff, who you can trust to give you jewel-eyed animals surrounded by flowing pastel clouds or other enchanting things like that. We'd also like to compliment Hrefna Maria on the gothy blackwork she's got going on. As an (internally) goth magazine, her devotion to the darker arts must be celebrated (sullenly).

Street Rats Tattoo @sleepofertattoo Hverfisgata 37

Runner-up for our Best of Reykjavik 2021 award for Hidden Gem, Street Rats Tattoo is the personal playground of Kristófer, a.k.a. Sleepofer Tattoo. He does that sort of full-on thick traditional shit that never goes out of style. Think naked ladies, skulls, snakes and spiderwebs. You

know, devil-may-care things that make you look cool.

Valkyrie Tattoo Studio @valkyrie_tattoo_studio Fiskilóð 31

First off, this studio has one of the best views in Reykjavik, so we'd love to offer to switch offices with them. Second off, this is another place that runs the gamut of styles beautifully—from handpoked by The Witch and The Sun to Trash Panda's traditional. Apprentice Karítas also does some pokemon/anime things that we like, as an office full of trainers. Catch 'em all, though.

**Black Cross
@blackkrosstattoo
Hamraborg 14a, Kópavogur**
A really, really, really good place

for old school. Actually, the artists there do everything well, but their old school is particularly *chef's kiss*. In my experience, people who like Black Cross are weirdly culty about it—like they only get tattooed there and go a lot and just really love it—so watch out, they might be putting something in the ink. (For legal reasons, we are obliged to clarify that that is a joke.)

Memoria Collective @memoriacollective Hverfisgata 52

Another place that does most styles and does them really well. That said, Balli's got some particularly stellar neotraditional and we must also shout out the black and grey work of Emii Dun (who has tattooed the author of this article many times.) No favouritism here, folks.

Bleksmiðjan Tattoo & Piercing @bleksmidjantattoo Kringlan 7

Located next to Kringlan, Blek-smiðjan is another fan favourite. Ingi is a go-to for colour-realism, which you don't see a ton of in this country. Bleksmiðjan also has some amazing piercing people who can do everything from smilies to dermals. No word as to whether or not they can install a \$24-million pink diamond in our forehead, though.

Apollo Ink @apolloink Síðumúli 3

Apollo Ink is probably the number one place for black and grey realism in Reykjavik, considering most of the artists here specialise in it and just do it really fucking well. Adrian Chou's surrealist take on the style is particularly trippy, but seriously, Jesus Christ, everyone here is just really good aren't they? Isn't realism supposed to be super hard? Where did they find these people?

Reykjavik Ink @reykjavikink Frakkastígur 7

The one. The only. No doubt a downtown institution by this point, Reykjavik Ink is a tried-and-true locale that has been serving the local community faithfully for 13 lucky years. Pro-tip: They get really fantastic guest artists, so keep an eye on their Instagram to see who's coming over. 🍷

BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2021

Shopping

Spend your way to personal fulfillment

Best Grocery Store



Krónan Downtown

Hallveigarstígur 1

Going to a grocery store in Iceland is always a social occasion and especially during COVID times, it might have been the only place you run into friends and acquaintances you otherwise wouldn't see. And while Krónan's larger Grandi location put up a strong fight in the battle for first place this year, it was its downtown location that captured our heart, not only for its spot smack dab in the middle of the city, but also for its fantastic selection of vegan options—something that's been deftly missed by the other downtown grocery stores. So feel free to go cruelty free for dinner tonight. Krónan's got you covered.

Runners-Up



Melabúðin Hagamel 39, 107

For foodies looking for artisanal deli meats, fresh figs, rare cheeses and all sorts of unexpected, hard-to-find treats, Vesturbær's beloved Melabúðin should satiate your desires. "You can get everything you need, everything you didn't know you needed and if you're lucky, you might even see Björk," one panellist laughed.



Hyalin Hverfisgata 35

This French gourmet shop is, above all else, inspirational. It's the type of spot that you stop by for a mosey and then leave carting a bottle of the most luxurious imported mustard. This then naturally inspires you to finally learn the intricacies of the condiment and cook up a mustard themed feast which impresses all your friends. And thus—a foodie is born.

Hidden Gem



Listval

Hólmaslóð 6

"It's just so well-curated," one panellist said of Grandi's Listval, a multi-purpose art space and store. "You can go to just one place and see a beautiful exhibition and also buy work. They've had a nice mix of very stylish artists and also up-and-comers, so for someone visiting Iceland, it'd be a great place to come and get really well acquainted with the local scene." While Listval is anything but a hidden gem—just a gem really—for those in-the-know of the Icelandic art community, its location far off in Grandi means it's often a missed destination for those who would otherwise just mosey in and be wowed by its charms, maybe leaving with a piece or just a new artist to follow. So if the word 'Listval' is a new one for you—do yourself a favour and get well acquainted with this winner.

Runners-Up

svartbysvart Týsgata 1

If svartbysvart wasn't tucked away on a sidestreet, we guarantee that you'd see the store's unisex, minimalist, totally futuristic style everywhere (which we hope will now happen due to this award). Marko Svart—the visionary behind the store—serves up eco-conscious Nordic wares often composed of found materials including raw sustainable ceramics, jewellery made from Icelandic clay, and other revived objects—many of which are made by Reykjavík-based foreign artists. Support conscious consumption! We do.

Núllið Gallery Bankastræti 0

In its few years of existence, Núllið Gallery has become a mainstay of the young Icelandic art scene, constantly showcasing the newest, edgiest and most exciting artists in the city. With its finger on the underground pulse—to be fair, it is literally underground—Núllið is a place to obsessively follow. In fact, don't even check who is exhibiting. Just show up. Then talk about it after and you will seem very hip and cool to your normie friends.

Street Rats Tattoo Hverfisgata 37

We love Kristófer, a.k.a. Sleepofer Tattoo, which is why he's once again one of our Hidden Gems. A fresh, beloved artist of the Reykjavík clandestine scene, Kris is known for his edgy takes on traditional tattoos—think naked ladies, skulls, snakes and spiderwebs. You know, devil-may-care things that make you look cool. Just like us—a magazine targeted to tourists.

Best Jewellery Shop



Orrifinn

Skólavörðustígur 43

Orrifinn is known for their sensual, raw, detailed and carefully crafted pieces that manage to be at once timeless and distinctly modern. Often inspired by mythology, the beloved store was an instantaneous pick for this award. "By this point, Orrifinn is an institution in Icelandic design and style," one panellist decreed. "They know what they are doing and have a confidence and vulnerability in their work that is simply beautiful." Notably, they also opened up a new location this year, just down the street from their last! This spot is bigger and better than ever, giving you more room to stand and gawk at them making jewelry right in front of your eyes.

Runners-Up



Aurum Bankastræti 4

Aurum is just beautiful. In fact, it's rather hard to find a better word for the brand, which takes its inspiration from Icelandic nature and molds that into delicate—yet sometimes harsh—pieces that are guaranteed to be that piece of jewellery in your collection that everyone comments on. Their works also feel distinctly high end—like a rich widow on her third husband that spends her time wearing pearly claw rings and delicate silver chains. Tell us, what's better than that?



Hildur Hafstein Klapparstígur 40

Slightly hippy, full of mystical symbols and teaming with craftsmanship, Hildur Hafstein has created a niche all her own in the Icelandic jewellery community. "Her store and jewellery has an inviting and witchy vibe. Her pieces seem really ritualistic," one panel member said. That said, Hildur does often indulge her playful side. "I just really like her. In fact, I just got a bracelet from her that had all the Pride colours on it!" another panellist exclaimed.

NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF ICELAND



WELCOME TO THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ICELAND



The National Museum of Iceland
Suðurgata 41, 101 Reykjavík

Opening Hours
Daily 10-17
Closed on
Mondays 16/9-30/4

www.nationalmuseum.is
+354 530 2200
@icelandnationalmuseum
@thjodminjasafn

BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2021

Activities

Get off the internet already!

Reykjavík is bustling with activities, from famous attractions to small hidden gems. And we have busted our balls, pushing ourselves to our physical limits—have you seen how many mountains we hiked?—to compile this list of what you need to do to experience Reykjavík to the fullest (and most authentic). So, here are the winners of our Best of Reykjavík 2021 Activities awards, all of which are recommended by our panel of locals. Although there is still a pandemic going on, all these places have been accessible and safe throughout the restrictions. So sanitise those hands, put on a mask and enjoy.

Best Pool



Vesturbæjarlaug

Hofsvallagata, 107 Reykjavík

Vesturbær is one of Reykjavík's most bustling areas, and probably the only locale where you could bump into Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir, renowned artist Ragnar Kjartansson, and a member of Sigur Rós in the same day. Vesturbæjarlaug is smack in the middle of the hubbub and serves up a wonderful selection of hot tubs chock full of chattering artists, students and other 107 locals. The pool is unique in the sense that it offers up pretty much anything you'd need—a shiny outdoor pool, big hotpots, a large steam room and a particularly lovely outdoor changing area, which you should take advantage of in the summer months. And remember, don't hesitate to converse about the state of things in the hot water—Icelanders love to debate politics, philosophise about art and make fun of, well, everything.

Runners-Up



Laugardalslaug Sundlaugavegur 30, 105 Reykjavík

Here we've got the biggest pool in Reykjavík, which—get ready for this—has the tallest slide in the city. So if you've got kids, get ready for a wild ride. For adults though, the panel praised the saltwater hot tub, which they described lounging in as odd but fun. You'll step out salty head to toe. Yum.

Newcomer



Sky Lagoon Vesturvör 44, 200 Kópavogur

This pool combines two of our favourite things: hot pools, nature and booze. Wait, that's three things... so scratch out nature. Sky Lagoon is a man-made haven in Kópavogur, carved out of seaside rocks and with a view to kill for and a patented seven step Ritual™. If the weather is good, you'll be able to spot the volcano in the distance.

Best Artist-Run Gallery



Gallery Port

Laugavegur 23, 101 Reykjavík

You could perhaps call Gallery Port the dive bar of the Icelandic art scene—and we mean that in the coolest, most in-the-know and loving way. This artist-run space, located smack dab downtown on Laugavegur, serves up gritty, unusual and eclectic art by people who will probably be famous one day (or already are). Stop by if you're looking to enter some David Lynch-directed dimension. Note: It's also one of the few venues where you can buy the brilliant art you see on the walls.

Runners-Up



Kling & Bang Grandagarður 20, 101 Reykjavík

The Marshall House serves up a number of brilliant galleries, but the artist-run Kling & Bang is a true standout. No matter what exhibit or installation they have on the roster, expect something ambitious and unique—from feminist AI fantasy games to gardens covered in bees. Another amazing thing about Kling & Bang is that they play host to not only well-known international creators, but also to up-and-coming talents. The space never ceases to amaze with its provocative, vibrant style and it is for that reason that it continues to be a not-to-miss space.

Newcomer



Flæði Vesturgata 17, 101 Reykjavík

The freshest gallery in town to discover the newest artists in Iceland is definitely Flæði ('Flow' in English). The gallery prides itself on being a non-profit exhibition space and art venue aiming for visibility and inclusivity in the art scene in Iceland, which is music to the ears of the art-hungry journalists at the Reykjavík Grapevine. (Or a call to arms for the Marxist cultural revolution.) Either way, we're down for both and you will find the next generation of the Icelandic art scene right there.

Best Gallery



i8

Tryggvagata 16, 101 Reykjavík

There is no way around it: i8 is still the best gallery in Iceland. Over the years, it's given us works from internationally lauded art superstars like Ragnar Kjartansson, Elín Hansdóttir and Ólafur Eliasson, putting Icelandic art on the worldwide map and helping it stay there. Although it's a commercial gallery, it's not a stuffy, hoity-toity spot—expect to see conceptual cutting-edge museum-sized displays, rather than conservative and conventionally appealing work. Best of all, there's a sharp wit and sense of fun running through the gallery's roster, in sharp contrast to the often po-faced offerings of the contemporary art scene.

Runners-Up

Hverfisgallerí Hverfisgata 4, 101 Reykjavík

Hverfisgallerí consistently impressed our panel with a roster of brilliant exhibitions by young artists like Helena Margrét Jónsdóttir and the incredibly talented Davíð Órn Halldórsson, among others. This gallery is (and we cannot emphasise this enough) ambitious. Stop by for the best and brightest of the scene.

Berg Contemporary Klapparstígur 16, 101 Reykjavík

For the past few years, Berg Contemporary has concretely established itself as the go-to spot for contemporary art in Reykjavík. Their large, beautifully renovated space is known for blurring the lines between the conceptual, the abstract, the art and the functional with their installations and exhibitions. That may sound complicated, but what we're trying to say is pretty simple: Stop by.

Newcomer

Y Gallery Hamraborg 12, 200 Kópavogur

Possibly the most original location for a gallery, Y Gallery can be found in the notorious Hamraborg (trust us, ask any Icelander about it) parking lot, housed in an old gas station. The location is an experience in itself. You will find work by all of the best contemporary artists in Iceland there and get a feel for the suburbs at the same time. Sounds like a win-win to us.

Notable Mentions

Pula Gallery (We love you.)

Best Art Museum



Reykjavík Art Museum

Tryggvagata 17, 101 Reykjavík

Hafnarhús, the downtown branch of the Reykjavík Art Museum is a cathedral to contemporary art that exhibits a constant conveyor belt of interesting international work. In 2020, they wowed with exhibitions from international heavyweights like Gilbert & George and Shoplifter to up-and-coming Grapevine favourites like Una Björg Magnúsdóttir. Check out their numerous rotating exhibitions as well as their shop—it's the perfect rainy-day destination.

Runners-Up



National Gallery of Iceland Frikirkjuvegur 7

Listasafn Islands (the National Gallery of Iceland) is a crown jewel in the Reykjavík cultural scene. This is where you go to see our best artists' work, to fill your soul with something that matters or just to cross it off your bucket list. It's also one of the museums that is often the most underrated—hey, sometimes we just take things for granted. But although it's the oldest and most distinguished museum of them all, that doesn't mean that they aren't still the absolutely best in the business.



Gerðarsafn - Kópavogur Art Museum Hamraborg 4

Gerðarsafn is one of those hidden gems outside of Reykjavík. Located in Kópavogur, the museum offers a fresh take on Icelandic art and gives visitors an opportunity to meet and listen to their artists in their fantastic artist talks. It also has a coffee shop and a delightful garden.

Best Museum



The National Museum

Suðurgata 41

Of Reykjavík's many museums, one stands taller than the rest due to the pure breadth of their displays. Iceland's National Museum is a treasure trove of the country's history, covering everything from early culture to clothing, metalsmithing, religion and more. It's well-curated and well-designed, even showcasing contemporary displays that connect to modern cultural waves like football and feminism. Trust us, it's an amazing feat of a museum—somehow making silverware interesting while also displaying a baby skeleton. Creepy? Kind of, but we love it.

Runners-Up



The Settlement Exhibition Aðalstræti 16

Yearning to learn more about the first 101 hipsters of Reykjavík? Well, the Settlement Exhibition has got you covered. Based around the carefully excavated remnants of a Viking farm, it's a great way to learn about how the early inhabitants of Iceland lived, how they made their first latté and what they called Kaffibarinn in the year 900.



Einar Jónsson Museum Hallgrímstorg 3, 101 Reykjavík

If you know where the Hallgrímskirkja church is, you know where the Einar Jónsson Museum is. Einar Jónsson is Iceland's foremost sculptor and built this beautiful museum around his artwork. There is a good chance that you've already seen his work, as half the statues around the city are his creation. An interesting visit, with deep history.

Best Cinema



Bió Paradís

Hverfisgata 54, 101 Reykjavík

The heart of Icelandic cinema lies at Hverfisgata's Bió Paradís. It's the only arthouse cinema in the country and the premiere destination for those that want to see Icelandic films with English subtitles. In fact, when it closed for a short time, it caused a city-wide panic, culminating in a popular movement to revive it. Thankfully, it's back, and just as great as ever. We are very excited to see what their future holds and hope it includes the cult nights and party screenings the theatre is known for.

Runners-Up



Háskólabíó Hagatorg, 107 Reykjavík

Háskólabíó, located in the west of Reykjavík, showcases worldwide blockbusters as well as local Icelandic films (check online to confirm the availability of English subtitles). It's a cosy location within walking distance from downtown that'll satiate your desire for the whole popcorn-Avengers experience.



Smárabíó Smáralind, Kópavogur

We're fans of Smárabíó for two reasons: it's easily accessible by bus and it offers an unbeatable VIP luxury experience, where you can recline on cushy chairs with some room to groove while you munch on your nachos. Seriously—if you're looking for a big movie theatre-style movie theatre, this is it. Also you can stop by Extralöppan afterwards and get some vintage duds to imitate The Rock in whatever flick you just saw him in.

Best Tech Exhibition



Wonders of Iceland

Perlan

If stormy weather blows your glacier trip off course, visit the Wonders of Iceland museum in the iconic Perlan. The impressive displays includes a man-made ice tunnel, complete with frigid air temperatures and a selfie spot so realistic it'll fool your Instagram followers. In the main hall, projected glacial vistas let you see the glaciers' different shapes and sizes, while stop-motion videos of glacial retreat reveal how fragile these majestic phenomena are. There's also an 8k aurora planetarium in case the Northern Lights prove elusive.

Runners-Up



Flyover Iceland Fiskislóð 43, 101 Reykjavík

This VR experience took the city by storm in 2019, with as many Icelanders lining up for a bird's eye view of the country as tourists. On this virtual ride, soar over glaciers, mountains, lava fields and more—complete with fresh mountain air and Iceland's varied scents—all from the comfort of an amusement ride seat.



Whales Of Iceland Fiskislóð 23-25

Whales Of Iceland consists of 23 life-size models of the gentle giants, from gargantuan blue whales to a 25-meter long sperm whale. Meandering around the hall will probably give you a new appreciation for underwater life. To be frank, it's a whale of a time (sorry about that).

BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2021

Activities

Seriously, try the pools, it's not like back home.

Best Day Trip



Geldingadalur Volcano

Close to Grindavík

Perhaps you haven't heard, but there is an active volcano erupting near Grindavík town, which is conveniently close to the airport as well. It's only a 40-minute drive from Reykjavík, plus the hour and a half hike to the ridge where you can get a sweeping look at this incredible event. If you want to know more about the volcano, visit us at YouTube. And remember, don't walk on the lava.

Runners-Up



Guðlaug Natural Pool Langisandur, Akranes

Feeling hot after a global warming summer? Well, why not swim in the Atlantic ocean? Too cold? We know. If you drive all the way to Akranes, you will find a beach, with beautiful hot pools on two floors, and the roaring Atlantic ocean in front of you. If you're brave enough to take a dip in the ocean, you can always warm up again in the pool.



Reykjadalur West of Hveragerði

Why go to the pools, when you can bathe in the hot rivers? Reykjadalur is only a 40-minute hike from Hveragerði, which is, coincidentally, a 40-minute drive from Reykjavík. In the bottom of the valley you will find a beautiful hot river where you can luxuriate like you're in a hot tub at a Reykjavík swimming pool. Pro tip: bring a towel with you and consider wearing your swimming gear under the hiking clothes if you're too prudish to change in public.

Best Place To See The Aurora



Gróttá

Seltjarnarnes, 170 Seltjarnarnes

Gróttá is something of a hidden gem. At the end of the Seltjarnarnes peninsula, not far from the centre of Reykjavík, there's a lonely, windblown, red-topped lighthouse, with a walkable causeway that's only accessible at certain times, depending on the tide. There's a black beach, a miniature hot pot, and a nature reserve. Now, to find the Northern Lights, it's rather complicated. Basically, you stand on this picturesque beach, open your eyes, and look up. There you go. Pure happiness. Note: Be aware of the tides if you're gonna cross over and check out the lighthouse. You could get stuck overnight.

Runners-Up



Landakotstún

Hávallagata 14-16, 101 Reykjavík

This spot is a sneaky one. It's smack downtown, but yet there's magically enough darkness there to spot the aurora if it's burning up above the city. Where is it, you ask? Find the Catholic Church—there's only one—and walk to the bench behind it. That's it. Now, pull out your flask and enjoy the green fire in the sky.



Sæbraut

Sólfarið, Sæbraut, 101 Reykjavík

Reykjavík's coastline path features a gorgeous sculpture called Sólfar ("The Sun Voyager"). There, take a seat and soak up the dark ocean as you enjoy the dancing lights above you. It's a simple spot that can be surprisingly secluded.

Best Place To Spend Time With The Kids (Winter!)



Reykjavik Maritime Museum

Grandagarður 8

At the end of the day, no matter how sophisticated we pretend to be in Iceland, everything is just about fish. The sooner we make peace with this, the better. So dive into the most fun museum in Iceland, the Reykjavík Maritime museum is an incredible adventure, surprisingly diverse and the kids can even play ocean-themed video games. This museum is a no-brainer for families; it's beautiful, fun and enlightening.

Runner-Up



Reykjavik City Library Tryggvagata 15, Reykjavik

For some free and wholesome family time, the parents on our panel enjoy the Reykjavík City Library. There's an excellent play area for younger children between one and three and—you guessed it—there are books for kids of all ages to look at. On the second floor, take a gander at everything from a small aquarium to a closet of pirate and princess costumes. Afterwards, show your kid your favourite comics or just chill while they run around like crazies. Don't miss the photography museum on the top floor either.



Flyover Iceland Fiskislóð 43

Kid playing too many video games? How about just stepping into one? Flyover Iceland is a brilliant amusement park ride for the whole family—a VR flight over the majestic and frightening nature of Iceland. It'll definitely make your kid forget about Minecraft. We promise.

For A Fancy Night Out



Iceland Symphony Orchestra

Harpa

In recent years, the Icelandic classical music scene has been booming, producing superstars like Víkingur Heiðar Ólafsson, Anna Þorvaldsdóttir, and, yes you guessed it, the Oscar-winning composer, Hildur Guðnadóttir. What do these three all have in common? Well, all three have played or have had their compositions played by the wonderful Iceland Symphony Orchestra. With shows every month at Harpa featuring a mix of old-school favourites and contemporary premieres, they are one of Iceland's most valuable cultural assets.

Runners-Up



Tjarnarbíó Tjarnargata 12

Tjarnarbíó houses the independent professional theatre scene in Reykjavík. The works shown here are experimental and often in English, which is refreshing, especially as Iceland gets more and more multicultural. Recently, they played host to everything from a Saga-inspired Drag Show to contemporary plays and more. We stan.



Reykjavik Goth Night facebook.com/ReykjavikGothNight

This won't be everyone's can of Monster, but for those looking to get dark on their fancy night out, Reykjavík Goth Night knows how to do it. We have to give it to them for continuing to do pandemic-safe events that keep the spirit of the night alive. So if you've gotten bored of watching 'The Crow' alone in your basement, lost your page in 'The Vampire Lestat', or realised that your blacks don't match, grab your Peter Steele Playgirl issue and come reminisce with your fellow creatures of the dark at Reykjavík Goth Night. Come ready to dance and remember: Dress to depress.

Best Hike



Akrafjall

North of Akranes (The huge one)

Akrafjall is close to Akranes and is roughly 600 metres high. The hike takes about 2-5 hours, depending what route you take, and it's a relatively easy hike for an Icelandic mountain this high. The prize for making it to the top is a view over the city area, over to Reykjanes, and Snæfellsnes, where the glacier Snæfellsjökull is. Definitely a great way to spend a day if you like hiking.

Runners-Up



Helgafell

Kaldársel, near 220 Hafnarfjörður
Despite its proximity to the city, driving to the Holy Mountain of Helgafell, just outside Hafnarfjörður, really feels like going into the wild. It's a nice light walk across a lava field and then up a gentle slope to a 300 metre peak that offers a nice view over the Reykjanes peninsula that'll look crazy good on Instagram. Stop by to see locals walking their dogs, intrepid athletes training for a marathon or couples having a lovely date in the countryside. If you're not looking to get super sweaty but you still want to take a break from city life, Helgafell is the perfect trip.



Glymur Hvalfjörður

Even the residents in the city area often forget about this pearl of nature that is within an hour drive from Reykjavik. Located close to Botnsdalur valley in Hvalfjörður, Glymur is the second highest waterfall in Iceland—it's just shy of 200 metres—and the hike is relatively easy. The elevation is only around 280 metres and on a good day, this should be no problem for a physically fit individual. This is where you go for that perfect Instagram photo that'll have your friends dying of jealousy over how perfect your adventurous life is.

Best Art Hall

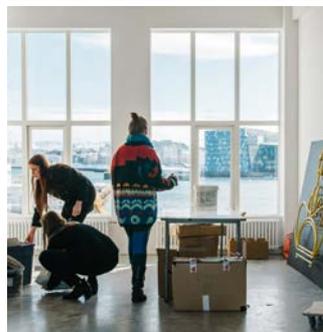


Ásmundarsalur

Freyjugata 41, 101 Reykjavík

Ásmundarsalur is all in one theater, art gallery, coffee house and even a marketplace for new art made by young and interesting artists in Iceland. It's lively, offers fantastic art and atmosphere, and the house is especially beautiful and worth visiting.

Runners-Up



Kling & Bang Grandagarður 20, 101 Reykjavík

Kling & Bang have been on our Best Of lists from the beginning. And there is a good reason for that; the gallery always displays the best of the best of new art in Iceland, made by the freshest artist around. If you want to know what's up, you need to check this place out.



Núllið Galleri Bankastræti 0, 101 Reykjavík
In a tiny, repurposed public toilet underneath Bankastræti, Núllið combines a punkish atmosphere with simplicity. The gallery is a creative venue for street art and up-and-coming artists in Reykjavik. This is where you could find the next Erró.



BAR GUIDE

Don't Despair, Skuggabaldur Is On The Prowl

There's a new jazz bar in town

Words: **Valur Grettisson** Photo: **Art Bicnick**

"I've always wanted to open up a jazz bar," Jón Mýrdal says. A stand-up comedian and TV personality turned bar owner and restaurateur, he's one of the better-known names and faces in the local scene. Now he, along with his business partner, musician Snorri Helgason, have made that dream come true with their new jazz bar Skuggabaldur.

The importance of improv

Jón has almost a cult-like status when it comes to running Reykjavik bars and restaurants. His first project—fish restaurant Messinn—became an instant hit in Reykjavik with its sophisticated yet classic take on the pan-fried fish of the Westfjords. He's also known for founding the legendary Húrra, which became one of Iceland's most beloved music venues for the indie crowd. In fact, it was there that he discovered the power of jazz.

"I started these nights on Mondays at Húrra. We called it Mánudjazz [a play on the word for Mondays in Icelandic 'mánudagur'] and there were around 200 guests in the house, which was unheard of in Reykjavik at the time," he explains.

Along with Húrra, he also started another bar, Röntgen, just before the pandemic hit. In true Jón Mýrdal style, it was another hit, quickly gathering a loyal following among the city's cultural elite. That said, COVID -19 changed everything. And during the pandemic Jón's views began to morph, and lead him to look for a different nightlife vibe.

"Yeah, I'm getting middle

aged," he laughs. "I haven't [had a drink] for eight years now, so I want something more serious," he adds. That said, serious has never been his style. Jón imagined a new music venue/bar, with a young house band filled with talented musicians at its core. On weekends, there would be a lunch hour with concerts by some of the best musicians in Iceland and at night, a party funk band. And what's more, each show would be free. And what's even more—the kitchen would offer some of the best food in town.

And he somehow made that vision a reality.

Enter Skuggabaldur

The term 'Skuggabaldur,' the name of Jón's new enterprise, has a pretty weird history. A skuggabaldur is a mythical creature—a mix of a cat and a fox that can't be killed by a gun. The creatures are often treated like shadow figures, sneaky animals or evil spirits.

In one old tale, it is said that a farmer managed to corner a skuggabaldur and kill the beast with his bare hands. But the creature could talk and cried out a mysterious statement before it died. Then, later that night, the farmer repeated the monster's parting words while bragging about his victory. At that moment, a wild cat appeared out of nowhere, biting the farmer in the throat, killing him instantly.

But what does this have to do with a jazz bar? Well, it's pretty outrageous, isn't it? And that's jazz. 🍷

Info: Skuggabaldur is located at Pósthússtræti 9.



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