

The Reykjavík Grapevine



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Volume 21

Issue 17 2024

Best before December 5

Dysfunction On Full Display

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On The Cover

It's that time again! Ten months ahead of schedule, Icelanders will venture to their local voting stations on November 30 to cast ballots in a snap election triggered by the dissolution of the three party coalition government that was first elected in 2017. It's been seven years of internal disagreements, with not a heck of a lot to show for it – a scenario our cover feature breaks down on pages 14 to 17. On the cover, Halldór Baldursson captures the level of expectations many have for these elections – more of the same.

COVER ILLUSTRATION:
Halldór Baldursson

Editorial Welcome Home

WORDS Catharine Fulton
Editor in Chief

When I was first in the process of moving to Iceland – a span of time that saw me alternating 90-day periods spent in Reykjavík and my native Toronto – I was a frequent flyer on Icelandair. The announcements made upon landing are much the same today as way back then before the arrival of low-cost carriers to Iceland, with the lead flight attendant wishing international travellers “welcome to Keflavík, Iceland” before rhyming off the local time and temperature.

What follows next for the ears of the Icelanders on board is a warm “Velkomin heim.”

It wasn't until the jet-setting nature of my life came to an end with a visa marriage of convenience* to a willing Icelander that the greeting hit me.

Velkomin heim. I'm not from here, but circumstances and life have brought me here and, now, as a member of that relatively miniscule club of Icelandic nationals and residents, that greeting was intended for my ears.

I, like so many other people of foreign origin living in Iceland, are home here. For whatever reason, we have chosen to build our lives on this island nation, to contribute our considerable and varied talents to society, to pay taxes into its coffers and, in some cases, to add to the population through building our own families.

Iceland is *our* home, Alþingi is *our* parliament and the people elected to parliament are *our* public servants, tasked with looking out for *our* best interests and improving the conditions of *our* lives with an equal zeal and passion as they work for the interests of those born in Iceland who can trace their lineage to the settlement.

With snap elections approaching on Nov. 30 and a “caretaker” government using the interim to fan the flames of division, I truly hope that inclusion, equality and representation come out on top over fear and division.

Ísland er heimili okkar. It's time to expect our politicians to work for all of us.

Free Palestine. ■

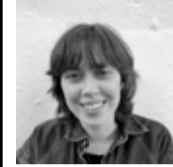
* This is a joke. Please don't report me to ÚTL.

Contributors



CHARLIE WINTERS

Ever since escaping his enclosure in the U.K., Charlie has been on the loose in Reykjavík. Idea spouter, drag queen, comedian, retail worker, English teacher and short story writer, he is single handedly ruining the job market. In his free time he skitters along the fine line between delusion and fantasy through tabletop roleplaying games.



ISH SVEINSSON HOULE

Ish is a former radio station manager and DJ, mainly focusing on music writing with a side of other cultural happenings. Ish moved to Reykjavík to get more in touch with half-Icelandic genes, also writes poetry, and has unfortunately only ever been in a cover band.



IRYNA ZUBENKO

Iryna is a Ukrainian journalist working at the cross-section of media and technology for the past five years. While still figuring out what to do in life, Iryna's love of travelling, unspoiled nature and Scandi design has brought her to Reykjavík. One day she'll write a non-fiction book.



JOANA FONTINHA

Joana is an Aries baby expressing her soul through photography. She's been obsessed with Icelandic culture since her teens, so much that at 20 she threw herself headfirst on a plane to her long-time dream country, Iceland. Driven, energetic and unable to be still, she clumsily moves like a flash and suffers from a serious fast-talking condition.



JÓHANNES BJARKI BJARKASON

Jóhannes Bjarki is a Reykjavík local, straight out of Grafarvogur. Having been active as the frontman of the post-punk band Skoffín and in the post-dreifing art collective, Jóhannes is fascinated by the Icelandic music scene. Among his interests are politics, history and pop culture.



JOHN ROGERS

is a long-time Grapeviner with a particular focus on art, gaming, culture, and travelling to Iceland's far corners to poke around and see what's there. He also podcasts, photographs, makes art, and does a bunch of other stuff, which is perhaps indicative of a low attention spa



SHRUTHI BASAPPA

Shruthi Basappa traded the warmth of Indian summers for Arctic winds of Iceland. She's a food enthusiast masquerading as an architect at Sei Studio and loves obsessive attention to detail. When not leading our Best of Reykjavík food panel, Shruthi can be found trying to become a Michelin restaurant inspector.

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What The News!?

Celebrities Running For Alþingi, E.coli, Zelensky In Iceland & Teachers On Strike

A look at some of the news making headlines in recent weeks

WORDS The Reykjavik Grapevine
IMAGE The Government

Icelanders will vote for a new government on November 30, as snap elections were called following the dissolution of parliament on Oct. 13. Read more about Iceland's political situation throughout this issue, as well as our cover story on pages 14-16.

MINI-CELEBRITIES

On October 15, President Halla Tómasdóttir confirmed Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson's request to dissolve parliament. A caretaker government was subsequently appointed, with the three ministers of the Left Green Movement dropping out of the coalition.

Since that series of events, parties across the political spectrum have initiated their respective election campaigns. With less than two months to prepare, a tactic almost every party has turned to includes folding well-known individuals to their ranks. Four of the 12 presidential candidates from last summer's election – Jón Gnarr, Halla Hrund Logadóttir, Arnar Þór Jónsson and Viktor Traustason – are running for separate parties.

Some famed talking heads shifting into the political sphere include two-thirds of the public Covid executive

committee, Víðir Reynisson and Alma Möller, who are running for the Social Democratic Alliance. Former Reykjavik mayor Dagur B. Eggertsson, meanwhile, announced his bid for the Social Democratic Alliance in late October.

Concurrently, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited Iceland for the Nordic Council summit held in Reykjavik from October 27 to October 31. During a press conference, Heimildin journalist Aðalsteinn Kjartansson informed President Zelensky about Iceland's continued exports to Russia by way of Belarusian firms. The practice effectively diminishes the effects of targeted sanctions against Russia. The Ukrainian president claimed he was not aware of the actions, saying he would continue the discussion with Bjarni.

E.COLI INFECTIONS

Politics aren't the only thing making headlines. On October 22, a cluster of e.coli infections broke out in a Vesturbær neighbourhood preschool. As of October 31, a total of 45 of the school's 120 preschool-aged children have been infected, RÚV reported. Symptoms of an E.coli infection include diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach pains and fever.

In an interview with the national broadcaster, chief epidemiologist Guðrún Aspelund said that she had never seen an infection of this scale in Iceland before. Two cases of e.coli outbreaks were recorded in 2019 and 2007, but neither as widespread.

The source of the infection is currently being identified, although food is the likeliest culprit given the illness' primary transmission routes. The playschool in question remains closed.

TEACHERS ON STRIKE, DOCTORS TO FOLLOW

On the morning of October 29, a nationwide teachers' strike began, affecting nine schools across the country. The work stoppage followed unsuccessful negotiations between teachers and municipalities. In conversation with news outlet Vísir, Association for Primary School Teachers chairperson Mjöll Matthíasdóttir called for increasing primary school teachers' base pay up to one million ISK. According to Mjöll, the current base salary for a teaching position is approximately 700,000 ISK. The strike affects one secondary school, three primary schools, four pre-schools and one music school. If negotiations won't be reached, more teachers will follow.

Medical doctors are also preparing their rounds of work stoppages. On October 28, the Icelandic Medical Association held a ballot for its members, voting on a potential strike. In conversation with RÚV, the association's chairperson Steinunn Þórðardóttir stated that strikes begin on November 18, if agreed upon.

"The actions are temporary, every other week throughout December and not at every workplace simultaneously," she said. "If negotiations will not be reached in December, daily strikes will continue in January." ■



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Word On
The Street

So, How About That Iceland Airwaves?

The Grapevine asks the tough questions

WORDS Ish Sveinsson Houle, Sölvi, Daniela, Freyr & Benoit
IMAGES Joana Fontinha

FREYR, 38

What are your thoughts on Iceland Airwaves?

Well, I haven't been to Airwaves in like, 10 years, because it's way too crowded, and the lines are, also like the lines are way too long, so last year, I got a VIP ticket to see one concert, at the Reykjavik Art Museum, and the queue was all the way to like Bæjarins Beztu, like these people are not getting in. Terrible.

What did you go see?

Um, I don't even remember, I was just there supporting my friends.

SÖLVI, 52

What are your thoughts on Iceland Airwaves?

I love it. It brings a really good vibe to the city, and through the years it's uplifting to the Icelandic bands and to get all the up-and-coming bands from all over. And for the stores and cafes and restaurants downtown it has been a very big boost. So, for us, it's very good.

Are you planning on going this year?

Yeah. And also, you know, we have always had a lot of the participants in Iceland Airwaves, they come here for breakfast, and also the foreign media come and sit here, sometimes all day on the same table. It's quite good.

So you saw Airwaves when it was first starting?

Yeah, yeah. I was at the first Airwaves, in the airport area.

And how do you feel about how it has evolved?

It has had its ups and downs, it was very hard a few years ago, some strange directions, but I think it's coming back to basics now. To be a little bit more in the smaller places, I think that's the right way. But I think it's very important to bring the foreign bands as well, and the foreign media, otherwise it's just some Icelandic festival.

DANIELA, 32

What do you think about the Airwaves festival?

Yeah, I think it is a necessary part of Icelandic culture.

Do you plan on going?

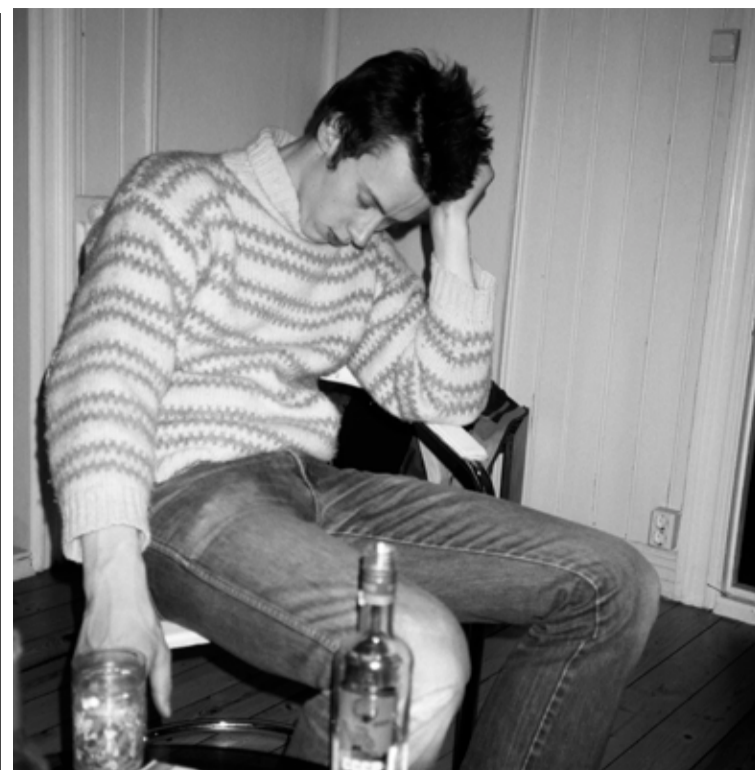
Yeah, of course absolutely, but I didn't check the schedule yet so I don't really know what's on the plan.

Have you been before?

Yeah, usually the off-venues though. They're free.

Anything else you think about it?

Yeah, I knew about this [festival] even before I lived in Iceland, because there are a lot of YouTube videos from the concerts, so I knew some Icelandic musicians before I moved here. So yeah, I really love any cultural events. ■



Word Of
The Issue

In Good Conscience

The Grapevine's guide to sounding Icelandic, one word at a time

WORDS Ish Sveinsson Houle
IMAGE The Reykjavik Grapevine Archives

portmanteau is coming from, you need to know that *djamm* is a party. There are a few different words in Icelandic for a few different kinds of partying. *Djamm* does not apply to a tame dinner party with friends, this is for going out downtown; maybe clubbing, maybe drinking, definitely having a raucous time.

When you combine all we've learned thus far, you can see that *djammviskubit* is the regret you get from partying, particularly after drinking. It's an unspecified regret, so your possibilities are endless. If you've woken up in the morning with a raging headache and grasping a half-eaten wrap from *Pítubarinn*, really wishing you hadn't said yes to all those Fernet shots or tried cutting the line at *Kaffibarinn* (and getting caught), you might already be familiar with *djammviskubit*.

So, what have we learned here? Five new Icelandic words, for starters – not too shabby! But also, you've learned something to use at your own risk. Yeah, it's Airwaves. We're obviously not endorsing you doing anything actually regrettable – don't be an asshole, keep our city happy and safe. But hey, if you wake up and have regrets about spinning the wheel at English Pub or somehow ending up at Radar, then feel free to tell your friends you can't make it out of the house today – you're working through a bout of *djammviskubit*. ■

As we dive headfirst into this Airwaves season (happy 25th, you guys), I've decided to share a word that I hope you don't have to end up using. Buuuuuuuuuuuu you might have to. I'm talking about *djammviskubit*.

Let's break it down. This word is a fun little portmanteau and in order to understand it, we have to start with the word *samviskubit*. *Samviskubit* is the Icelandic noun for guilt or regret. And because the Icelandic language just loves a compound word, this word is a compound of *samviska* and *bit*. *Samviska* is the word for conscience, and *bit* is a bite, sharpness, or edge. *Samviska* + *bit* leads you to a sharp bite in your conscience, more commonly known as a guilty conscience.

Which brings us back to our Word of The Issue. To see where the

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On The Fringes

Reaching New Heights And Feeling Boulder

Unleash your inner Spider-Monkey at Klifurhúsið

WORDS Catherine Magnúsdóttir
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

After living in Copenhagen for six years, and witnessing the evolution of the sport and the emergence of more and more commercial gyms outfitted with climbing walls, Benjamin eventually moved to Iceland where things are still comparatively club-based. Though, according to Benjamin, the sport is gaining increasingly in popularity.

Asked about the appeal and the sensation of scaling a wall, Benjamin describes both the individual focus involved and the communal aspect of the practice.

“I don’t think about anything else. I can cut loose on all the daily problems and really focus on just climbing,” he says. “And it’s a really nice community too. You might pursue climbing for yourself but you are always surrounded by friends or people from all walks of life – the atmosphere is really nice.”

“Then there’s the problem solving aspect, which I like a lot because the idea is so applicable to life,” he continues. “There is a problem and there is always a way to somehow manage it. That’s the beauty of climbing. Especially in bouldering. There is always a problem, you try to figure it out and might have to try a new or different solution – but there always is one.”

There are, of course, different types of climbing, such as bouldering, where it’s just you and the wall and some chalk; rope climbing, which includes a harness, carabiners, quickdraws (a type of extender) and a belay device to control the rope;

lead climbing, which involves moving along set anchors on a higher wall and a partner (aka belayer) on the ground; and multi-pitch climbing, which requires more than one rope length.

Then there are the outdoor iterations of these. Outdoor bouldering, for example, necessitates bringing along a crash pad (which still only covers a certain amount of ground) and to double check the environment.

“You have to see how the landings are,” Benjamin tells me. “You have to check the top outs (angle changes), you have to see how the gripping holes are and where they are, put in some chalk to know where they are and things like that. There are some areas around here and all around Iceland that are also in guide books.” An encouraging prospect for those of us who have been eyeing the bold rocky landscape Iceland has to offer.

Benjamin emphasises how welcoming the climbing halls apparently are, promising a place for people from all over the world, students, families (particularly parents that got roped in by their kids) and pretty much anyone else to hang (literally) out.

“Climbing is sort of everything for me,” he says. “I travel for climbing, it keeps me going, it’s pretty much a lifestyle choice I would say.” If it’s a lifestyle you’re interested in adopting, you can be certain it’ll take you to new heights. ■

There is something sort of primal about looking up at a big rock, or cliffside, or a tree and thinking to yourself “I could climb that.” That’s when impulse control typically kicks in. I myself have failed often enough to keep that impulse in check and have thus sought out the safer and more socially acceptable variant of distancing my inner chimp from imaginary predators. In my ongoing chase to check out and champion the most cheerful of challenges against chagrin I caught up with Benjamin Mokry, teacher, route setter and CEO of the climbing hall Klifurhúsið.

“I have been climbing for 22 years now,” Benjamin says. “I used to play football back home in Germany but then had knee surgery. My Mom gave me a book by mountaineer Joe Simpson and from then on I couldn’t think of anything else. Back then, the internet was just starting so it was a bit hard to find information, but there were the Alpine clubs of course, they have walls, so my wife and I took a class together and I was hooked.”



„Aaaaaah... allir þessir gítarar“



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In This Economy!?

The Free Airwaves Experience

The Grapevine's ongoing guide to free stuff

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGE The Reykjavik Grapevine Archives

As should be abundantly clear from all of the Iceland Airwaves coverage sprinkled generously through this issue of the magazine, we are nuts for the annual music festival. It's an absolute treat every year to slide on our wristbands and venture out into the night to explore, experience and generally have our minds (and occasionally our eardrums) blown by the deluge of music flowing through Reykjavik.

Buuuut... we also love free stuff. So our more frugal sides go absolutely nuts when the official Airwaves Off-Venue schedule is released. Boy oh boy are there some great bands playing the off-venue circuit this year. After studying the schedule, considering conflicting priorities, travel times, potential vibes and the potential for seeing various artists on the main Airwaves stages, we've compiled this guide to the off-venue events we'll be checking out.

"HAVE YOU BEEN EXCITED?" ICELAND AIRWAVES PHOTOGRAPHY 2014 - 2023
November 5 - 19:00
Harpa

Woah, woah, woah. Airwaves is running November 7 to 9 - what's this madness with events happening two full days before that? If you're looking to start the Airwaves party early with a nostalgic stroll down memory lane, this exhibition of Marcus Getta's photos will be just the ticket. Marcus is showcasing 80 snaps spanning 2014 to 2023. Go see how many of the gigs you were at. Maybe you'll even spot yourself in a crowd shot.

12 TÓNAR OFF-VENUE

November 6 - Various Times
Skólavörðustígur 15

As if you need an excuse to stop by 12 Tónar during Airwaves (or any other time of year, for that matter), but MSEA and Spacestation will fill the beloved record store with music on the eve of the festival. They're Grapevine favourites, with MSEA taking home the You Should Have Heard This award at our 2024 music awards for her album *Our Daily Apocalypse Walk*. And Spacestation you can read more about on page 32 of this issue. Oh, and both acts played our off-off-venue in 2023, so we're hungry for seconds. Go see MSEA at 18:15 and Spacestation at 21:15.

TÓNABÍÓ OFF-VENUE
November 7 - 15:00-18:00
Skiptólf 33

At first we were like "oh, an off-venue with 22 beers on tap? Yes please!" But then we saw the killer scheduling at this hot new venue in a former bingo hall and we're even more excited to take a stroll over to Skiptólf. Thursday's lineup will dazzle with Ólöf Rún, Teitur Magnússon and Celebs bringing the energy. But will Celebs bring the inflatables? Time will tell.

GRAPEWAVES OFF-VENUE
November 8+9 - 14:00-18:00
Lækjartorg

What's this? The Grapevine's very own off-venue concert series in collaboration with the good folks at Iceland Music? How marvel! While we took the off-off-venue approach last year (ahem... zero Airwaves affiliation), we're going legit and hosting an off-venue in the wildest venue of the festival: that old-timey tower smack dab in the middle of Lækjartorg. Be honest, you've spent countless seconds waiting for the bus and pondering whether a five-piece rock band could fit in that

compact octagonal space, drum kit and all. Now's your chance to find out. The good times go down daily from 14:00.

LUCKY RECORDS
OFF-VENUE
November 9 - 13:30 - 19:00
Rauðarárstígur 10

We know it's not good business to direct people away from our own off-venue, but if you're a sucker for Scots, you're going to want to check out the Meet The Neighbours showcase at Lucky Records. Guitars! Shoe-gazey vibes! Fun accents! Hop on a Hopp to check it out between Grapewaves sets.

SMEKKLEYSA OFF-VENUE
November 10 - 17:00-20:00
Hverfisgata 32

The Faroe Islands meets Iceland in this chilled out off-venue that will be the perfect post-party wind-down. Dania O. Tausen's velvety vocals and quirky instrumentals, Lúpina's distinctive blend of Scandi-pop and electronica, and the undieable effervescence of Supersport! will pair beautifully with that Treo tablet and copious water you may be needing after a Saturday night bouncing between Airwaves venues. There will be coffee. ■

Seeing as our focus is on finding free stuff to see, do and experience in Reykjavik, we've only considered the off-venue events categorised as "no wristband needed" for this article. But there's a whole lot more happening on the fringes of Iceland Airwaves. Find the full Off-Venue schedule at IcelandAirwaves.is/Special.

Do you have a recommendation for something free to do in Reykjavik? Let us know at grapevine@grapevine.is



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On top of it all, Arnór Dan is preparing a return to stage

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

Somewhere between navigating the global pandemic, becoming a father and riding his personal rollercoaster, Arnór Dan Arnarson – the frontman of energetic prog-rock band Agent Fresco – vanished from the music scene. Seeking to reset and reinvent himself, he began practising yoga and breathwork, gradually turning that into his primary source of income while music faded into the background.

“A lot of people have asked me where the hell have I been and what’s been going on,” he says when we chat a few weeks before his first concert in a really long time. “I haven’t been on stage for four years. The gig at Iceland Airwaves is sort of my return to the stage.”

Arnór Dan, 39, musician

I’m a singer and musician. I worked a lot with the music business back in 2020 right before Covid. When the pandemic hit, I was becoming a dad and, at that moment, I just felt so disconnected from everything. I needed to unplug and reset.

Now, I’m in a great position where I’m doing what I’m meant to be doing, I think. I’m a juggler and I know many people connect with that – I’m

not a nine-to-five kind of guy. I can do it, I can do it intensely, but I like having a lot of things going on and being a part of many communities. Man, my LinkedIn is ridiculous right now. I’m an educated life coach, a Yin Yoga teacher, a Reiki healer and a 9D breathwork facilitator. I help people go through breathwork journeys and give them the tools to get in touch with their own selves, regulate their emotions and thrive as themselves in modern society.

I combine that in a hybrid kind of way. I do some shifts as a counselor for a company called Klettabær, for instance. We work with people who need support to live as normal a life as possible, whether short or long-term. I also do group sessions focused on breathwork and private sessions for people who want to combine breathwork with coaching. You know, whatever I needed to learn when I crashed back in 2020 – I’m just using that in my work.

LESSONS LIVED

I’ve always been a very open and emotional kind of guy, so I guess the gift of that is that people feel like they’re allowed to be who they are around me. I feel good being in my own body and with my own emotions, and I want to help people if I sense there’s some kind of struggle going on. After Covid and some personal struggles, I realised that I’m not as connected as I thought I was.

What I mean is that I wasn’t really in line with my values. Who am I? What do I want to do? What are my talents and gifts? Where am I? I’ve been trying to force things I thought were good for me instead of allowing things to evolve.

Everything I’m doing today has helped me a lot at some point in my life. That’s why it’s so easy for me. It’s such a nice state of flow, it’s just natural.

SCHEDULING SHENANIGANS

The mother of my child and I separated a year ago, so we have alternating weeks with our daughter, which took a lot of time to accept, embrace and adapt to – now I’m just really trying to figure it out. How do I make things work? For me, it’s just the difference between the weeks of me being a dad with my girl and being here with my other girl, Kíra [Arnór’s dog]. It’s a lot of fun, but it’s intense. It’s an emotional ride to schedule everything. Your kid could be sick for maybe three days and then you have to rearrange everything, such as private sessions at my home, the office, or the studio. The last year has been a lesson in just fucking allowing things to be as they are and just going with the waves.

Music used to be my main source of income six or seven years ago, until

the Sony job started [Arnór used to be the A&R and business manager for Sony Music Iceland before the branch closed down]. Now it feels like we’re going back again into music being hopefully a bigger income. There are so many projects; the band will be releasing our third album, which was put on hold in 2020. It’s been a long time, but time flies when you have a baby and start completely resetting everything in your own life.

My favourite thing about what I do is the connection, the community, the heart growing bigger every time. I know I’m doing the right thing and it’s supporting me in everything I do, whether in my personal life or music. My least favourite is, of course, scheduling. I’m still getting used to it. Also, financial stability gets a little bit rocky. I’m not employed 100% anywhere, so finding projects is my own responsibility. But at the same time, I wouldn’t change it for anything. This is where I thrive, it’s just a part of the game! Most of the time, when I felt a little bit stressed about income, I could flip it over. It’s a great way to get focused or more disciplined.

CONNECTING WITH YOUR INNER SELF

I had to unplug music for a while to realise how fucking important it was.

I am treating the performance at

Fríkirkjan at Iceland Airwaves as a celebration of what has helped me. It’s going to be a combination of honouring the past, playing some of that music, and playing some of the new stuff as well. It’s a celebration of getting back on stage and embracing the gifts I’ve received in the form of collaborations, and being able to perform, sing and write music.

I’ve come to realise that you need to take care of yourself. Everything is going to be alright. Everything will be in its own time, but trying to create, love and connect in a state of stress – when a nervous system is just running on fumes, thinking you need to do and do and do – won’t work. Be with your feelings. Be with sadness. Learn to slow the fuck down. Whatever gets you there – whether that’s meditation, walking, connecting with people, breathwork, or alternative medicine – whatever you need to do to connect to yourself so you can slow down, figure out who you really are, what your values are, and where you’re abandoning yourself. The rest will follow. ■

Catch Arnór Dan at Fríkirkjan on Nov. 8. He hits the stage at 19:50 as part of the Iceland Airwaves official programme.

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2024 Election

The Seven Year Itch & The

As Iceland prepares to vote, the ineffectiveness of the outgoing government is laid bare

WORDS Elias Þórsson
IMAGES The Reykjavik Grapevine Archives

ting at just 20%. For the Independence Party, such dismal polling data was nightmarish, as the great old party would, in better times, consistently claim 40% of the vote. They were now polling at just under 14%.

The day after Bjarni's announcement, the public got a glimpse into the dysfunctional marriage that the government had become. In an extraordinary two-hour live debate on national broadcaster RÚV that featured the heads of all the parties represented in parliament, the hatred between Bjarni and Left-Green counterpart Svandís Svavarsdóttir was on full display, while Progressive Party Leader Sigurður Ingi Jónasson seemed determined to show voters that his party's middling opinionlessness would make them an ideal partner for any takers.

THE "STABILITY" GOVERNMENT

It had come as a surprise to many when the Left-Greens decided in 2017 to join hands with their arch-enemy the Independence Party. The former's voters wanted the state to create a more equal society, while the latter's believed they were voting for private wealth creation and a relatively hands-off government. In the end, nobody would be satisfied. But the line that was sold to voters in 2017 was that stability was the most important issue. Having gone through five elections in 10 years – with the latest being held just a year prior – many felt this odd couple pairing had a point. Vindication came when the coalition had their mandate renewed in the 2021 elections.

"This government is very unusual as it was formed across the left-right spectrum, which is rare both here

and abroad," says political scientist Ólafur Harðarsson. "You can compare that to, say, the current coalition government in Denmark, where you have two moderate right-wing parties along with the social democrats governing across the middle."

A Professor Emeritus of political science at the University of Iceland, Ólafur has become a fixture of political analysis and election night coverage in Iceland. He's calm; a straight shooter who wears shorts year round, whether he's lounging in his garage smoking his pipe, or on live television dissecting the latest political meltdown.

The day after Bjarni's announcement, the public got a glimpse into the dysfunctional marriage that the government had become.

He describes the outgoing government as one that was marked by significant internal disagreements in recent years. "During this latter term, it will be remembered for its disagreements and that it ultimately broke apart," he says.

PANDEMIC POLITICS

Despite the ideological differences at play, the coalition functioned well in its early years, partly due to Iceland's strong economic position, which allowed for investment in public infrastructure. Katrín Jakobsdóttir was selected to lead the government as prime minister. Despite garnering just 17% of the vote, she was the most popular pick across party

lines. During the 2021 elections, the government even managed the remarkable feat of bucking a trend that started with the financial crash government of 2007.

"All governments since after 2007 have seen their support collapse during their term and none have managed to renew their majority," explains Ólafur. "That is, except for the 2017-2021 government."

According to Ólafur, during its first couple of years the government showed all the hallmark signs of being another victim of a vindictive Icelandic electorate that seeks to

time, exacerbating internal frictions to the point of boiling over when, on April 5, 2024, Katrín announced she would step down as prime minister to launch her ultimately failed presidential campaign.

"While Katrín was in government, she managed to hold them together and resolve many very difficult disputes, but many supporters and MPs from both the Left-Green Movement and the Independence Party became increasingly irritated by the coalition and by the need to make all sorts of compromises," says Ólafur. "After Bjarni became prime minister, he seemed much less committed to keeping the government together. The party plummeted in the polls and his main solution was to call for elections."

Icelanders have become accustomed to their governments not lasting a full four-year term and as we head to the polls once again, society seems to be dealing with a backlog of major issues that the outgoing coalition government, riddled as it was with internal disharmony, failed to tackle.

NO VISION, MO MONEY

If you want to become fluent in Icelandic watercooler talk, you need to familiarise yourself with a couple key topics: the weather, Strákarnir okkar, Tenerife and inflation. Since 2000, the country has seen a cumulative inflation rate of approximately 219%. Compare that to Denmark's 53% and the issue becomes even more apparent. Much of the West saw a post-pandemic surge in inflation, but while other nations have taken steps to rein theirs in, Iceland's government has been unable to tame the beast. Inflation currently sits at 5.4%, compared to the U.S.' 2.4%.

On November 30, Icelanders will head to the polls 10 months ahead of schedule. The snap election became an inevitability on October 13 when Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson announced he was disbanding the coalition government of his Independence Party (Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn), the Left-Green Movement (Vinstri græn) and the Progressive Party (Framsóknarflokkurinn) that had been in power since 2017. While the government's collapse was sudden, it was hardly surprising. The coalition parties had been relentlessly hammered in the polls since the summer, with the combined approval ratings of the trio sit-



Coalition Of Contrasts

In addition to soaring cost of goods and services, rampant inflation has resulted in the central bank keeping its key interest rate at 9%, making borrowing prohibitively expensive.

“Certain things during the past seven years have been to our benefit,” says Íslandsbanki chief economist Jón Bjarki Bentsson. “Productivity has increased, in regards to purchasing power, households have higher income and unemployment is low – things like that are good. But we remain mired in the all too familiar environment of high inflation and high interest rates.”

Jón Bjarki claims that in 2017, the government came into power in a period that was marked by relative stability with low inflation and moderate interest rates. However, the ideological divide that the government trumpeted as a great approach to stability meant that when it came to key decisions, it was hard to form a coherent strategy that the parties could agree on, which ironically caused issues with maintaining economic stability.

“We see differing policies on, for instance, energy issues and the resulting consequences, with a lack of clear strategic direction, which is also true for this inflationary period,” Jón Bjarki explains. “On the one hand, there are those against raising taxes, who advocate for keeping taxes low, and on the other, there are those strongly opposed to cutting public services, which forms the basis of the political debate. As a result, neither increasing tax revenues nor better controlling expenses to cool the economy was feasible. Because of these disagreements, the government’s capacity to take decisive action on either front was limited.”

That lack of a clear direction has seeped into all aspects of Icelandic life in recent years, presenting not insignificant challenges to the business community.

“During this last term, it has been hard to figure out whether this government is coming or going and that is very bad for companies and the public,” says Iceland Chamber of Commerce General Counsel María Guðjónsdóttir. “You’d sometimes see two ministers talking about an issue from two completely different angles. One would be arguing for opening up for foreign investments, while the other would be talking about limiting them. So there was a definite lack of vision, which is vital for businesses.”

She points out that this lack of vision has created harmful uncertainty, negatively impacting wealth creation and business operations across the country.

“To some extent, the government needs to have the courage to make decisions that can be relied on for the long term. It is incredibly difficult when they are introducing bills in the fall that involve perhaps significant tax increases – major changes to the business environment – which are then supposed to take effect on January 1,” María says. “All companies have long since planned ahead. You can see this now with the tourism industry – suddenly they are changing the accommodation tax on trips that have already been sold for next year.”

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT FOREIGNERS

One of the more interesting aspects of Icelandic politics compared to neighbouring states has been the

absence of large populist, anti-immigration parties. A contributing factor to this has been the relatively low number of foreigners living in Iceland (or the lack of attention paid to the number of immigrants living here) – but this has rapidly changed in recent years.

“What do all the Nordics have in common? It’s visual. All our flags have crosses,” outgoing PM Bjarni Benediktsson said in a recent podcast, where he discussed, among other things, the problems that come with mixing “different cultures.” With his Independence Party staring down the barrel of its worst election result in party history while facing attacks from the left and right, Bjarni has been flirting with a more nationalistic approach and advocating for curtailing the number of asylum seekers permitted to seek international protection here.

Emerging as one of the frontrunners for the upcoming elections is the Centre Party (Miðflokkurinn). It was founded in 2017 by former prime minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson after his scandalous departure as leader of the Progressive Party. Sigmundur’s government famously crumbled in 2016 after his business dealings were laid bare in the Panama Papers. The leak exposed offshore accounts tied to his family, which he allegedly did not disclose, stirring public outrage and mass protest, and forcing him to step down. His Centre Party party holds conservative, nationalistic values, particularly around issues of immigration and national sovereignty.

“The Centre Party has been very vocal about the need to reduce the number of asylum seekers and tighten regulations – and some-

times members of the Centre Party talk as though they aren’t only referring to asylum seekers but to foreigners in general,” says Ólafur. “And then, if you start talking about protecting the Icelandic language and culture, framing a multicultural society as a threat to our culture, then you’re essentially on the same ground as nationalist-populist parties we’ve seen come to prominence in the Nordic countries.”

Despite this being arguably the first election in Icelandic history in which immigration has featured close to the top of the agenda, Ólafur claims that the research increasingly shows that the Icelandic electorate has become less worried about foreigners over the past decades. It may be that post-election analysis will paint a different picture, but there is no denying the massive economic contribution of that demographic.

“Despite decreasing birth rates, we have a growing population, which is vital for us as a society because we can’t sustain ourselves otherwise,” says María. “We want to attract people who want to come and live here. We need this. But the discussion is unfortunately very shallow instead of addressing how we accommodate people. For instance, immigrants are much more likely to work in jobs that don’t match their education and skills.”

In just over a decade, Iceland’s immigrant population has doubled, growing from about 8% in 2012 to nearly 20% in 2023. This influx has been vital for sustaining Iceland’s labour force, contributing significantly to wealth creation.

However, the rapid pace of immigration has come with challenges in integration. Many immigrants face

barriers in the labour market, such as underemployment or working in jobs that are not reflective of their education and experience. Iceland’s high cost of living and the language barrier add to these challenges, particularly for those in lower-income roles or those not conversant in Icelandic. Forming a coherent policy that balances social cohesion, freedom and economic prosperity will be paramount for the next government.

“From an economic point of view, the fast population increase is the flip side of the growth we’ve experienced. Without immigration, we couldn’t keep up the wealth creation we’ve become accustomed to, or bring in the foreign currency that pays for our holidays abroad and consumer imports,” says Jón Bjarki. “But in a limited sense you can say that this development has started to work against itself because the population increase has been so rapid. In a simplistic way you could say that some people coming here to work in construction are just building roofs over their own heads.”

NO ROOM AT THE INN

Bolstered by high inflation, a booming tourism industry and demand vastly outstripping supply, housing prices in Iceland have risen sharply over the past decade. Increases have exceeded 140% since 2013, making Iceland one of the most expensive housing markets in Europe. Consequently, the issue of housing affordability is expected to be a central topic on Nov. 30, with various parties proposing policies to increase housing supply, stabilise rental prices and address inflation. “The problem doesn’t just lie with the national government, we also need to look at the municipali-



ties,” says Jón Bjarki. “But what is interesting is that while everyone acknowledges we have a serious problem for which there aren’t any simple solutions, nobody seems to be willing to step up and take ownership. This is such a massive issue that we need to give it priority so we don’t end up with housing shortages becoming a permanent problem.”

CRIME AND WELFARE

The most horrifying change to Icelandic society we’ve seen during the tenure of the coalition government is the increase in murder and violent crimes. Already this year, Iceland has experienced eight murders – the highest ever occurrence in the nation’s history. From 2002 to 2022 the rate per 100,000 people averaged to 0.68 annually, but as of 2024 it’s up to 2.1.

“Typically when people start to experience that crime is increasing it isn’t reflected in the data, but that doesn’t seem to be the case now,” explains University of Iceland criminologist Margrét Valdimarsdóttir. “It is clear that there has been an increase in violent crimes in the past seven years.”

Margrét claims that Iceland, despite having relatively low income inequality compared to global standards, is experiencing an increase in

social divisions. She mentions that disparities are emerging in access to critical services like healthcare and education. These inequalities can lead to social tension and ultimately contribute to a higher prevalence of violence, as economic

for the rise in violent crimes solely on the outgoing government, but it can be argued that its inner strife has, as with so many other key issues, prevented it from forming an effective strategy to tackle the problem.

What comes out of the ballot box will decide how society approaches the future of the housing market, the welfare system, energy production and immigration.

and social division tends to foster resentment and reduce empathy among people.

“It’s been shown that social and economic inequality is the factor most strongly linked to serious violent crimes,” says Margrét. “I think Iceland has seen these inequalities increase, but you won’t notice them by just looking at income inequality. There is an increase in social inequality, with different social classes, for example, having different access to the healthcare and education systems.”

It would be unfair to place the blame

“What I would counsel the next government is if they want to prevent this development, then they need to take better care of our healthcare system, especially when it comes to mental healthcare, and our education system”, says Margrét. “I’d also encourage them to take a nuanced, evidence-based approach to tackling crime.”

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

At the time of publication, polls are indicating that the Left-Greens, who just last spring occupied the prime minister’s seat, will vanish entirely

from parliament while the Independence Party’s once dominating force will dwindle to a fourth-place showing.

Currently, the Social Democratic Alliance (Samfylkingin), under the leadership of their new leader Kristrún Frostadóttir, is poised to emerge as the big winners, with 22% of the vote going their way were elections to be held today. They’re followed by Liberal Reform Party (Vidreisn) and the Centre Party with 15% each, and the Independence Party with 14%. Given their well-funded and highly organised campaign machines, it is likely that the Independence and Progressive parties will finish the race stronger than current polls are indicating.

One of the more notable things to watch as the elections play out will be the situation on the left. As things currently stand, neither the Left-Greens, the Socialist Party (Sózialistaflokkurinn) nor the Pirate Party (Píratar) would pass the 5% threshold to be allocated a seat in parliament. This would effectively render 15% of votes dead on arrival, which could – or *should* – prompt a fresh debate about overhauling the electoral system. This would also mean that, for the first time in history, there wouldn’t be a “socialist” party in parliament.

There are big issues and bigger challenges facing Iceland in a year that has been marked by high tensions. What comes out of the ballot box will decide how society approaches the future of the housing market, the welfare system, energy production and immigration. Teachers across the nation are currently on strike and doctors are debating whether they should follow their lead. Whoever emerges victorious on November 30 will have to act fast in a difficult climate to tackle large issues and find the right partners to work with.

Ólafur believes that the most likely outcome, based on current polls, will be a centre left government featuring the Social Democrats and the Liberal Reform Party, with at least a third smaller partner rounding things out. No matter how the votes land, there is a general sense on both the left and the right that whatever comes next needs to be a government that can agree on key issues other than that Covid-19 is a real bummer.

“It would probably be good for the next government to be made up of parties that generally agree on major issues,” Ólafur concludes with a smile. ■

Top Events



SKÁLMOELD – ALLT
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1 - SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 3
6.990 - 15.990 ISK
HARPA, ELDBORG

Iceland's favourite viking-themed metal band is set to make the ultimate offering – everything. Having recently tempted the gods at their Arctic Henge performance in Northeast Iceland, Skálmöld have showcased time again their knack for unconventional concerts. Now, they'll convene at Harpa to perform their complete discography at their upcoming concert series. That's six albums over three nights. Onstage, Skálmöld is joined by the chamber choir Hymnodia as the band plays every song in its original version. Both hardcore and lightweight Skálmöld fans will not want to miss this Herculean feat – and the opportunity to encounter Norse deities. JB



GRAPEWAVES
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8 - SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9
FREE
LÆKJARTORG

Have you ever wanted to see a punk band getting crammed into a tiny tower while onlookers stand around like they're at the zoo? Do you miss the vibrancy of the old and packed impromptu off-venue scene surrounding Iceland Airwaves? Sounds like you want to check out Grapewaves, a two-day concert series happening in the daytime. In collaboration with Iceland Music, the Reykjavík Grapevine proudly presents this year's Grapewaves. Anchored in the old concession stand on Lækjartorg – yes, the one that looks like it was airlifted out of the Soviet Union – eight artists will perform for guests strolling through the historic square. JB



SHREK RAVE
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15 & SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16
4.900 ISK
GAMLA BÍÓ

When the Grapevine staff started receiving targeted ads featuring people dressed up as Shrek characters at a rave, it made us take a long, hard look at our online footprint. Having taken the world by storm, the event now graces Reykjavík. This is your chance to layer up (like an onion) and showcase your costume-building skills. The best Shrek-inspired costume gets a prize, hopefully slightly grander than a free glass of vodka and green food colouring. Apparently, the first night was so popular it sold out, necessitating an extra date – so maybe don't sleep on this one. For more information and tickets, visit shrekraiveofficial.com. JB

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Exhibition

A Conversation About Iceland

Einar Örn Benediktsson and Erin Boggs bring first impressions to life

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

They say it doesn't hurt to ask. In the case of American poet Erin Boggs, reaching out to Einar Örn Benediktsson to inquire about opportunities to see his art while on her first visit to Iceland proved particularly painless. In fact, it spawned a two-year collaboration that has now flourished into a handsome book showcasing the pair's poetry and art, and an exhibition at Listamenn Gallery opening November 2.

A Journey of Iceland couples Erin's poems – all inspired by that first experience of Iceland and the handful of trips she has made across the Atlantic since – and the prolific Icelandic musician and fine artist's charcoal drawings, with the latter drawing inspiration from the former. At Listamenn, the poems and drawings will be displayed alongside one another, augmented by a soundtrack by Kaktus Einarsson, to guide visitors through Erin's journey of experiencing and coming to understand Iceland.

FROM THE BEGINNING

"Damon Albarn was performing at Harpa," Erin recalls, explaining the catalyst for her journey to Iceland in 2022. "I had always wanted to come to Iceland and I've known [Einar's] artwork since the 80s with The Sugarcubes, so I reached out to ask if he

was exhibiting his art anywhere."

"That was my first experience of Iceland," she continues. "I was just really inspired by all of this and began writing. I reached out again and asked him if he wanted to collaborate."

Einar's response was in the affirmative and Erin soon sent her collection of poems for Einar to interpret through abstract shapes in varying shades of charcoal. The resulting book, published in October, 2024, is a bilingual (with a simple flip top to bottom) collection of memories and self-reflections of someone in the midst of a personal journey to Iceland; a window into Erin's own experience of discovery.

FINDING THE FLOW

The poems and artwork follow a flow from dark to light, tracing Erin's impressions of Iceland as a still mysterious place, through to reflections on the weather, adoration of the landscape and, finally, an understanding of the warmth of Icelanders and their culture.

"What Erin wrote about is an observation of what Iceland did to her," Einar says. "And then my art is inflicted by what I got out of her poems. But the difference is that I'm a local and she's an alien, and so sometimes I'm commenting on her experiences as an alien, not just illustrating each poem."

It's no secret that Icelanders revel in praise about the exceptionalism of their nature and cultural output. So how have Icelanders received Erin's collection of poems about various

aspects of their country and culture? "They didn't puke or barf when they read the poems," Einar says, delivering a glowing endorsement clearly meant to razz the poet with whom he's developed a playfully antagonistic brother-sister relationship over their two years of partnership. "They might puke or barf when they see my drawings."

BRINGING THE BOOK TO LIFE

Distilling the product of their partnership – 113 pages of poetry and art – into the compact confines of Listamenn Gallery was an exercise in editing. Much like having to pick and choose choice excerpts from an hour-long conversation to be distilled into a brief article, Erin and Einar were tasked with distilling their joint creation down to the most impactful elements; just the right sound bites to effectively get the message and emotion across.

"There are 50 separate pieces in the book, in the total conversation," Erin says in explaining what the public can expect from the exhibition. "We're not going to be able to fit every piece [in the gallery space], so we have to decide what the conversation is going to be."

Whether in its full glory in print or slightly abridged at Listamenn gallery, this conversation about Iceland is one worth listening in on for locals and aliens alike. ■

A Journey of Iceland is showing at Listamenn Gallery (Skúlagata 32) November 2 - 17. Erin and Einar's book is available at Listamenn and Smekkleysa.





Environment

Whaling Is Back On The Table

The government collapse was a gift for the pro-whaling Independence Party

WORDS Micah Garen
IMAGES The Reykjavik Grapevine Archives

interim government left an opening for Independence Party MP and fill-in Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson. After taking over the Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries in what should have been a caretaker role, Bjarni quickly appointed Jón Gunnarsson, a staunch pro-whaler from the Independence Party, as a special representative to the ministry. Bjarni then announced that an application for a whaling permit had landed on his desk.

“In my opinion this is clearly an abuse of power and legally questionable,” says Valgerður Árnadóttir, a representative for the anti-whaling movement Hvalavinir. “If the interim government decides to issue a whaling license it most likely violates administrative law. Hvalavinir, and other environmental and animal welfare associations in Iceland will contest the decision, and most likely the Parliamentary Ombudsman will investigate the matter. If he concludes that this breaks the administrative law it can lead to [Bjarni] being pushed to resign.”

Vala points out, though, that the Independence party has pulled this move before. “Einar K. Guðfinnsson, former minister of fisheries, approved a five year whaling permit on his last day in office in 2009, after the government fell because of the Icelandic financial crisis.”

The government is playing coy with the issue. Dúi Jóhannsson, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, declined to comment, saying in writing “there is very little information to provide on this subject due to a recent change in our government.”

When questioned about the appropriateness of issuing a whaling license with elections on the horizon, Bjarni said that, “historically we have seen a similar situation where an application was processed after the

late October. Independence Party MP Bryndís Harðardóttir expressed support for Bjarni’s right to issue a whaling license, saying “as the law says you can hunt whales then I think the minister should give out an allowance to do that.” She also pointed to the supposed sustainability of the practice, saying “environmental issues are so important, that is of course biodiversity...if it’s hunting whales or fish – all are creatures, it is the most important thing that it is sustainable.”

not accept that this government will give out a license two weeks before elections – that is not right to do.” Oddný said she’s hopeful that anti-whaling legislation will be put to a vote should the Social Democrats be invited to form government after November 30.

UNCERTAIN FUTURES

With the election fast approaching, what will a new government mean for the future of whaling in Iceland? Will this bloody chapter in Iceland’s history finally be brought to a close, or will it plod on with a renewed license and continued lack of purpose?

“It’s a desperate move from a party that knows that it won’t be in power for at least four or more years,” says Andrés Ingi Jónsson, a member of parliament for the Pirate Party. Andrés introduced a bill in 2023 to ban whaling, but it has been stuck in parliamentary doldrums with little sign of movement on the horizon.

“We have to call it dishonest the way they are dealing with things,” Andrés continues. “The Independence Party breaks down the government and while they are in a caretaker administration, they are going to use the opportunity to extend whaling for a considerable amount of time. Everyone seems to be in agreement

It’s a desperate move from a party that knows that it won’t be in power for at least four or more years.

coalition ended and before the elections. This time all I can say is that the application will be processed at the ministry and it is not timely to say if it will be accepted or in what manner it will be handled in the ministry, that is up to the process that is ahead of us.”

NO COMMON GROUND

The difference of stances across party lines was clear at the Nordic Council meeting held in Reykjavík in

When reminded that the International Whaling Commission had a catch limit of zero for commercial whaling, Bryndís countered that Iceland, as an “independent country” can decide for itself and whaling won’t be stopped “because someone else feels that we should not do it.”

Social Democratic Alliance MP Oddný G. Harðardóttir is of a different opinion. “My party and I don’t want whale hunting to be allowed. We can

The last weeks of the month brought an unlikely October surprise to Icelandic voters. Thanks to the sudden collapse of the government and a breach of protocol by the Independence Party, whaling – an issue the majority of Icelanders would like to see never resurface – is looming large again.

The inglorious ending of the odd-bedfellowed coalition government and the hasty departure of the Left-Green Movement from the

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that the future of whaling should be decided in parliament – extending whaling shouldn't happen without parliamentary debate. But they are doing it by decree.”

AN INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE

At the Arctic Circle conference in October, Andrés moderated a panel on ecocide and the growing legal movement to hold people who destroy the global ecosystem criminally liable. Noticing that Hvalur CEO Kristján Loftsson was in attendance, Andrés made a point of mentioning whales in his opening remarks, saying that northern lights and whales are extraordinary treasures of Iceland that remind us of how connected we are to nature.

At last year's conference, Kristján confronted a group of Maori leaders who had come to talk about a new initiative gaining attention around the world: giving whales legal personhood. Speaking from the back of the hall, the head of Iceland's sole whaling company challenged Ralph Chami, a former IMF economist who was with the Maori delegation to speak about the economic benefits of protecting whales – what he refers to as a blue-green future. Chami has estimated the ecosystem services of a great whale, like the fin whales Loftsson hunts, at

over \$2 million USD.

Iceland left the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 1992 in protest over the moratorium on commercial whaling, but rejoined in 2002 taking an “exception” to the moratorium. The country began whaling again soon after – a move that was heavily criticised. The U.S. even “certified” Iceland under the Pelly Amendment in 2011 for violating the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wildlife Fauna and Flora – a step short of sanctions.

There is a strong argument that Iceland is violating its international obligations under the IWC and other international agreements.

In May of this year, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) issued a momentous advisory opinion that countries have a legal obligation to do everything they can to mitigate the impacts of climate change on the sea based on the UN Convention for the Law on the Sea (UNCLOS). The advisory opinion requires countries to enhance carbon sinks, which whales are. Any of the 170 member states can now sue over climate obligations, which could open the floodgates to climate litigation.

Australia successfully sued Japan

at the International Court of Justice in 2010 for violating UNCLOS, which put an end to Japan's illegal whaling in the Antarctic. One could argue that both Japan and Iceland are in violation of UNCLOS now.

HIGH STAKES AND BIG UNCERTAINTY

There are indeed signs that the Independence Party's takeover of the fisheries ministry is a last desperate act of a party willing to go down with

as 700 vulnerable fin whales being killed before the end of the decade. Fin whale numbers have been decimated by industrial whaling, with an estimated 90% of the population killed off since the start of commercial whaling 150 years ago. There is very little scientific research on their current population numbers, though one study on populations off the coast of Europe in 2022 found a more than 50% decrease in their numbers in the past eight years.

drew from the interim government. There is the possibility that Bjarni might end its work altogether.

ALL EYES ON THE BALLOT BOX

For now, it seems clear that the future of whaling in Iceland will be closely tied to the Nov. 30 election and the possible passage of the anti-whaling bill in Parliament.

“The anti-whaling bill would need a simple majority in Parliament to pass,” Andrés explains. “We know roughly which parties support the bill on paper, we will have to see how that translates into action. The bill has members from the Pirate Party, the People's Party, Viðreisn and Samfylkingin – but not all those parties have adopted formal anti-whaling policies. The Left-Greens have a formal anti-whaling policy,” Andrés adds, “but are not supporting the bill.”

Taking a stance on whaling in a party's election platform is not just a battle for votes, it's a testament of will. “The next ministers will have to have the political will to reverse a decision on whaling,” Andrés concludes. “If we get a good government, a government that has a proper green outlook, then hopefully it is more likely than not that we will not have whaling next summer.” ■

The stakes are high. A new five year whaling license could mean as many as 700 vulnerable fin whales being killed before the end of the decade.

Hvalur's ships. Four of the party's most ardent pro-whalers are not running for parliament in these elections. Meanwhile, Japan's launch of a new whaling ship this summer suggests the country won't continue importing whale meat from Iceland. That's a massive market loss for Hvalur, which currently sells almost all its whale products to Japan.

The stakes are high. A new five year whaling license could mean as many

Bjarkey Olsen Gunnarsdóttir, a Left-Green MP who served as fisheries minister prior to the government's dissolution in October, convened a committee earlier this year to evaluate whaling in light of Iceland's obligations under international law. The committee was set to deliver its findings by the end of November, but, with the turmoil of the elections, that will almost certainly be delayed. The committee has become an orphan now that the Left-Greens with-

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Representation Matters

WORDS The Reykjavik Grapevine
IMAGE The Reykjavik Grapevine Archives & The Internet

Immigration has been a hot-but-ton issue over the past several months, with interim Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson declaring border security among his top priorities when he stepped into the role over the summer. But what's missing from the conversation are the voices of actual immigrants. The demographics of parliament simply do not reflect the demographics of Icelandic society, where 20% of residents are of foreign origin.

Rather than talking about immigrants, we turned to people of foreign origin running for parliament to learn more about their motivations and what issues are most pressing for Icelandic society

TOMASZ PAWEŁ CHRAPEK
#8 Reykjavik Constituency South for the Social Democratic Alliance

Why are you running for parliament with the Social Democrats?

It's not the first time I'm running for parliament – I was pretty far down the list during the last elections. I've been involved with the Social Democrats since probably 2007 when I was involved with a group of foreigners that were helping to shape the narrative around immigrant issues



Meet The Candidates

Catching up with a few people of foreign origin throwing their hat into the p

within the Social Democrats. Then in 2014 I got into the city council as a deputy councillor.

So I've been involved with the Social Democrats and the social democratic movement as a whole. I believe that this is the way forward.

What are your thoughts on representation in Alþingi?

I'm sending a message just by being there on the list and that was part of my motivation from the beginning. I'm pretty aware of what I'm doing – even my name stands out. It's pretty obvious to spot a foreigner on the lists – that's a message in itself and it's encouraging others to do the same and follow in my footsteps in a way.

Obviously I feel like there is a lack of representation and especially from the Polish community. We are the biggest minority yet we are being underrepresented in many cases. I guess the more I think about it, the older I get, the more I feel my opinions matter and the things that I really want to change in this country matter.

Inequality is a real threat to our happiness. The research shows that the only thing stopping first world nations from being happy is the inequality index. It's an existential crisis, because it affects the whole society. Inequality can lead to all kinds of nasty outcomes and it's also intertwined with all the environmental issues that are developing and social changes that are happening. So it's a multitude of issues that needs to be tackled.

LENYA RÚN TAHA KARIM
#1 Reykjavik Constituency North & South for the Pirate Party

Why are you running for parliament with the Pirate Party?

During the last election, I made up

my mind that I wanted to participate in politics in Iceland. A big part of the reason that I started in politics was because I realised that 20% of the Icelandic population consists of immigrants, but they don't have a single person that represents them in parliament. I wanted to be that person, as well as offering my knowledge and my point of view as a young person of foreign origin in Iceland.

So, I tested out the waters and I was successful in the primaries for a first timer. 2021 I ended up in third place in the Reykjavik North constituency and I saw how Icelandic people as well as immigrants received me really well. I would say that they welcomed me and they welcomed my perspective. They welcomed the fact that someone wanted to speak for them and be their representative in Alþingi.

What issues are you most interested in tackling should you be elected?

I think the biggest issues on most voters' minds right now are the state of the economy and the housing market. There's not a lot of supply on the housing market. Of course, we have been calling for action on that issue.

I've seen that some other parties are trying to make immigrant issues a really big policy issue in these elections, which is just a tactic to shift the blame when things get bad in the economy, or things get bad in the society. People are scared. It's always expected that the people that have been ruling are going to try to find a scapegoat, to blame, let's say, inflation, on a group of people that can't defend themselves.

So I think that it's really important that I stand my ground as a person of foreign origin and shift the attention to the things that really matter – and that is the economy, how to lower the inflation without it affecting the middle class and working people.



S Political ring

DEREK TERELL ALLEN –
#7 Reykjavik Constituency
North & South for the Pirate
Party

Why are you running for parliament with the Pirate Party?

I'm running for Parliament because I think that there needs to be fresh and new approaches, fresh eyes to see the issues, fresh ears to hear the people. I think that I would be an asset for the Pirates.

I feel like [the Pirates] is the only party that respects democracy. This is the party that is most about empowering the people and that really speaks to me.

The Pirate Party has been very outspoken about issues of asylum seekers and refugees, and standing up for their rights, the rights to fair treatment and humane conditions. But additionally, just outside of asylum seekers and refugees, just for other types of immigrants, the Pirate Party is big on Icelandic courses being offered during work time and things like that. So I think this is where the Pirate Party comes in, as the strongest spokesperson for immigrants within parliament.

Aside from immigrant issues, what issues would you like to progress if you were elected to parliament?

I've been active in equality issues, equal rights and whatnot. So queer issues are big for me – and the Pirates have been really big on securing more non-binary rights and recognising non-binary people. So I would love to keep that ball rolling.

Additionally, I'm interested in getting into housing issues specifically, since I'm a renter. We are in the process of developing our housing policy, but one thing I would personally be interested in seeing would be de-incentivising buying properties in order to use as short term rentals. Another big one for me is transportation issues, because I

don't have a car, so it can be quite difficult to get between places, and especially if I have to go outside the capital area, for some reason that's very difficult. So it would be great to strengthen public transportation, so that it would be easier to get around within the city and within the capital region, but also between parts of the country as well.

KINAN KADONI
#6 Reykjavik Constituency
South for the Left-Green
Movement

Why are you running for parliament with the Left-Green Movement?

I am an immigrant here and that is a hot topic in Icelandic politics and everywhere in Europe – you see there's lots of talking about immigrants, but rarely talking to immigrants. I would like to take action and try to do something instead of just being a topic that people are talking about. I really want to try, but of course it will be challenging. This is complicated, since it is the most complicated topic in all Europe, not only in Iceland.

As for why I'm running for the Left-Greens, I moved to Iceland in 2017, but in 2015 I was invited by the Left-Greens to visit Iceland and join a conference in Selfoss. They invited me as a Syrian to speak about Syria and the refugee crisis. At that time, I was living in Belgium but volunteering with refugees in Greece. It was really a huge thing to get such an invitation from a political party. That gave me the feeling that this is a party that really could fight for change.

What platform issues are you most interested in addressing?

As an immigrant, I find it so hard when people are speaking about us as a problem. So I am motivated to be involved in this topic, to try to do something about that. That's my goal, because it's really heavy when

you're an immigrant or a refugee, and you watch the TV and the conversation is all about problems with immigration. There are two options in this case, just close your ear and mind your own business, or to try to do something about it – I think that's what I'm passionate about. I want to try to do something. I know it will be challenging, it will be difficult, but at least I could say I tried something.

RENÉ BIASONE
#6 Reykjavik Constituency
North for the Left-Green
Movement

Why are you running for parliament with the Left-Green Movement?

I was elected as a parliamentary deputy in 2021. So I've been active in the Left-Green Movement for some time and in Icelandic society for much longer. When I moved here, there was the issue of pouring more energy into aluminium smelters. I was active, along with many Icelanders, in protesting this issue and met others in the party then. I found it to be the most natural party to join. So I joined just after the economic collapse.

What issues are you most passionate about?

The situation of foreign citizens in Iceland is always close to my heart – immigrants, their integration and equality in Icelandic society. I'm a specialist in environmental issues and I work for the Environment Agency of Iceland, so environmental protection is also important to me.

Thirdly, is energy resources in Iceland. The country could be one of the richest in the world per person, if we would manage the energy resources properly and we didn't divert 80% of electricity to very polluting heavy industry. That's an obsolete policy that we should find a way to change. ■



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Greenland Ho!

How To Get Away With

The saga of Erik the Red's discovery of Greenland

WORDS Valur Gunnarsson
IMAGE Finnur Bettaglio

old man was more of a Viking. Erik the Red stuck to the old gods rather than dabbling in that newfangled Christian stuff and he was prone to killing people. Oh, and he also discovered Greenland.

It was actually murder that set Erik's travels in motion. His father, Þorvaldur Ásvaldsson, was banished from Norway circa 960 "because of some killings" (the Sagas don't go into specifics). There was nothing to do but to move to Iceland, which he did with his roughly 10-year-old son in tow. By this time, Iceland was fully settled so their best option was to settle in Hornstrandir in the far northwest of the country, an area that is uninhabited today. It was probably the harshness of the conditions there that prepared Erik for his future in Greenland.

TIME DOESN'T HEAL
ALL WOUNDS

When he came of age, Erik married upwards, wedding Þjóðhildur Jörundsdóttir and settling in the far more pleasant Haukdalur in West Iceland. There he built a farm, which

he called Eiríksstaðir (Erik's Place) after himself. But the good times didn't last long. Perhaps taking after his father's murderous ways, Erik found himself in a dispute with his neighbours that ended with him killing two of them. As you might imagine, that didn't go over well. In fact, Erik remains so disliked in those parts that when Eiríksstaðir was recreated as a tourist attraction in 2000, locals wanted nothing to do with it.

Erik and some of his followers then moved to Óxney in Breiðafjörður bay. Bad luck followed and he had soon killed two of his neighbours' sons as well as "some other men." Again, the Sagas don't really go into specifics.

Poor Erik was sentenced to banishment and he had exhausted the places he could run to in Iceland, so the only logical step was to head west into the unknown – well, not entirely unknown. West of Iceland were Gunnbjarnarsker (Gunnbjörn's skerries), named after a certain Gunnbjörn who had discovered the group of small islands a century earlier. It was known that there was

You know the Sagas. They're about Icelanders, right? Well, there's also the Grænlendinga saga (the Saga of the Greenlanders), which tells the tales of the Viking settlement of – you guessed it – Greenland. Let's see what that's all about.

Though Leif Erikson's likeness occupies prime real estate in front of Hallgrímskirkja, in many ways his



h Murder

land there, but no one had been able to settle – yet.

FINDING GREENLAND

Erik was undaunted. In the year 982 he took to the sea with some of his followers and, when his sentence expired three years later, he returned to Iceland as the bearer of good news. To the west, beyond Gunnbjarnarsker, he had discovered a whole new land so lush that he had no choice but to call it Greenland. Things were getting pretty cramped in Iceland and crops had been failing, so many considered Erik's new-found earthly paradise to be a good option. And so Erik set off again with 25 ships. The crossing was so treacherous, however, that only 14 made it, with the others having turned back or sank on the way.

Nevertheless, although conditions may have been somewhat less than ideal, those who made it ashore spread out over two settlements. The larger of the two, close to the present-day Narsarsuaq airport, was known as the Eastern Settlement. The smaller was further north,

around present-day Nuuk, but was known somewhat confusingly as the Western Settlement.

LEIF FINDS RELIGION

Erik took up residency in Brattahlíð, just across the bay from Narsarsuaq. He called the fjord Eiríksfjörður (Erik's Fjord). Considering his penchant for the possessive, it's no small miracle that he called the country Greenland rather than designating it Eiríksland – it may not have appealed as much to prospective settlers in that case. Erik became a major chieftain in the new country but not all was idyll. His son Leif left for Norway and caught religion.

The new king of that land, Ólafur Tryggvason, was in the process of brutally converting his country to Christianity and Leif promised he would do the same in Greenland. No violence was required that we know of, the Greenlanders seem to have meekly submitted to the new god.

That is, except for Erik who stubbornly stuck to his old ways. His

wife Þjóðhildur, however, became a fervent Christian and refused to let him into her bed unless he converted. Erik acquiesced – happy wife, happy life, and all that – but he was not overly fond of this new religion and demanded that the church be built away from his farm.

THE END OF ERIK

Today, one can visit Erik's rebuilt farm in Qassiarsuk, population 39. It's about a 30-minute sail from Narsarsuaq. There is a plaque dedicated to Erik the Red on site, but more impressive is a statue of Leif Erikson atop an adjacent hill. Leif was probably born in Iceland, but Brattahlíð is where he grew up. He would be known as Leif the Lucky but would go on to commit many a folly, like ruining his parent's marriage and discovering America.

Erik was almost a party to these further voyages, but he fell off his horse and broke a rib while heading to his boat. Bad luck. So he decided it was best to stay home, where he died around age 50 in the year 1003 or thereabouts. ■



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Centre Map

We're here to fill you in on our personal favourite places around town – and a few to consider avoiding.

Dining

1 NAPOLI
Tryggvagata 24
We love places that do one thing and do them damn well. This takeaway place is a case in point. Napoli offers sourdough Neapolitan-style pizzas with a menu to match – think margherita, quattro formaggi, parma, calzone – plus vegan options and magnificent sandwiches. Look out for their lunch offer, every day from 11:30 to 15:00. JT

2 GAETA GELATO
Aðalstræti 6 & Hlemmur Mathöll
Gaeta Gelato is at the centre of a heated ongoing debate at the Grapevine office about who makes the best ice cream in the country. For those keen on the deep tastiness of Italian gelato, this place is IT. They are also located right smack downtown, so you can take that icecream for a stroll – we suggest a stroll to their other location for another scoop. JT

3 PLANTAN
Njálsgata 64
This cute little neighborhood cafe is 100% vegan and does a few things right: their soup of the day menu updates every week and uses seasonal produce, they mastered the plant-based cheese bun recipe to perfection, and this might be the most hearty vegan brunches in town. Look out for the daily bun and coffee deal, it truly is like a warm hug. IZ

5 CAFÉ BABALÚ
Skólavörðustígur 22
This quirky café hangout is a great choice when you're looking for a cozy, chill experience. Decked with kitschy decor and plush chairs, the café is perfect for a refuge from an instant shower of rain. If you're looking to snuggle up with a book and a good cup of coffee, look no further. JB

6 BAN THAI
Laugavegur 130
The absolute GOAT – as they say – in Thai cuisine in Reykjavik. Ban Thai's menu is dotted with little symbols of chili, denoting the spice level of each course. You're welcome to order a level-5 chili course, but do so at your own risk. JB

7 GRÁI KÖTTURINN
Hverfisgata 16a
This no-nonsense downtown staple has been serving Reykjavik dwellers quality breakfast food since 1997. Tucked away in a cute cellar, the diner boasts retro Icelandic design charm, while its menu is far from outdated. Pancakes, bagels and frying oil all have their special place at Grái Kötturinn. As Grái Kötturinn closes at 14:30 every day, it's not a place for nighthawks, but early-birds. JB

8 CHICKPEA
Hallveigarstígur 1
This Mediterranean-inspired restaurant is a great place for a quick bite. Servings are generous and the

food nutritious, meaning you'll go full well into the day. They do wraps, falafels, and all kinds of salads exceptionally well. Prices aren't extremely steep, but nothing to write home about either. JB

9 KRÓNAN
Hallveigarstígur 1 & more locations
If you're ever in a pinch while looking for something cheap to eat if you're downtown just go to Krónan and pick out some flatkökur. Flatkökur goes great with everything. Be it the Mediterranean/Icelandic fusion of lathering some with hummus, or turn it into a poor-man's pizza with pizza sauce and cheese. Honestly, the flatkaka is an empty canvas for you to paint your wildest dreams on. JB

10 JÓMFRÚINN
Lækjargata 4, 101 Reykjavik
Icelanders may have a love-hate relationship with the Danes, but let's be honest, who can resist craving a delicious smørrebrød every now and then? If you get what we are talking about, there's no better place in town for an authentic Danish smørrebrød than Jómfrúinn. This family-run restaurant specialises in serving Danish and Scandinavian dishes, and to top it off, it boasts a fantastic outdoor terrace where you can relax, sip a beer and complain about politics overlooking the Icelandic parliament. IZ

Drinking

11 APERÓ VÍNBAR
Laugavegur 20b
A wine bar that is both opulent and accessible? Yes please. The small team at Aperó remember the orders of regulars and make first-timers feel like regulars. If you know what you like, Aperó will tick your boxes; and if you're new to wine, the sommelier will soon unite you with your ideal glass. CF

12 BINGO DRINKERY
Skólavörðustígur 8
Admit it, sometimes you just feel like travelling back in time to your grandma's house, full of weird memorabilia one should have gotten rid of at least three decades ago. Luckily, Reykjavik now has a place like this – Bingo Drinkery. Tucked away from the crowds of tourists just off Skólavörðustígur, it offers a selection of beers and cocktails, all on happy hour 16:00-18:00. IZ

13 KAFFIBARINN
Bergstaðastræti 1
There are no correct words to explain just how iconic Kaffibarinn is in the local bar scene. It's the perennial hangout for the who's who of Reykjavik, welcoming everyone from members of Blur to curious passers by and everyone in between. Kaffibarinn is an establishment in and of itself. JB

14 VITABAR
Bergþórugata 21

If you're staying in Reykjavik more than a few days, you ought to find your own dive bar – this is ours. It seems like the time froze at Vitabar, but we love it that way. People come for their famous blue cheese burger, but stay for a few pints and delicious fries. Sometimes I wish Vitabar discovered craft beer, but I go back nevertheless – for a late night bite and Thule on draft. IZ

15 VÍNSTÚKAN TÍU SOPAR
Laugavegur 27
There are a few bars in Reykjavik that have learned how to do wine right, and Vinstúkan Tíu sopar, although located in the middle of the chaos and tourist buzz of Laugavegur, is one of them. Craving Pét-nat? In the mood for orange wine? Ready to explore small Slovenian wineries? You name it – the bar's staff will be ready to come up with suggestions that will suit any pocket. Don't get me started on their small bites to pair with wine – I'm already dreaming about their grilled peppers and torched broccoli with salted lemon. IZ

Shopping & Activities

16 BÍÓ PARADÍS
Hverfisgata 54
Sometimes the smell of popcorn fills the air of Hverfisgata, as if beckoning you to come inside. You succumb and find yourself in the cutest art house cinema with colourful posters on the walls and vintage-looking bar straight outta Wes Anderson movie. There's always a film screening and you rarely need to book tickets in advance, so enjoy the old school walk-in experience and one of the best Happy Hours in town. IZ

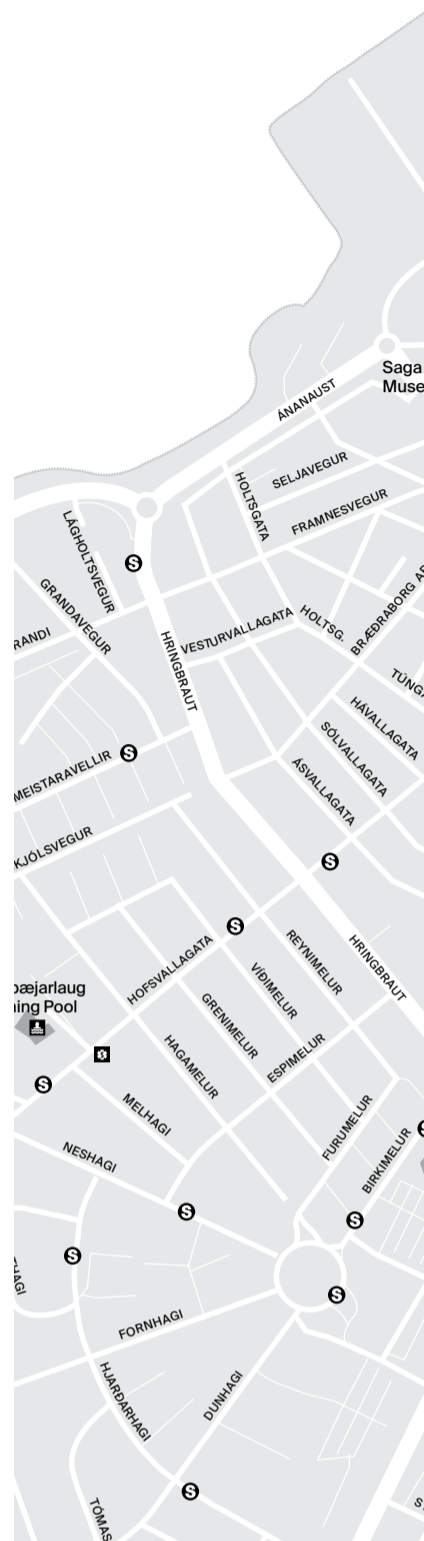
17 LAVA SHOW
Fiskislóð 74
I didn't know I had a primal urge to see a person clad in a Homer Simpson nuclear suit replicate the natural flow of molten lava until I paid the Lava Show a visit. Nothing will prepare you for sitting in an enclosed space while literal magma flows out of a chute through the wall. And then you just stare at the colours as the host explains the geological properties of lava. JB

Be Warned

18 101 BISTRO
Austurstræti 3
The bistro on the corner of Ingólfs-torg and Austurstræti that has a plaque outside saying, "Come in and try the worst [insert popular food item] that one guy on Tripadvisor said we had", or something like that. It's a trap, do not go there. That plaque has been in the same spot ever since Hrunið. RG

19 10-11
Austurstræti 17
If you're shopping here, I hope it's because you consider this an absolute last-minute resort. Like, you're down-and-out after a night of partying and you need some form of carbohydrates (or for that matter, protection). Don't make this a frequent pitstop in your grocery-shopping because: a) their prices are gouged to compensate for the fact they're always open, and b) their product variety is shit – even by Icelandic standards. Check out Krónan instead, a stone's throw away. RG

20 LEBOWSKI BAR
Laugavegur 20a
A joke that's gone too far. The longest lasting theme bar that sprung up during a theme-bar craze many years ago. We'd list off a bunch of reasons to avoid this place, but the owner has our phone numbers and we're over the after-hours calls. So just take our word for it. The Dude does not abide. RG ■





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Opening

GRAFÍKSALURINN
GÓLA (Gunnhildur Ólafsdóttir) – Timamót
 An exhibition at the Icelandic Printmakers Association, utilising different forms of printmaking to explore nuances in nature and environment of the city and the countryside.
 Opens November 1 @ 17
 Runs until November 10

ÁRBÆR OPEN AIR MUSEUM
Gunnar Freyr Ragnarsson – Reykjavík Street Art (Líkn)
 Photography exhibition of Hitt Húsið Art Groups & vibrant street theatre, in collaboration with Unglist.
 Opens Saturday November 2
 Runs until November 12

REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Laimonas Dom Baranauskas – Years in Between (Skotið)
 Black and white portrait series on beauty and age, aligning portraits of women with historical portraits of them, creating a comparison between present day and 30–60 years ago.
 Opens November 7
 Runs until January 12

HAFNARBORG CENTER OF CULTURE & FINE ART
Arngunnur Ýr – Kahalii
 New and recent paintings exploring the artist's relocation to Hawaii.
 Opens November 9
 Runs until January 19

Pétur Thomsen – Settlement
 Photography series evidencing hu-

man impact on the natural world.
 Opens November 9
 Runs until February 16

ANDRÝMI
Group exhibition – Let it Breathe
 A group exhibition and fundraiser in the radical social centre, this art show is still Open Call until November 10.
 Opens November 15 @ 19:30
 Runs until November 17

SMEKKLEYSA
Guðrún Kristjánsdóttir – “Mother-Earth; Lanscript”
 Exhibition of prints, projections, and drawings, and publication event of new bookwork holding the life's work of artist Guðrún Kristjánsdóttir.
 Opens November 16 @ 16

NÚLLIÐ GALLERÍ
2nd Year Graphic Design at LHÍ – Plaköt Unglistar
 An exhibition of the different proposals for the 2024 Unglist Poster, made last year by current second-year students in Graphic Design at the Iceland University of the Arts.
 Opens November 1 @ 19
 Runs until November 2 @ 17

PHENOMENON
Group Exhibition – “Coming Closer”
 Exhibition exploring the nature-self, relationships, and how humans view nature from different perspectives.
 Opens November 9 @ 15
 Runs until November 28

SÍM GALLERY
Gréta Mjöll Bjarnadóttir – “The land that doesn't exist”
 An installation based, in part, on the

poems of poets Edith Södergran and Hanna Mäkelä and the influence of their poetry being published in Iceland about 30 years ago.
 Opens November 1 @ 17:00
 Runs until November 23

GALLERY PORT
Árni Már Viðarsson & Steingrímur Gauti – Árekstur
 Exhibition of new paintings and the launch of Gallery port's artist-run investment fund.
 Opens November 9
 Runs until November 30

GALLERY GROTTA
Group exhibition – “Seasons”
 Series of watercolour paintings curated by Icelandic Watercolour Society
 Opens November 14
 Runs until December 7

Ongoing

ÁSMUNDARSAFN (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)
At Hand
 Works from the collection
 Runs until December 8

BERG CONTEMPORARY
GALLERY GRÓTTA
Jón B. K. Ransu – Mótsögnin í málverkinu
 Painting
 Runs until November 9

GALLERY FOLD
Karl Jóhann Jónsson – “My Point of View”
 Paintings
 Runs until November 16

GALLERY SIGN
Anna Hrund Másdóttir – Water Lilies
 Mixed media, silicone works
 Runs until December 15

GERÐARSAFN (KÓPAVOGUR ART MUSEUM)
GÍA – List án landamæra
 Paintings
 Runs until November 24

HAFNARBORG CENTER OF CULTURE & FINE ART
Elín Sigríður María Ólafsdóttir – “We See What We Want to See”
 Paintings, mixed media
 Runs until November 3

HAFNARHÚS (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)
Erró – 1001 Nights
 Paintings, collages and graphic works
 Runs until March 23

Hreinn Friðfinnsson – From Time - To Time
 Mixed media from the collection
 Runs until January 12

HALLGRÍMSKIRKJA
HALLGRÍMSHORFUR
 Design, archival works
 Runs until December 1

HÖFUÐSTÖÐIN
Shoplifter/Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir – Chromo Sapiens
 Installation, colourful whole body experience
 Permanent exhibition

HAVARÍ
Lóa Hlín Hjálmtýsdóttir – Solo Exhibition
 Prints, mixed media
 Runs until December 23

I8 GALLERY
Callum Innes – Alphabet
 Paintings
 Runs until November 30

I8 GRANDI
Andreas Eriksson – Real Time
 Paintings, progressive exhibition
 Runs until December 2024

KJARVALSSTAÐIR (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)
Hallgrímur Helgason: Havoc
 Paintings, drawings
 Runs until February 9

Kjarval and the 20th Century: When Modernity Anchored
 Paintings, drawings
 Runs until December 2024

KLING & BANG
Konstantinos Lianos
 Painting
 Runs until November 24

Korpúlfsstaðir
LISTVAL
Steingrímur Eyfjörð – 1978
 Multimedia
 Runs until November 11

THE LIVING ART MUSEUM
Head2Head
 Group exhibition
 Runs until November 24

MOSFELLSBÆR ART GALLERY
American Dreams
 Group exhibition
 Runs until November 15

MUSEUM OF DESIGN AND APPLIED ARTS
Residency – Unnar Ari Baldvinsson
 Graphic Design
 Runs until December 29

Microbes in the Home
 Curated by Ragnheiður Másól Sturludóttir
 Focuses on the collaboration between humans and microbes
 Runs until November 17

Katla Einarsdóttir & Una María Magnúsdóttir – Messages
 Graphic design
 Runs until November 24

At Home in the Design Museum
 Icelandic design works from the collection
 Runs until March 2026

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ICELAND
Looking Inward, Looking Outwards: 140 years of the National Gallery of Iceland
 Mixed media from the collection
 Runs until March 30

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ICELAND
Þorgerður Ólafsdóttir – Future Fragments
 Mixed media, archival works
 Runs until January 2025

THE NORDIC HOUSE
The Tree
 Children-oriented exhibition
 Runs until January 2025

REYKJAVÍK MARITIME MUSEUM
Heimir Freyr Hlööversson – We are Earth, We are Water
 Video installation
 Runs until December 2024

Eva Ágústa – Queer and Autistic
 Photography
 Runs until November 3

REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Agnieszka Sosnowska & Ingunn Snædal – RASK (en)
 Photography
 Runs until December 8

SIGURJÓN ÓLAFSSON MUSEUM
Carl Philippe Gionet – Imprints of Laugarnes
 Graphite works
 Runs until December 1

PULA
Hayden Dunham – Salt of a New Earth
 Sculpture
 Runs until November 10

Art Picks



Craft and Design Expo
 Thursday, November 7 - Monday, November 11
 Reykjavík City Hall
 Free entry

Reykjavík's annual crafts and design exposition has showcased local artisans for more than 20 years. This November, the event celebrates its 22nd edition. Every year, thousands of potential patrons visit the expo as they make their first rounds of Christmas shopping. A host of various artists peddle their wares as you stroll around the unique handicrafts. Hopefully, you'll find a gift for that special someone or a memento to bring back home. JB



Árekstur
 Saturday, November 9 - Saturday, November 30
 Gallery Port, Hallgerðargata 19-23
 Free entry

Gallery Port's Árni Már Viðarsson joins forces with long-time friend and fellow artist Steingrímur Gauti to exhibit a new series of paintings. But beyond being an exhibition, Árekstur is an event to welcome Steingrímur to the Gallery Port board and to launch Árni Már's new artist-run investment fund. So head to Port for the art and to welcome Steingrímur, and stay to diversify your portfolio with some artsy stocks. CF



Reykjavík Dance Festival
 Wednesday, November 13 - Sunday, November 17
 Various locations
 19.900 ISK for festival pass

Do you know what your body can do? That's a question the upcoming iteration of the Reykjavík Dance Festival seeks to answer. Teaming up with Lókal Performance Festival, this synergetic celebration of the arts will offer close to 30 separate events. Some of the festival's highlights include 'Hverfa' and its double-bill 'Liminal states', the Lókal-hosted performance 'What if you held a protest and everyone came?' For more information and all show times, visit reykjavikdancefestival.com. JB



Events

01.11–05.12.24

If you're putting something on for the general public, send us a line to: events@grapevine.is

Friday November 1

Geislar
21:00 Iðnó

Tom Waits 75
20:30 Salurinn

ApocalypticK
21:00 Gaukurinn

Grunge: Best Of
22:00 Bird

Babies take Bee Gees
21:00 Gamla Bíó

K.óla Skiptir mig máli Release
19:00 Smekkleysa

Morse – A Living Tradition: Discussion with Intelligent Instruments Lab
16:00 Loftskjástöðin

Allenheimer
23:00 Kaffibarinn

Saturday November 2

COP RVK: Lecture, Panel, Mending Workshop, Dinner, Halloween Party
14:00 Iðnó

Heim: Jón Jónsson
20:00 Salurinn

Reykjavík Opera Days: Dreaming while awake
12:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)

Reykjavík Opera Days: Sing, sister! – lunchtime recital
12:30 Harpa (Hörpuhorn)

Reykjavík Opera Days: Pierrot Lunaire
19:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)

Reykjavík Opera Days: Scent - & sound games / And the self appears
21:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)

Tout neuf!
15:00 Tjarnarbíó

Jyoty
22:00 Auto

Casio Fatso, Juno Paul, Deffice
21:00 Bird

Tu Ha? Tu Bjö! & Knackered/SMK
21:00 Mengi

Unglist: Cover
12:00 Árbær Open Air Museum (Landakot)

DJ Godfather & More
22:00 Radar

Unglist: "Conflict" Fashion Show
20:00 Hitt Húsið

Unglist: "Cover" Dance Show
14:00 Árbæjarsafn

Hádegistónleikar: Hymnasýn
12:00 Hallgrímskirkja

punktur punktur punktur: FWD & SKISSAN
20:00 Grensásvegur 14

Art without Borders: Arts and Crafts Market
13:00 Hverfisgata 94

Straumur Concert Series: Holy Hrafn & Dr Vigdís Vala
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Tales from the Underground: WOWO iNC., MISHU X HXFFI, ICY-G, SXEF
22:00 Prikið

Slummi DJ Set
21:00 12 Tónar

Fusion Groove
23:00 Kaffibarinn

Sunday November 3

Ipsa Dixit
20:00 Salurinn

Hljómeyki Chamber Choir: All Saints Day
17:00 Hallgrímskirkja

Jónas & Heine
13:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)

Unglist: Classy Tunes
20:00 Harpa (Kaldalón)

Art without Borders: Arts and Crafts Market
13:00 Hverfisgata 94

Sensory-Friendly Sunday
17:00 Gaukurinn

Bragi Ólafsson Innanríkið - Alexíus Book Release
16:00 Smekkleysa

Teitur Magnússon
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Monday November 4

Bear the Ant, LadieLex, Jon Coehn Ex, SAKARIS
20:00 Gaukurinn

Unglist: Choir & Chlorine
20:00 Sundhöllinn

DJ Júllala
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Tuesday November 5

Midday Concert: Kristín Sveinsdóttir with Antonía Hevesi
12:00 Hafnarborg

Trío Allison Lupton. Umbra Ensemble & Reykjavík Trad Sessions
20:00 Iðnó

Movie Night
19:30 Loft Hostel

Paddan & Cat Beats

20:00 Smekkleysa
Jónbjörn (Lagaffe Tales)
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Wednesday November 6

Unglist: Choir & Flowers
16:00 Árbæjarsafn

Mezzoforte, Óskar Guðjónsson
20:00 Bæjarbíó

Lucky Records Vinyl Night
21:00

Thursday November 7

Hverfa / Liminal States: Melkorka Sigríður Magnúsdóttir and Margrét Sara Guðjónsdóttir
20:00 Borgarleikhúsið

Skrattar & Spacestation
20:00 Smekkleysa

Jónfrí Djúpfalsað efni Listening Party
17:00 Röntgen

Keli, Silja Rós, Andervel, South of Savoy
13:00 Hús Máls og Menningar

Unglist: Jam Session
20:00 Hitt Húsið

Sugar Shake Session vol.3
18:00 Hotel Holt

Aevy Lore, LadieLex, Jon Cohen Ex.
17:00 Loft Hostel

Two Beats Ahead: Live Podcast Sessions
13:00, 14:30, 18:00 Space Odyssey

Atli James
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Friday November 8

Páll Óskar and the Iceland Symphony Orchestra
20:00 Harpa (Eldborg)

Anna Sóley, Ingibjörg Turchi and Gyða Valtýrs
Smekkleysa

Concert / Open Lab - Intelligent Instruments Lab
Loftskjástöðin

Aevy Lore, LadieLex, SAKARIS, Milkywhale
13:00 Hús Máls og Menningar

Unglist: Act Better
20:00 Tjarnarbíó

Two Beats Ahead: Live Podcast Sessions
12:00 Space Odyssey

Invisible Landscapes Film Screening & Discussion
18:00 Space Odyssey

Concert & Open Workshop: Intelligent Instruments Lab
15:00 Loftskjástöðin

Looking Inward, Looking Outward

140 Years of the National Gallery of Iceland



Anna Ancher (1859-1935), Sjómannastrúka / Fishermen's Girl, 1886. LI 25

12.10.2024
-30.3.2025

Listasafn Íslands
National Gallery of Iceland

+354 515 9600
listasafn.is

Event Picks



Festival of Nations
Sunday, November 3
14:00-17:00
Jaðarsbakki Sports Hall, Akranes
Free

Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson recently remarked that if cultural mixing in Iceland continues, the country has a lot to lose. He obviously hasn't been reading up on his own party's policies in support of free movement of people and markets. On the contrary, we love the mixing of cultures and the good it brings to Iceland. Hosted by the Festival of Nations West Iceland, a cultural initiative aiming to highlight countries' diversities, the Akranes event features an array of performances, music, arts and flavours from various corners of the world. JB



Bransaveisla by Iceland Music
Monday, November 4 -
Wednesday, November 6
Tónlistarmiðstöð, Austurstræti 5, and various locations
Free, registration necessary

If you've ever wondered how the inner workings of the music industry function, Bransaveisla might be the place to seek answers. In a series of free educational events, Iceland Music invites key figures and innovators shaping the global music industry to share their knowledge. Highlighted events include a "fireside chat" with Laufey's creative director Júnía Lín, and "Útrás," a course for artists seeking to export their music. More information is available at icelandmusic.is JB



EPICYCLE: GYÐA VALTÝSDÓTTIR
Wednesday November 20
Harpa, Norðurljós
7.990 ISK

A talent like no other, Gyða was one of the founding members of the influential band múm before embarking on a highly successful solo career. Having released her landmark album *Epicycle* in 2016, Gyða now returns to Harpa for a unique interpretation of the work. In the production, Gyða ties together her vast musical knowledge as she explores both ancient and contemporary influences. Joined by friends and collaborators such as Ólöf Arnalds and Skúli Sverrisson, Gyða will conjure up an immersive, captivating world. JB

Reykjavík Art Museum

One museum Three locations



Hafnarhús
Tryggvagata 17
101 Reykjavík

Kjarvalsstaðir
Flókagata 24
105 Reykjavík

Ásmundarsafn
Sigtún
105 Reykjavík

Open daily
listasafnreykjavikur.is
artmuseum.is



Events

01.11-05.12.24

Concerts, comedy, movies and other happenings that defy categorisation

If you're putting something on for the general public, send us a line to: events@grapevine.is

Saturday November 9

MC Myasnoi (Doom Set) & Grafic Futanari
20:00 Smekkleysa
Unglist: Dance, Stretch & Twist
13:00 Borgarleikhúsið
Unglist: Ungleikur
16:00 Tjarnarbió
Revenge of Calculon
20:00 Loft Hostel
Bjarni Biering & Andrew Groves
18:00 Space Odyssey
Eight Projects To Think About Non-Human Worlds
18:00 The Nordic House
Simon & Hristo & Special Guests
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Straumur Concert Series: Xiupill
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Sunday November 10

Lucky Records Vinyl Night
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Monday November 11

Nerd Party Night
17:00 Gaukurinn
Brynja (Girls Gang)
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Tuesday November 12

Fu Kaisha
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Wednesday November 13

Arabian Horse: GusGus
11:00 Harpa
Bring the Laughs! Standup Comedy in English
21:00 Gaukurinn

Young Gaudi
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Thursday November 14

Af fingrum fram: KK
20:30 Salurinn
Jazz í Djúpinu: Sigmar Matthíasson
20:30 Hornið (Djúpið)
Turturi, K.óla & Laglegt
18:00 Smekkleysa
Haukur (fknhdsm)
21:00

Friday November 15

Shrek Rave
20:00 Gamla Bió
Vala Guðna & Órn Árna
20:00 Salurinn
Butch Tribute
19:30 Iðnó
Flesh Machine Nothing Never Happens Listening Party
18:00 Space Odyssey
Agnar Eldberg & The Cult Of One
19:00 Smekkleysa
Eva Luna x Karen
23:00 Kaffibarinn

Saturday November 16

House of Revolution vol. 5 – WONDERLAND
19:00 Þjóðleikhúskjallarinn
Iceland University of the Arts
14:00 Hallgrímskirkja
Arabian Horse: GusGus
19:30 Harpa
Shrek Rave
20:00 Gamla Bió
Crownest Album Release Show
20:00 Bird
Dagur Íslenskrar Tungu
22:00 Kíkí
Roller Derby Iceland: Talk and Screening of Whip It

20:00 Bió Paradís

Revealing our New Dictionary & Open Mic
14:00 The Reykjavik City Library
Óli Dóri
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Straumur Concert Series: Juno Paul
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Sunday November 17

Jón Halldór
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Tuesday November 19

Movie Night
19:30 Loft Hostel
DJ Vala
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Wednesday November 20

Már & RNCM Session Orchestra
20:00 Salurinn
Venus Vulcanism
18:00 Space Odyssey
Silja Glömmi
21:00 Kaffibarinn
RVK Poetics: Reykjavík Open
20:00 Mengi

Thursday November 21

Benni hemm hemm and Kött Grá Pje
19:00 Smekkleysa
Af fingrum fram: Sigga Beinteins
20:30 Salurinn
Jazz í Djúpinu: Ingi Bjarni Trio
20:30 Hornið (Djúpið)
80's Jazz Reimagined: Kristjana Stefáns
18:00 Hotel Holt
Drink&Draw
19:00 Loft Hostel
Guðný Jóns
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Friday November 22

Afternoon Tones: Andrés Þór Nordic Trio
18:00 Hafnarborg
Music Bingo
20:00 Loft Hostel
Issi 21 Concert Vol. 2
21:00 Iðnó
Apex Amina & Mary Jane from UA
23:00 Kaffibarinn

Saturday November 23

gugusar
20:00 Salurinn
Lagaffe Tales
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Straumur Concert Series: KUSK & Óviti
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Sunday November 24

Hverfa / Liminal States: Melkorka Sigríður Magnúsdóttir and Margrét Sara Guðjónsdóttir
20:00 Borgarleikhúsið
Kraftgalli Vinyl DJ Set
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Monday November 25

DJ Júllala
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Tuesday November 26

Fu Kaisha
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Thursday November 28

Til hamingju með að vera mannleg: Siggú Soffíu
20:30 Tjarnarbió
Drink&Draw
19:00 Loft Hostel
Badstof
18:00 Space Odyssey

Las Vegas Christmas Show
20:30 Gamla Bió
Jólaveisla Positive Vibrations Reykjavík (PBVR)
18:00 Kaffibarinn

Friday November 29

I Gave You Milk to Drink: Fern Brady
20:30 Tjarnarbió
Las Vegas Christmas Show
20:30 Gamla Bió
Þorgerður Jóhanna
23:00 Kaffibarinn

Saturday November 30

I Gave You Milk to Drink: Fern Brady
20:30 Tjarnarbió
The Nerdlesque Revue
21:00 Gaukurinn
Karaoke
20:30 Loft Hostel
Simon (fknhdsm)
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Straumur Concert Series: dirb
21:00 Kaffibarinn
SAMAN Market – Design, Art, Drink & Food
11:00 Listasafn Reykjavíkur Hafnarhús

Sunday December 1

Strip Lab Life Drawing Event
19:00 Gaukurinn

Monday December 2

Midday Concert: Íris Björk Gunnarsdóttir
12:00 Hafnarborg

Wednesday December 4

Reykjavík Poetics Presents a Night of Palestinian Poetry
20:00 Mengi

Sæta Svínid
ICELANDIC GASTROPUB

HAPPIEST HAPPY HOUR IN REYKJAVÍK

Happy HOUR
15-18

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Appy Listings

Some Of The Happiest Hours In Town

If your bar has a happy hour, email us on events@grapevine.is with the details.

12 TÓNAR

Every day from 14:00 to 19:00
Beer 1.100 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

APÉRO

Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 1000 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

BINGO DRINKERY

Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

BÍÓ PARADÍS

Every day from 17:00 to 19:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

BODEGA

Every day from 14:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

DAISY

Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

DEN DANSKE KRO

Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer & Wine 1.550 ISK 2-for-1 offer

FORRÉTTABARINN

Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 950 ISK, Wine 950 ISK

FRÖKEN REYKJAVÍK

Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 1.100 ISK

GAUKURINN

Every day from 17:00 to 21:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

HAFNARHÚS

LADY BREWERY POPUP BAR
Every thursday 17:00 to 22:00
Beer 1.100 ISK, Wine 1.300 ISK

THE IRISHMAN

Every day from 12:00 to 19:00
Beer 950 ISK, Wine 950 ISK

JUNGLE COCKTAIL BAR

Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.100 ISK

KAFFIBARINN

Every day from 15:00 to 19:00
Beer 950 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

KAFFIBRENNSLAN

Every day from 16:00 to 20:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 950 ISK

KALDI BAR

Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 950 ISK, Wine 950 ISK

LOFT

Every day from 16:00 to 20:00
Beer 990 ISK, Wine 1.400 ISK

ÖLSTOFAN

Every day from 15:00 to 20:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

PRIKIÐ

Every day from 16:00 to 20:00
Beer 800 ISK, Wine 1.500 ISK

RÖNTGEN

Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 950 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

SKÚLI CRAFT BAR

Every day from 12:00 to 19:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

STÚDENTAKJALLARINN

Every day from 16:00 to 19:00, until 21:00 on weekends
Beer 850 ISK, Wine 1.090 ISK

TIPSÝ

Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
50% off select cocktails

VEÐUR

Every day from 14:00 to 19:35
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 900 ISK

VÍNSTÚKAN TÍU SOPAR

Every day from 17:00 to 19:00
Buy one wine bottle, get two courses (any price)

* We do our best to keep these prices current, but still they change.

Smiðjustígur 10 / Klapparstígur 16, 101 Reykjavík

Artists Björn Roth, Dodda Maggý, Finnbogi Pétursson, Haraldur Jónsson, Hulda Stefánsdóttir, John Zurier, Katrín Elvarsdóttir, Kees Visser, Monika Grzymala, Páll Haukur Björnsson, Rintaro Hara, Rósa Gísladóttir, Sigurður Guðjónsson, Steina, Woody Vasulka, Þórdís Erla Zoëga
www.bergcontemporary.is, (354) 562 0001

BERG Contemporary



Woody Vasulka
The Brotherhood - Table 6: The Maiden, 1998
Video still

Woody Vasulka
The Brotherhood
01.11.2024–20.12.2025

Featured
Happy Hour

Veður

KLAPPARSTÍGUR 33

There's a reason why Veður was awarded the title Best Happy Hour in our quarterly Best Of Reykjavík publications. Veður's happy hour is unparalleled among the various drinking holes in town. Stretching from 14:00-19:35 every day, Veður's pricing starts at a remarkable 950 ISK. And it doesn't end there. From 19:00-21:00, Veður starts its cocktail hour, slashing its prices down to 2.200 ISK. In this economy?! Yes please. Offering a modern, simple, Scandinavian vibe, Veður's central location makes it an ideal spot to begin or end a night. JB
HAPPY HOURS:
Beer and wine from 14:00 to 19:35, 950 ISK. Cocktails from 19:00 to 21:00, 2.200 ISK.
Cava and prosecco every Thursday, 1000 ISK.



Cheap Eats

Here are some sweet meal deals that'll fill your tummy and without draining your bank account.

APÓTEK

Soup of the Day
1.990 ISK all day, every day

ARABIAN TASTE

Falafel Roll
1.790 all day, every day

BIRD

Deathmetal sandwich and beer
3.500 ISK all day, every day

BÆJARINS BEZTU

Hotdog and soda
990 ISK all day, every day

DEIG

Poor Man's Offer: filled bagel, doughnut & drink
1.850 ISK weekdays after 10:00

HAMBORGARABÚLLA TÓMASAR

Tuesday Special: burger, fries & soda
1.990 ISK all day on Tuesday

HLÖLLABÁTAR

Lunch Offer: Choice of any sub and soda
2.195 ISK every day until 14:00

ISLENSKI BARINN

Soup of the Day
1.950 ISK all day, every day

LEMON

Combo of the Month: large sandwich & juice
2.390 ISK all day, every day

MAI THAI BISTRO

Lunch Offer: daily curry meal
2.290 ISK weekdays between 11:00 - 14:00

NAPOLI PIZZA

Lunch Offer: choice of menu pizza

or sandwich
1.890 ISK every day from 11:30 - 15:00

PÍTUBARINN

Veggie pita sandwich
2.090 ISK all day, every day

REYKJAVÍK ROASTERS

Breakfast menu & sourdough toasts
580 ISK - 1.800 ISK, all day, every day

SHALIMAR

Curry in a Hurry Lunch Special
1.790 ISK weekdays from 12:00 - 15:00

ZORBIAN HOT

Chicken shawarma wraps & falafel wraps
1.690 ISK all day, every day

* We do our best to keep these prices current, but shit's outta control. Let us know if you spot a sweet deal: grapevine@grapevine.is

MUSEUM OF DESIGN AND APPLIED ART Garðatorg 1
210 Garðabær

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Stairways to Airwaves

The Fateful Event In A

Iceland Airwaves celebrates 25 years of staying alive

WORDS Jóhannes Bjarkason
IMAGE The Reykjavik Grapevine Archives

Much of Iceland's cultural output depends largely on enterprising spirits. Throughout Iceland's young entertainment history, ambitious go-getters with limited resources have set the tone for the creative sector's unruly operations.

That's partly how Iceland's biggest music festival, Iceland Airwaves, got its ball rolling in 1999. From its humble beginnings in Reykjavik airport's aircraft hangar number four, the festival has grown into an unmissable weekend for music lovers. Attracting countless visitors over its lifetime, Airwaves has been an imperative tool to connect Icelandic musicians to the international industry, while cementing Reykjavik as one of the top destinations to experience live music.

Having gone through periods of tumult, prosperity, bankruptcy and exponential popularity, Iceland Airwaves is now celebrating 25 years of staying alive.

DAY ONE

Like most Icelandic cultural institutions, the minute details of how Airwaves came to be are clouded by time and lack of archived sources. But Þorsteinn Stephensen might be the man who comes the closest to an accurate depiction, given his involvement in the festival since day one.

For a promotional event for GusGus' album *Is This Normal?* in February 1999, Þorsteinn was one of the many people involved in helping the band transform the airport hangar into a performance venue. "People think this is the first official Airwaves gig, but it really wasn't," Þorsteinn clarifies.

The premise was simple: bring the foreign music industry to GusGus, not vice-versa. Sponsored by Icelandair, the airline supported the venture by securing flights for music industry personnel – a service they provide to this day as the event's

principal patron.

"From this, we had the idea to create an annual music festival. Icelandair was so happy about this because Iceland wasn't really being promoted at the time. Every piece of coverage was the equivalent of gold," he says, emphasising the festival's dual role of promoting Icelandic music and Iceland itself as a tourist destination.

describes. Taking over the reins after the 2009 edition, Grímur was well aware of the festival's comings and goings due to his previous roles as a music manager. His vision for the festival was to preserve some of Þorsteinn's edge.

"I found the key was to create something crispy," Grímur explains. "Like a meatball or a fish ball that's not mushy – you can feel the bite in it."

Musicians and journalists lay like driftwood on every corner after partying at Sirkus and Kaffibarinn.

In October 1999, Airwaves was formally kickstarted in the same yellow airport hangar, welcoming around 500 guests to its debut. As success repeated itself in subsequent years, Þorsteinn suspected the organisation team were on to something. "We had run into a working formula. Because so many journalists came over, we decided to make this an industry festival," he says, adding that "Iceland was just so hot at the time."

Responsible for turning up Iceland's cultural heat in those early days were performances by GusGus, Quarashi, and the young up-and-comers Sigur Rós, whose Airwaves show in 2000 Þorsteinn claims was one of the festival's "defining moments." The band was subsequently featured in the *New York Times*. "Everything goes sideways and interest in Iceland skyrockets," Þorsteinn recalls.

BANKRUPTING AIRWAVES

By 2003, Airwaves had become the world's most popular party. "Everyone was there, whether they performed or not. Musicians and journalists lay like driftwood on every corner after partying at Sirkus and Kaffibarinn," Þorsteinn reminisces.

But as with all parties, the hangover soon came in the form of an economic recession.

"During those first years under Þorsteinn, it had a lot of edge," former Airwaves director Grímur Atlason

And create a festival where you're bringing something that wouldn't otherwise come to Iceland."

As Grímur puts it, the festival's success and relevance depend on a delicate balance between performers, the city of Reykjavik and the tourism industry.

"You should be looking at those factors. That was the harmony; what happened all across the city I think was the beauty behind the festival," he says, referring to the festival's once vibrant off-venue scene – a feature which has undergone a major transformation.

"[One of the things] eating up the festival was the off-venue schedule. But at the same time, that was a part of the magic," Grímur reasons. "Then it either worked out or it didn't. It did, but I thought it was too big," he admits.

After two years of running the festival with a deficit before going bankrupt, Grímur stepped down and local promoter Sena Live took over.

Leading up to the festival's 2018 bankruptcy case was an incremental expansion of the festival. In 2017, Grímur's final year at the helm, Airwaves was operating on multiple fronts. Over four days, the festival schedule included a headliner concert by Mumford & Sons; 207 performing artists playing 229 shows in Reykjavik and 30 in Akureyri across 16 venues; and a whopping total of 500 off-venue performances. In



Yellow Hangar

contrast, the 2024 iteration of the festival incorporates six venues over three days.

“We did too much. I admit that,” Grímur says, pointing out the festival’s heavy scheduling in his last years.

Although the festival was a financial loser under Grímur’s leadership, it demonstrated the possibilities of ambitious festival programming in a place like Iceland. Ask nearly anyone, and they’ll say that the culture of off-venues embedded an air of magic into Reykjavik, with live music playing on every corner and bursting forth from seemingly every bar and storefront.

CREATING BUSINESS

Interestingly, Grímur mentions he always perceived the festival running best as not-for-profit – only needing to amass enough income to cover the next festival. “Although it looks like we were playing with other people’s money, that’s not the case. The festival didn’t own more than it received,” Grímur clarifies. “I think [the festival’s] most advantageous shape is as a non-profit festival.”

People involved with creative businesses have always recognised the sector’s economic effects. That understanding had been latent – and probably still is – in the eyes of policymakers, until a recent report published by the Ministry of Culture and Business revealed the substantial economic input of the country’s cultural output.

According to the report, every króna invested by the government into the arts generates three more in the economy. Furthermore, it highlighted that the direct contribution of cultural activity accounted for 3.5% of Iceland’s GDP – a figure only surpassed by the fishing industry’s 4%.

Ísleifur Þórhallsson, the current director of Iceland Airwaves and CEO of Sena Live, is well aware of this fact. “It’s been calculated that Iceland Airwaves creates business in the economy for about a billion ISK [approx. 6.7 million EUR] every year, when accounting for flights, hotels, food, trips,” he says.

When Sena took charge of the festival in February 2018, Ísleifur and

his team were tasked with making necessary, yet unpopular, changes to steer the festival away from the rocks.

“I understand why it went under. It’s incredibly fun but equally challenging, and includes major responsibilities and duties,” Ísleifur explains. “It’s a challenge to manage a festival that fulfils every single requirement and makes everyone happy without losing money.”

“We realised we would probably stumble and learn many lessons, but we were also confronted with making necessary changes which would not be popular,” he admits. “Everyone loves off-venues. We love off-venues as much as anyone else, but when that stopped adding to the festival and started to literally replace it, it was evident that was a part of the problem,” he surmises.

Ultimately, Sena implemented its austerity measures which included shortening the festival, minimising headlining acts and reducing the off-venue scheduling. A big change was the reduction of artist payment and complimentary guest tickets, a decision Ísleifur admits was, “Not fun. But if every single performer has a complimentary ticket, you’ve got a built-in feature to give away 2000 tickets.”

This reshaping of the festival made Sena take a long, hard look into its core roles, resulting in a renewed emphasis on its original purpose.

“The basic strategy we tried implementing since the beginning is to do less. Scaling back the festival and trying to return to the festival’s core,” Ísleifur clarifies. “Asking questions like, ‘Why was this festival founded? Why does it exist?’”

“It was founded as a platform to promote Iceland through Icelandic music,” he says. “So it was about going downtown and not chasing the biggest bands in the world.”

EULOGY

To make conditions even more difficult, Ísleifur’s had to deal with the onset of the covid pandemic only two years into Sena’s management of the festival. The pandemic’s undoubtedly most devastating reper-

cussions for the global live industry was the erosion of ticket sales.

“What we’ve realised is that the pre-covid reality is gone. We’re just figuring out this new reality,” Ísleifur says.

With ticket sales as the festival’s biggest income stream, Ísleifur claims that government support is almost nonexistent. When compared to other Nordic countries, Airwaves lies on brittle foundations.

“[Festivals in] Norway, Sweden and Denmark – it’s almost as if they are on a fixed budget. The state, authorities, and municipalities understand that they create so much value, that the patrons get it back multiple times over,” he argues. “They’ve decided that a festival like this shouldn’t have to rely on ticket sales or private sponsorships,” he asserts, partially reverberating Grímur’s comments on running as a non-profit. “The festival needs more support to ensure the operational baseline for the future.”

However, despite financial hardships or momentary controversy, Airwaves has provided an unquantifiable amount of personal experiences, creative opportunities, networks and economic stimuli.

“If I’m completely honest, we love this festival; it cannot disappear,” stresses Ísleifur. “It cannot die. It is such an important phenomenon for the Icelandic music industry and the country itself, it would be with a very heavy heart to see it disappear.”

“It’s a very valuable brand and it has done a lot for all of us. People from everywhere in the world came over, saw our country and heard our music,” says Grímur. “That’s good stuff.”

Thinking back to those early days in the yellow hangar, Þorsteinn admits the festival’s longevity is a pleasant surprise. “[The fact] that it would still exist after 25 years – that we’d been thinking on those terms – it never entered our minds.” ■

Go celebrate 25 years of Iceland Airwaves in downtown Reykjavik on November 7-9. Full festival price is 21,900 ISK with day passes available. For the full lineup and more information, visit icelandairwaves.is.



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Slaystation

Positively Pessimistic

Rock 'n' roll revivalists Spacestation are fed up

WORDS Jóhannes Bjarkason
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

Crowding a leather couch in a purple-lit recording studio, the five members of Spacestation take turns sniffing powdered tobacco – a habit usually reserved for geriatric sailors. Boisterous, yet courteous, the quintet are working on their forthcoming album while preparing for their first shot at Iceland Airwaves.

With their 2023 EP *Bæbæ*, rock and roll band Spacestation entered the Reykjavik music scene with a fervour and attitude the likes of which the capital had not seen in decades. Their slacker-rock outlook and faded leather jackets seem to summon the zeitgeist of the early 00s atmosphere of the city, reminiscent of the life-worn Singapore Sling.

Spacestation's single "Hvitt Vin" was the early precursor to that first release, recruiting fans young and old to their growing listener base. The song's dreamy instrumentation coupled with lead singer Björgúlfur Jes Einarsson's shouty vocals marked yet another revival of rock and roll's struggling reputation.

"I tend to stumble upon different genres I like," says guitarist, singer and songwriter Víðir Rúnarsson, explaining where Spacestation's musical roots derive from. "I start to identify new sounds. At one point, that was shoegaze and we started as a shoegaze band. But then we started listening a lot to Velvet Underground," he continues.

"As the new guy, I look at it being a fusion of everything they like in terms of rock. They find the golden mean which combines into Spacestation," drummer Davíð Þór Hlynsson adds.

BYE BYE BÆBÆ

Having established themselves as an unreserved rock outfit playing the local venue circuit, Spacestation quickly started work on their debut LP – the ironically titled *Reykjavik Syndrome*, expected early 2025.

"It's a bit more dramatic," Björgúlfur – Bjöggi – says of their forthcoming release. "There's a lot more droning. It's more like, cigarette-stained, Brian Jonestown Massacre stuff going on. It's less partying and more emotional."

"It has a wider scope than *Bæbæ*,"

Ólafur Andri Sigurðsson chimes in, breaking his commitment to the silent bass player act.

"It's more of a bummer. *Bæbæ* was such a party," Bjöggi says before backtracking slightly: "Maybe not a bummer – more this grey, cold reality of living in Reykjavik. It's about this small-town syndrome every Reykvikingur experiences. Especially grumpy men like us," he jokes.

"If we'd all hail from Barcelona and were 'chulo' and surfed all day, and we'd suddenly move to Reykjavik, we would be dying," Bjöggi explains. "Because we're raised here and this is our home, we love it. But there's a special kind of co-dependency with the environment going on. You're making things work in this darkness, in the cold."

"It fits basically into optimistic nihilism," Davíð explains. "To be able to create something good from being nihilistic in this grey world."

HELLO WORLD

Despite its optimistic outlook, *Reykjavik Syndrome* is not foolishly hopeful. As the band points out, they're outright pessimistic about the current state of affairs. "Everything's going to shit," Bjöggi laments. "The only people outside are tourists, every venue is closing down. People are staying at home eating cheap food from Bónus."

Spacestation's complex relationship with their hometown presents them with a perfect opportunity to look outside Iceland. Following up on their release next year, Spacestation hopes to break into international markets.

"We've always been interested in performing somewhere else," Víðir admits.

"It's such a travelled path in Reykjavik. If we go abroad, it will always be an untrodden path. Every step we'd take would be something new," guitarist Hafsteinn Jóhannsson adds.

Their goal is simple: to spread their message and keep rock and roll alive. ■

Catch Spacestation's first Iceland Airwaves gig on November 8 at Gaukurinn.

Reykjavik Syndrome's singles "Í Draumalandinu" and "Fokking lagið" are out now. Their debut LP is expected in February 2025. For the latest from the band, make sure to follow their socials, @spacestation_band.



Memento

What's Your Best Iceland Airwaves Memory?

Looking back at Grapeviners' stand-out festival moments

WORDS The Reykjavik Grapevine
IMAGE The Reykjavik Grapevine Archives

work we enlisted the help of (mostly) American music journalists in return for a bunk, brunch and booze. We stayed at concerts through the night, wrote into the morning and then went out partying.

Somehow, in the middle of this, I managed to convince my current partner to kiss me for the first time during a GusGus show at Nasa. We're still together and have three kids.

When the festival ended, we were all worn out but felt obliged to get smashed one more time at the Grapevine offices. Booze: plenty. Food: Icelandic hotdogs. The Condé Nast writer – a five-foot, marathon-running vegan – bet some of us, including me, the Rolling Stone guy, the Details Mag (RIP) guy, and the NME lady, that she could down

fun. I remember going to Airwaves and thinking how civilised it is. Hear me out: prior to IA, what I called a music festival involved sleeping in a tent in 30-degree heat only to be awakened by a [insert random name] band soundchecking and drinking beer to sober up in the morning.

Compared to my previous festival experiences, Iceland Airwaves is a cute city festival. I love walking between the downtown venues, doing that once-a-year venture to the church, or walking up Laugavegur with a beer in my hand without drawing any attention. Over the years, I've discovered some new bands I liked, weird stuff from the Faroes or Greenland I would probably not learn about any other way. Oh, and last year, I found what the Bombay Bicycle Club frontman looks like – a memory I'd like to erase. Aren't all of us a bit past our prime? IZ

Being asked to name an Airwaves highlight brought up a slideshow of vivid memories. Fresh-faced, note-perfect indie hopefuls Retro Stefson taking the stage at Tunglið in 2008. Screaming drag-punk band Æla tearing the roof off Grand Rokk. A transcendental 24/7-era Gus Gus show at Nasa. Getting a front-row seat for Zola Jesus who reached out and literally touched my face as she sang a high note; the jolt of some unknowable energetic transference taking place. Getting through an existential hangover with the healing sounds of JFDR, even in a soulless hotel lobby off-venue. Nico Muhly's spine-tingling ensemble rendition of "The Only Tune" at IÐNÓ. FM Belfast's Ívar Pétur crowdsurfing out of Kaffibarinn, down Bergstaðastræti, then back in again. Airwaves used to be fucking wild. JR ■

Crowdsurfing out of Kaffibarinn, down Bergstaðastræti, then back in again. Airwaves used to be fucking wild.

while at the same time looking chic. I remember the Art Museum's tarp roof almost blowing over during a particularly angry storm in 2012; carrying Grísalappalísa's Gunnar Ragnarsson in a sweaty crowdsurf at Gamla Bíó; and every FM Belfast show ending with a massive explosion of confetti which I duly stuffed into my pockets as a keepsake. Man, did we have fun. JB

In 2005, the Grapevine decided it was a good idea to publish daily reports during Iceland Airwaves, reviewing every show. To make this

seven hotdogs with everything. If she could, we'd all get tattoos of her choice. I can't remember what would happen if she lost, because she didn't. Long story short, me and five other people have the word "Bláðamaður" tattooed somewhere on us. A tattoo, which for me at least, brings back memories of the greatest and most consequential weekend of my life. Also, the music WAS great. JTS

My very first time at Iceland Airwaves was well past the festival's prime, they say, but I still had a lot of



Mama Oyama

Go With The Flow

Oyama Makes A Comeback With *Everyone Left*

WORDS Irina Shtreis
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

In April 2020, Icelandic independent mavericks Oyama released their EP *Opaque Days* – a title that accidentally outlined the themes of the subsequent pandemic and the band's hiatus.

In the respite between lockdowns, Oyama's songwriters Úlfur Alexander Einarsson and Júlía Hermannsdóttir gathered to record a few songs which would eventually take the shape of *Everyone Left*, a reflective album released October 18.

Tinged with an underwater feel and unexplainable poignancy, the record represents a shift from their angsty 2014 debut *Coolboy*. Now in their thirties, Úlfur and Júlía describe Oyama's latest release as a record that resulted from a state of maturity and contemplation.

MATURE SINCERITY

"I feel like we've grown as lyricists," Úlfur explains. "Our lyrics used to be more vague. I think we've always been a melancholic band. But I tried

to sound more ambiguous in my lyrics and I do that less now. I feel like I'm more on point. It's the same melancholy but more understandable," he states.

"I like keeping a level of ambiguity because I like when people have interpretations of lyrics that are different from the intention that I put in them," Júlía explains. "At the same time, there is a sincerity that comes with maturity. When you're younger it feels more embarrassing or cringe to be sincere. But now I just don't care."

A similar ambiguity surrounds the title of *Everyone Left*, with its meaning simultaneously suggesting glass-half-full and glass-half-empty perspectives. The title's duality implies those who are present and those who are not. "It's from the lyrics of 'Cigarettes' [the album's second track]," Júlía elaborates. "In that specific context, the singer doesn't want to confess to another person until everyone leaves the party. Instead of being to the point with one another, they just hang around until they're on their own. So, they are everyone who is left while all others have left the party," Júlía explains.

SHOEGAZE TRANSFORMATIONS

Everyone Left captures Oyama transitioning from lush distortion-driven sound towards a more transparent,

watercolour-like texture. Although they don't shy away from shoegaze, the band cannot deny their sonic transformation.

"We love shoegaze and we started as a 100% shoegaze band," Úlfur says. "Our first EP *I Wanna* is just noisy guitars from A to Z. But then we evolved a bit and started turning off the distortion and fuzz, and building some dynamics and some soundscapes in our songs."

"I wouldn't classify us as bonafide shoegaze anymore," Úlfur continues, "I feel like we are more of an indie band with a flavour of shoegaze."

In addition to the band's musical shift, they have also taken a different approach to recording, with the perfectionism of *Coolboy* giving way to spontaneity. "The new album sounds more like us during practice than before," says Úlfur. Some songs, particularly those without drums – "Howl at the Moon" and "Through The Water" – were built from older demos and recorded by Úlfur and Júlía at Studio Harmur, the band's rehearsal space.

Another couple of compositions were finished in the studio. "For 'Sundried,' we were still working on a verse when we went to record it," says Úlfur. "This would have stressed me out 10 years ago. Back then, it was crucial that we go to the studio with a final melody. This time,

we were confident enough to go with the flow," he admits.

HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO

The go-with-the-flow dynamics are augmented by Oyama's longtime guitarist Kári Einarsson as well as new members Jón Þorsteinnsson and Ragnar Jón Hrólfsson on bass and drums, respectively. Making guest appearances on every track is kimono's Alison McNeil, who takes Oyama to a new territory.

nese, and if you put an O, it can be an honorific way to address a mountain," explains Júlía. "It also means a male actor who plays women in kabuki theatre, there is a city and a martial artist with this name too [Zainachi Korean karate master Mas Oyama]."

This multitude of meanings resonates with the songwriting and production principle that has guided both Úlfur and Júlía over the years.

This would have stressed me out 10 years ago.

Everyone Left also marks the point at which a reciprocal fandom comes full circle. "I have been a huge kimono fan since I was a teenager," shares Júlía. "I would go to all their shows. After I started playing with Oyama, Alison came up to me and said she was a big fan of the band."

During another conversation years later, Alison suggested she could play guitar on Oyama's next record. Her presence brings artistic firmness and emotive undertones, especially on the closing track "The Light."

Just like Alison's band, Oyama's name makes references to Japan. "Yama means mountain in Japa-

"To me, shoegaze is a driven band with loud drums but flowing vocals all over it. I've always loved that harmony. I've always liked this combination of energies, relaxed and flowing vocals versus driven guitars and drums," Úlfur explains. "You can call it shoegaze or not, but this formula is always at the back of my mind when I write Oyama songs." ■

Oyama will perform at Iðnó on November 7 during Iceland Airwaves. Listen to *Everyone Left* on available streaming platforms and look out for the vinyl release via Reykjavík Record Shop next December.

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Live From The Faroe Islands

Scraping Tradition: Sk

The Grapevine spends 72 hours getting to know the the Faroe Islands' gras

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

unique, “you’ll find most things in the tourist guides. But there’s an autumn festival happening this weekend – with a sheep-slaughtering competition, if you’re interested.”

One couldn’t think of a more stereotypical welcome to this pocket-sized country coated in tradition and yet I’m here for a different festival – Skrapt.

Skrapt Festival is a brainchild of Sunneva Háberg Eysturstein and Jóel Briem, co-founders of the legendary institution Sirkus in Tórshavn, and musician Pan Thorarensen, the co-founder and artistic director of the Extreme Chill festival.

Sunneva, who hails from the Faroese countryside, moved to Iceland when she was 19 to “party and get away from here.” In Reykjavík, she worked at the late iconic bar Sirkus before starting Sirkus Föroyar in 2009 with Jóel. His mother, Sigríður Guðlaugsdóttir – better known as Sigga Boston – had established the original Sirkus on Klapparstígur in 2000.

For a while Sirkus was the only music venue in town, if you don’t count the Nordic House and the National Theatre. “Everybody played here,” says Sunneva. “For the first five years, we had four or five concerts a week, which became overwhelming in the long run.”

Slowly, a bunch of other venues emerged in Tórshavn, but there was a need for a festival. “Ever since I lived in Iceland and visited Iceland Airwaves back in 2006, I always wanted to bring that to the Faroes – a festival that shows all the cool stuff that’s not on the commercial scene,” Sunneva says. “Most of the things you see in the Faroes are bookings from Denmark, or beer from Denmark, or everything from Denmark, whereas for me, it’s much more natural to bring stuff from Iceland, because that’s what I relate to much more.”

Pan, who not only co-organises Skrapt but is also performing this year – alongside his spacious ambient band Stereo Hypnosis and dreamlike techno-utopian project Apex Anima – adds that Skrapt aims to be a showcase festival. “We’re still figuring things out,” he says. “Next year, we will hopefully invite some other countries to collaborate with us. My festival, Extreme Chill, is in a big collaboration with the festivals all over the Nordics, so the idea is to have Skrapt in this loop so we could send artists on exchange programmes.”

POETIC START, ELECTRONIC FINISH

Skrapt embraces progressive sounds and experimental art in any form – kicking off with a mellow poetry reading. Despite having read earlier that the Faroese tend to go out quite late, I decide to show up at the venue right at 19:00 and find it packed. The crowd – a mix of young and old – are either seated behind round tables, or lining up for a pint of Föroya Bjór’s Slupp, one of the popular choices this weekend.

The recitals are mostly in Faroese and I’m trying hard to focus on the words that sound similar to Icelandic, the experimental videos in the background, or a man, armoured with a headlamp, notepad and a pencil, sketching every artist coming on stage.

The calm and mild atmosphere slightly intensifies, as Stereo Hypnosis takes to the stage. This is a very special concert for at least two of the three members of Stereo Hypnosis, the father-son duo of Pan and Óskar Thorarensen. “The craziest thing about bringing Stereo Hypnosis to the Faroe Islands is the fact that my father used to live here in the 70s. He met my mother here in 1975,” Pan tells me later. “This is his first time here since then. It was always on his bucket list to go to the Faroe Islands and play a small

STUNNING PHOTOGRAPHY

Man hasn’t the imagination to think of shapes that don’t exist in nature.



BIG OR SMALL



This is a living land. Here creation and destruction are simultaneous, as continuous as the rhythm of breathing.

My plane makes a swift turn and the clouds part, offering a first glimpse of the unknown land. A rough ocean stretches below, with islands scattered across its surface – tiny, rugged, dramatic peaks covered in emerald green despite the date on the calendar. I’m filming the view when suddenly the plane plunges into an air pocket, causing a passenger a few rows ahead to scream. I put my phone down and grip my armrest. The aircraft shudders violently as fierce gusts of wind rock its wings, making this powerful machine feel frighteningly fragile. I catch my breath and remind myself that everything will be fine. Two seconds later, the wheels touch down on the runway of Vágar island.

“Welcome to the Faroe Islands,” a stranger says to my companion and I as we slowly stand up, still recovering from the bumpy landing. “I can assure you this was the worst part of your trip. It’s all uphill from here.” We exchange some small talk and ask the stranger, who turns out to be a local, if there’s anything he’d recommend we do or see during our first visit to the Faroes. “Well...” he pauses, trying to think of something



Skript Celebrates The Underground

roots music scene

concert here.”

Unlike the first edition of Skript, which took place in mid-July and centred around one big stage, this

making strides in the Faroese music industry with her first single “Stadig Væk” even nominated for song of the year at the Faroese Music Awards in 2022.

the gig. “I like to think that great artists do several projects, and I try to be a great artist,” he laughs, adding that almost everyone in the group does something else on the side.

the guitarist, and I had been talking a few times when we were drunk that we should make some lo-fi punk stuff together. One day, he just messaged me on Facebook, and said ‘I want to record a bullshit punk single. It’s gonna be called Joe & The Shitboys, you’re gonna be Joe and we’re gonna play shit punk.’”

as we speak after a few beers later at Sirkus. “To go to the Faroe Islands for a festival? It’s insane!”

All it takes is five or 10 good people in the country this small to keep culture and music alive.

“Last night, we had electronic DJ sets all night. That’s not a thing that you get the opportunity to see a lot in the Faroes,” he compliments the energy and vibe of the festival, adding with the wisdom of a 20-year old, “But all it takes is five or 10 good people in the country this small to keep culture and music alive.”

Now, Iggy Pop-approved and touring around the world, Joe & The Shitboys might as well be the most successful band outta Faroe Islands.

On the first sight, Sirkus seems like just another cosy timber-clad bar. But somewhere behind the memorabilia on its walls lies a foundation of Faroese underground music history or at least, a place that gave it a powerful push. Now, with Skript, this teeny-tiny country has a chance to show the world that the Faroe Islands offer much more than sheep and dubious whaling traditions.

edition is spread across three stages. At one of them, versatile singer and producer Nönne delivers a truly electronic feast accompanied by visuals he created himself. The crowd is thirsty for this kind of music and we all dance fervently in the packed-to-brim venue as if this was our last party ever. “Nönne’s been my most positive surprise. He’s just flirting with a lot of genres,” says Sunneva.

MARIUS DC STEALS THE SHOW (AGAIN)

Night two of the festival begins on a high note with a 19-year old Tóra Trond. She starts alone on the piano, then is joined by the band that seems like they’ve just stepped out of high school, despite Sunneva assuring me they are older than they look. Tóra delivers an emotional, lyrical set that belies her young age. I can’t find her on Spotify yet but I overhear that she’s been quickly

Before coming to Skript, my knowledge of the Faroese music scene was limited to a handful of acts Faroe Music Export has been dispatching to Iceland Airwaves. One artist who left a lasting impression two years ago was Marius DC, whose show at lðnó lived up to the legend. I didn’t spot Marius on Skript’s lineup, so imagine my surprise when he joined Ókendir on stage. This collective of rappers, singers, producers and musicians has been around for four years, with Marius only joining last year.

The energy from Ókendir is absolutely electric, and I find myself chanting along in Faroese without knowing the lyrics or the language, pausing only to catch my breath during sax solos.

“We’ve been in the underground for a while, but now we’re coming to the surface,” Marius DC tells me after

INTRO TO SHITPUNK

Next up is Killer Distiller, who Skript organisers describe as “a hardcore two-piece pseudo-heavy metal punk band,” known mostly for their singles “Dazed” and “Confused”. They deliver an absolute banger of a set, despite wearing too much denim. The duo is a side project of members of Joe & The Shitboys – the definitive highlight of the night.

At first glance, a band that calls themselves “queer vegan shitpunks” are difficult to be taken seriously. Their songs, however – despite rarely lasting even a minute – underscore issues like homophobia and misogyny that the conservative Faroe Islands are still known for.

“We met up for the first time in early 2018 when we were all in different bands,” says Friði Djurhuus, or Joe Shit, the band’s frontman. “Ziggy,

SKÁL TO SKRAPT

Skript’s final night is a long-needed retreat from all the dancing, yet the party continues. Festival visitors relocate from Tórshavn’s downtown to the Gundadal swimming pool, where Pan Thorarensen plays an ambient DJ set, while the crowd disperses between three different pools and a cold tub for the bravehearted. The pool is a bit too cold to my liking – the Faroese, unlike their neighbours, don’t have any geothermal water – but with colourful lasers, a smoke machine, shadows reflecting in the water and music that takes your mind away, it’s hard to think of a better location for a wrap-up party of a festival that passed by like a whirlwind.

“We’re making an underground festival for a country of 55,000 people, so you can imagine, if we have 50 people at the concert, it’s like 1000 or 2000 people in Berlin,” says Pan

Somewhere between farewell hugs and final pints, I finally ask Sunneva what Skript means.

“I’ve been wanting to do something that’s shameless,” she says. “I come from a very religious background, and I know that people think that I have no shame because of everything I do.”

“We don’t have the word shameless in Faroese, but what ‘skript’ means is that you’re proud and tough,” Sunneva adds. “Nobody fucks with you.” ■

Trip provided by Skript via Visit Faroe Islands

Skript took place from October 18-20. Visit the festival’s website to stay updated on the next edition: skript.fo. You can also listen to their Spotify playlist titled Skript 2024 to keep up with the Faroese music scene.

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Day Tripping

Touching Moss

Shake off your Airwaves hangover with a day trip that avoids the crowds

WORDS John Rogers
IMAGE Art Bicnick

Iceland over years of repeat visits and treat Airwaves as a kind of annual holiday-cum-cultural pilgrimage. But each year also brings hundreds of newbies into town – wide-eyed first-timers combining the music festival with a city break, a bar-hopping drinkathon, and an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the famous Icelandic wilderness.

We marvelled at the tiny fishing villages that line the northern coast, pulling over often to poke around among the turf houses, mysterious bones and half-frozen waterfalls.

We saw neither the Snæfellsjökull glacier, which was cloistered in thick cloud cover nor another car on the road – it was, mercifully, before Iceland’s tourism boom. It was an unforgettable day with enough fresh air to (almost) enough stave off our three-day hangover.

PICK YOUR POISON

Snæfellsnes, in retrospect, was one of the more ambitious choices on offer. The round trip involves about six hours of driving – and that’s without factoring in the requisite impromptu hikes, waterfall rambles and gas station burger stops. But if you’re an Airwaves-goer who’s thinking about getting out of town, there are plenty of other options to

Whenever Iceland Airwaves blows into town, it’s a certainty that people from all over the world will be riding that same breeze. It’s always an interesting time of year for Reykjavík, when the bars are buzzing with fresh faces who shake up the usual Groundhog Day-esque vibe of 101 nightlife.

Many Airwaves-goers these days are festival veterans – silver-haired indie types who’ve grown fond of

I was one such Airwaves visitor myself when I first set foot in Iceland with a bunch of friends from London, way back in 2007. We had the benefit of having some local pals – the members of drag-punk band Æla – who gave us great advice to ensure our daytrip to Snæfellsnes was a banger. We drove around the peninsula, pausing for walks at the towering Hellnar sea arch and the wreck-age-strewn Djúpalónssandur beach. We stumbled upon the Sönghellir “song cave” and improvised a harmony, listening to the long echoes vanish into the depths of the earth.



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If you don't drive, or want something mega easy and don't mind being among people, then 1) well done for somehow not succumbing to generalised misanthropy, and 2) good news – there are plenty of simple coach trips you can hop onto.

You've maybe heard of The Golden Circle – a classic day out that trundles around a few epic natural sites not too far from town. It's nice, but it has also seen the arrival of a lot of new infrastructure in recent years and lost a lot of its charm as a result. You'll spend a lot of time navigating car parks and gift shops, and jostling in the crowd for a good spot on a viewing platform to catch sight of a waterfall. So while you can't argue with the majesty of Þingvellir, Gullfoss and Geysir, the experience itself may not be quite what you're after.

GO WEST, IN THE OPEN AIR

A good alternative is to hire a car and hit the road. It allows you to be with your pals, have control over the stereo, get off the beaten track and pull over for a closer look when something catches your eye. If you're crowd averse and want to control your destiny to some degree, this is the way to go.

The first road trip option I'd usually throw out there is the Reykjanes peninsula. But all the eruptions in recent years have necessitated a load of road closures, so it's all a bit fucky down there right now. Instead, I'll suggest heading up to Borgarfjörður – a pretty fjord and valley that's only an hour from Reykjavík.

To get there, hit Route One north, take the Hvalfjörður tunnel, then turn right onto route 50 just before the Borgarnes bridge. From there, the roads are few, so if you keep

your eyes open you'll find the good stuff. There's the Deildartunguhver geothermal spring, the historic hamlet of Reykholt and a spectacular 900m long waterfall called Hraunfossar, where a jewel-blue torrent pours from the side of a vast crust of lava.

The road winds onwards around the lava field, with views up to the Langjökull glacier on a clear day. The Viðgelmir tunnel is out there, too, with guided underground tours if you wanna get all spelunky and Jules Verne about it.

On the way back, a dip at the Krauma spa is worth the entrance fee to relax your body and mind in some steamy geothermal water. After that, go for a coffee and cake stop at Kaffi Kyrrð in Borgarnes – a charmingly chintzy little café with loads of diving decks that'll help you ascertain your destiny for the night (and life) that lies ahead.

THE STEAMY VALLEY

If the weather out west is particularly bad, you could also go inland from Reykjavík. Route One south will take you past Rauðhólar – a series of dramatic, shattered, bright ochre volcanic craters right at the city limits. From there, it's only a forty minute drive over the Hellisheiði mountain pass to the garden town of Hveragerði.

One of the main events there is the Reykjadalur trail – a relatively chill one to two hour mountain hike to a high geothermal valley where you can bathe in a warm river. It is just a mountain river though, so there are minimal facilities, of course – take some cold tinnies and snacks, and bear in mind that you'll have to expose your butt to the elements to have a dip.

The town also has a couple of great restaurants to regain your energy

– the Ölverk brewery and pizzeria being a Grapevine fave – and if your hike gets rained off, the town pool is like something out of a Wes Anderson movie. But if the skies are clear and you wanna catch sight of some glaciers and black sand beaches and so forth, keep going south on Route One until the landscape gets dramatic – you'll find what you're looking for.

Those are just a couple of relaxed Airwaves day trip options. There are hundreds more, so if none of them floated your boat, check out grapevine.is/travel for more ideas – there's a years-long archive covering all areas of Iceland, so something's bound to catch your eye.

Good luck out there. Drive safe. Try not to become a "Tourist Falls Down Hole" news story that we have to write about. And happy Airwaves! ■



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Culinary Institutions

Three Decades Of De

Reykjavik's fine dining icon reveals its secret sauce to enduring success

WORDS Shruthi Basappa
IMAGES Austur-Indíafjelaði

reminded me of water filled things being squashed.

island when it comes to global occurrences. When Chandrika arrived here in the 80s as Chandrika Gopalpur Chandrashekar there was, "Taj Mahal Tandoori and Sushi Bar," she guffaws out loud. She eventually bought the place with husband Gunnar Gunnarsson.

The dance of flavours and textures as the crispy puri and spicy water meld is writ large on the bewildered and awe-tinged expressions of my fellow diners. It is a fitting start to the

For me, it was a personal thing – it was home away from home – I was not going to make anything different from what I would eat in my home.

"This is a pani puri," Chandrika Gunnarsson says as she nimbly places shot glasses of verdant pani with a perfect sphere of puri on top. "Or golguppa," she says, offering up another name for the popular street snack. The deep fried hollow puri is cracked open slightly, stuffed with a thimble of lightly spiced boiled potatoes. The pani is minty water, flavoured with roasted cumin and green chillies. Chandrika describes the morsels while instructing us to pour the pani into the puri before eating it in one bite. Just as the liquid filled puri explodes in your mouth, its other Indian name, "puchka," springs to mind – the onomatopoeic word has always

30th anniversary meal at Austur-Indíafjelaði and an instant reminder of just why this institution continues to be relevant three decades after first opening its doors.

To diners (and readers) from outside of Iceland, pani puri is perhaps not the ground-breaking food barrier it is to local diners here in Iceland. And therein lies the answers to the curiosity that is Austur-India. Unlike the U.S. or U.K., which saw a wave of immigration from the formerly colonised that lasted well into the 70s, Iceland has been a relatively distant

Despite the slim pickings at the time, Icelanders were no strangers to Indian cuisine. "Most people we knew had been educated abroad," Chandrika recalls. "So they already knew Indian food from their Indian colleagues at universities, their fellow students in classes. They knew it apart from the curry house fare."

"But why Austur-India is Austur-India comes down to two things," she explains. "When Gunnar came to India the first time, the food cooked at home was very different from food

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cadence At Austur-Indíafjlagið

he had eaten in any restaurant. We knew [what we served in our restaurant] couldn't be generic fare peddled as Indian food. For me, it was a personal thing – it was home away from home – I was not going to make anything different from what I would eat in my home.

“The focus is: would I serve this in my home? If I don't, why would I serve it here?”

The second defining driver of Austur-India is about a particular hospitality. “It's what we are taught. You give the guest that comes to your home the best that you can give, even if it means taking it away from your own plate and giving it to them.”

30 FOR 30

Austur-India's 30th anniversary menu is chock full of their biggest hits from over the years. Today the restaurant stands in the exact same location as it did in 1994, running on the same kennitala, and has grown in foot print, even as the menu remains a tight orchestration of regional flavours.

Diners can choose from an attractively priced set menu at 14,990 ISK or choose their own adventure by

ordering from the hefty selection of the restaurant's greatest hits. The deep green Hara Bhara Kebab (2024, 3090 ISK) of minced peas and spinach will silence even the staunchest meat lover. I am particularly partial to the Seekh Kebabs (1996, 3390 ISK), a juicy, moreish lamb kebab that is hand minced, marinated in a special blend of fresh green chillies, ginger, garlic and ground whole spices. The mixture is then hand pressed onto sword-like skewers and cooked in the tandoor to delightful perfection. Pair this with a masala kulcha on the side, with a dab of the accompanying garlic sharp burrani-esque raita and I assure you will look at desi kebabs and grills in a whole new light.

The Cod Pollichathu (2008, 3190 ISK) is a readaptation of the Kerala classic, with cod subbing in for pearl spot. The fresh onion-tomato-garlic based masala is smothered over fish, wrapped in a fresh banana leaf package and griddle cooked. The singed emerald bundle arrives like a present at the table – one that you must open and devour right away to savour the steamed-in-its-own juice-heightened-by-goju magic that renders the cod flaky and most like itself.

Kori Gassi (2008, 5890 ISK) is yet another classic South Indian curry, this time from Mangalore. It's teeming with that unique blend of fenu-greek-cumin-coconut-chillies distinct to Tuluva households. A study in balancing delicate fragrant spices with the warmth of roast ground chilli-coconut milk, I recommend trying this with simple steamed rice for the optimum enjoyment of the layered flavours.

KARRÍ ER EKKI KARRÍ

Austur-Indíafjlagið's anniversary menu is a taste of nostalgia for those like food critic and writer Steingrímur Sigurgeirsson, who

ers. Icelandic lamb curry served as inspiration, resulting in the delicately fragrant Kaja Gosht Masala, red-olent with creamy ground cashew nuts and sweet green cardamom.

It is a tightrope act of satisfying customers whilst educating them and training their palates to understand the nuances of Indian cuisine beyond generic butter chicken. Chandrika is candid in her reflections: “We did not want the challenges to make us change what we want to offer. Instead, we decided to take these challenges head on. Whether it was importing the spices, growing coriander,” she pauses. “And, of course, it helps that I come

ing with, ‘Oh, you have this place on Hverfisgata? Who even goes to Hverfisgata?’

“And I honestly needed a job,” she adds with classic Chandrika candour.

FOR THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE

What sets the success and endurance of Austur-India apart from other restaurants is their tenacious focus on serving Indian food the way it's meant to be. Apart from the pantry quality, a significant way this has been achieved is by its commitment to getting the best talent from India. Is there a better testimonial to claims of Austur-India being a family business than the fact that their longest serving chefs have been in the kitchen for more than 29 years?

For the first year, there were three people in the kitchen: Gunnar and his two childhood friends, Jón and Karl, who had prior culinary experience by way of starting a pizzeria. Chandrika was the lone waitress. When a pregnant Chandrika had a kitchen accident, it was clear that they needed to rethink their plan and the team started an intentional search for chefs in India, often

Those who meet Chandrika even once, come away feeling the confidence and power she exudes.

famously catapulted the restaurant into public imagination with his 1996 review, “Karrí er ekki Karrí.” That exact “karrí” (curry) is on the anniversary menu now, honouring the restaurant's steadfast ethos of marrying the homes of its found-

from a family of plantations where spices are freshly grown – to carry the cardamom and pepper from Coorg added that personal touch. It was about not compromising; I was already making too many other compromises. I was already deal-

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stopping to make enquiries when they encountered an especially well made dish. Which is how the first chefs, Lakshman and Madaiah were found.

Chefs Lakshman Rao and Madaiah Kalaiah have been with the restaurant ever since, though they now both split their time between Austur-Indía and Hraðlestin. Many of Austur-Indía's early hits – like the Chicken 65, Vindaloo and Kaja Gosht – can be credited to their ingenuity of bridging customer expectation while honouring tradition and technique. Such is their expertise that Lakshman boasts of the rare privilege of having cooked for the late British monarch Queen Elizabeth.

“My first night in Iceland, in January 1995, I didn't sleep all night because of the 'heavy construction' outdoors,” chef Lakshman remembers. Chandrika cannot hold her laughter, clarifying that, “it was no construction, it was a classic winter storm!”

Lakshman and Madaiah are still amused. “We had no inkling of what cold was until we got here. And after two years, we were ready to leave.”

But they didn't. By then, Austur-Indía had grown a reputation for being a cut above the rest for its food and hospitality. In a country starved for good service, Chandrika and Gunnar vehemently stuck to their

mantra that the “front of house are ambassadors of the cuisine and the kitchen.”

It isn't just the restaurant that has grown, customers have grown alongside. Lakshman recounts a lunch incident where a lunch customer was angry and upset about being served a hollow, puffy bhatura. You can enjoy this dish at the Hradlestin Grandi brunch today, but in 1996, the customer felt “cheated.”

Chefs Sheikh Jalauddin and Mahipal Singh, who man the tandoor grill stations and curries, having worked 18 and 22 years at Austur-Indía, respectively, echo their observation that the Icelandic guest today eats spicier food, demands authenticity and is overall a more aware dinner guest than they were in those early days.

The consistency in Austur-Indía's food and service can sometimes make expertise look effortless and easy; but the choreography of flavour, technique and timing, shines through in every dish, particularly with the tandoor, a testament to chef Johnson George's leadership. To adapt a cuisine that eats with its hand translated to perfecting la cuisson for a cutlery-based culture speaks volumes about both customer insight, as well as dogged determination to marry seemingly opposite expectations. Notice how the Harrison Ford favourite Gosht

Kalimirsch is grilled to medium rare, as is the Kodava Pepper Fry, where the lamb retains a toothsome bite ideal for fork and knife dining. So while the menu may come across as traditional to the untrained eye, it is in the dining of it that such distinctions and innovations become apparent.

ACCOLADES AND MILESTONES

“Focus and follow through,” Chandrika asserts, stressing on each word, “and committing to the customer,” is the secret sauce.

I marvel at the formidable figure she is. Those who meet her even once, come away feeling the confidence and power she exudes. In a predominantly male industry with few immigrants at the helm, she has built Austur-Indíafjelagið into a brand that is steadfastly associated with value and quality. Maskina recently honoured sister restaurant Hraðlestin as the most customer-recommended restaurant of 2024. Their range of ready sauces were the first Icelandic brand in that category to be sold on Costco shelves.

“I want to give the Icelanders the benefit of the doubt that maybe they don't realise how difficult this is for me,” Chandrika is open about her struggles. It is a matter of great pride for Chandrika that her chefs come from premier hospitality

schools, with an enviable roster of staging and professional experiences from some of the most decorated kitchens in India.

However, challenges with both immigration and the department of labour have been a recurring woe. Local institutions often lack international know-how and systems are woefully archaic and white washed, ignoring the wealth of diverse experience that qualified chefs bring with them. Hospitality is a five-year bachelor programme in India, whereas local schools offer only 12 or 18-month studies. The paperwork alone for non-EU experts is daunting. Yet, somehow Chandrika remains enthusiastic and positive.

“It simply had to work. That's just how my thought process has been all along. ‘The chef has to come.’ If I choose this guy, he has to come. I'm not going to let anybody (unfamiliar with Indian cuisine) decide for the Icelandic people what I should offer to them, because they don't know it as well as we do. So it's for me to say, okay, these people will now teach Icelanders what a specific taste is meant to be.”

When asked what centres her, Chandrika takes a deep breath and a few moments before delivering her reply. “I think the guest, the compliment, just one person to say, ‘Wow, this is the best meal we have had in a while,’ that will carry me for many

more months until the next compliment. I'm like that.”

“I think when you go into the heart of a wedding, a confirmation, a Christmas dinner, then you know that you've done something right, those one or two people give you the hope to keep going on. That really gives me comfort, as if they're saying, ‘Go for it! Keep doing what you're doing.’”

“I choose to just have complete gratitude,” Chandrika says, reflecting on the journey so far and what's to come. “And I say that from the absolute bottom of my heart because if people did not feel as special every single time, they would not come back. I'm honoured that they choose us every single time over somebody else.”

“This heritage is our responsibility and I will always represent India when it comes to this cuisine. I take pride in that this is an old cuisine that is coming into a relatively new culture. I think that when we are carrying that responsibility, we carry the responsibility through and through.”

Austur-Indíafjelagið's 30th anniversary menu will be available through November, December and January, with occasional tweaks and additions here and there. Book your table by calling 552-1630 or visiting dineout.is.






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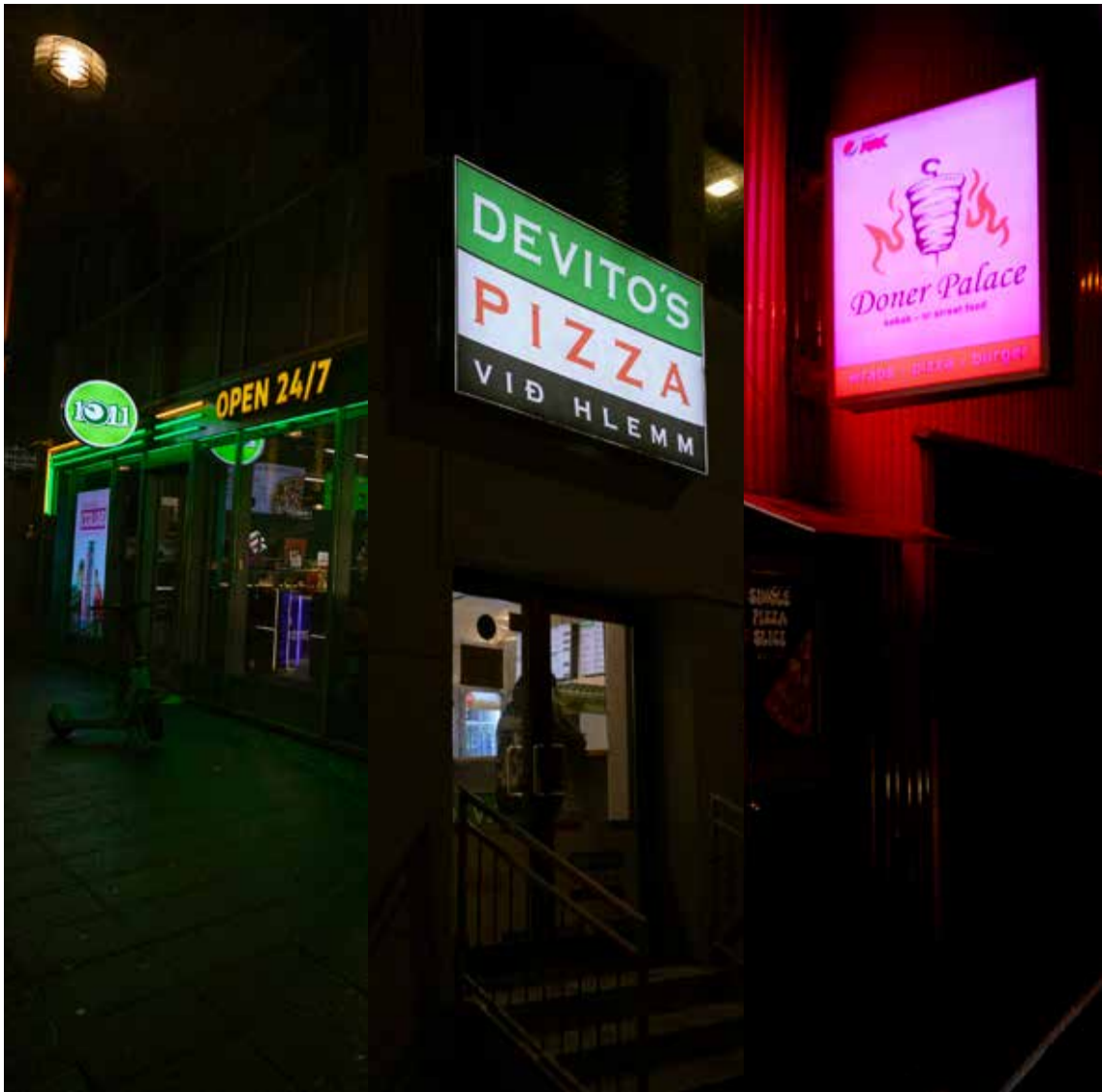


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Late Night Bites

Midnight Munchie Madness

Where to get the best (or at least most accessible) sustenance late at night

WORDS Grayson Del Faro
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

So, you've found yourself in Reykjavik. Maybe you're here for Airwaves or maybe you're not. But the concert just ended or the club just closed. It's late, it's cold and it's probably raining. If you're really unlucky, it's possibly even snowing. Either way, you're drunk and hungry. You have to grab something — anything! — to eat lest waking up tomorrow morning (or afternoon if that's your thing) will be unbearable. Don't worry, we've got your back. Here are some of the best open late options to sustain you in these trying times.

10/11

I'm afraid we have no choice but to include 10/11 on this list due to its convenience, but we'll also file it under the "necessary evil" category for its outrageous pricing. If it's outrageously priced even by the standards of the most expensive country in the world, you know it's gotta be bad.

That said, it's the only place that's truly open 24/7, so when all else fails, 10/11 will be there for you. In addition to serving up Sbarro pizza by the slice and the exact same hot dogs as that famous stand around the corner, they also have everything else you can imagine an Icelandic convenience store might offer. Maybe you want skyr and a banana? Maybe you want a bar of fancy chocolate and a bag of trashy chips? Maybe you want a whole cucumber for reasons you don't care to explain right now? They'll have all that and more, and all it will cost is a

kidney. But let's be real, your kidney isn't really worth much after tonight, anyway.

HLÖLLABÁTAR

This is the place for anyone craving a gloriously greasy sub sandwich. With a name that means something like "happy boats" and which is lovingly referred to by locals as "Hlölli," it's a bit like the OG Icelandic alternative to Subway (which already closed at 9 like the cowards they are).

Hlölli's got all the belly-busting combos of cold cuts, cheeses and sauces your heartburn desires, each with a funny nickname that'll probably go over your head unless you speak Icelandic. But that's okay, because there are even a few combos that include questionably tasty but unquestionably Icelandic ingredients like lamb and even one with shrimp. They're open until 5:30 a.m. on weekends, so stop by and grab a boat that'll sail you off into tomorrow.

DÖNER PALACE

While Mandi may be the most popular late-night kebab joint, that also comes with the curse of its late-night chaos, meaning lines on lines on lines. So let me introduce you to Döner Palace, which stays open until 6 a.m. and occupies a less conspicuous but still convenient location just off Laugavegur. As its name suggests, the Palace has all your döner, shawarma and falafel needs covered, but it also boasts one of those weirdly long menus that includes all kinds of unexpected munchies. They've got burgers, they've got pizzas, they've got wings, plus onion rings, rice and everything nice. Whether they'll still make all of those things at whatever ungodly hour you arrive is a gamble, but when in doubt, in döner we trust.

DEVITO'S PIZZA

This is one of the longest-running pizza joints in Reykjavik and it's held out all this time for a damn good reason. It's just solid. It's one of few places left that still sells pizza by the slice. Couple that fact with its no-frills deli-esque interior and you're the closest you'll get to a cheap New York slice on this side of the Atlantic. (The north side, obviously!) Located just off Hlemmur Square, it's convenient for 105 locals and all those staying in the vortex of glitzy new hotels around that part of town. Keep in mind it closes at 1 a.m., making it perfect for the early birds amongst the night owls.

LÆKJARTORG

Food trucks often jockey for positions at Lækjartorg on the weekends, but the options are a complete game of roulette. Icelanders are famously bad at managing their money, both on a personal and national level. This means that no one has cash left to party come the end of the month and the streets are half empty, including Lækjartorg. On the first weekend of the month or during any festival like Airwaves, however, the cup overfloweth. Vöfluvagninn spends their days stationed next to Hallgrímskirkja but is possibly the most trustworthy presence at Lækjartorg by night. They offer Belgian-style waffles with all kinds of sugary toppings for those who prefer to end their wild night by treating their sweet tooth rather than testing their tummy with a greasy gut-bomb.

The important thing to remember after a night of Airwaves audacity is you deserve whatever your heart and/or stomach desires. So have some fun this weekend and, most importantly, don't go home hungry. You'll thank yourself tomorrow! ■

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Chosen By The Music

Organist and conductor Erla Rut Káradóttir meets us in her office: Háteigskirkja

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

As I walk into Háteigskirkja, or as I would casually refer to it, “the spiky church,” I’m greeted by an incredible sight – the sun is setting over the city, its rays radiating through the church’s large windows, drawing me in. “I think it’s the cosiest church,” says Erla Rut Káradóttir, catching me curiously looking around. Erla is Háteigskirkja’s organist and choir conductor, but her career almost took a completely opposite direction.

I started studying singing when I was five years old and sang in choirs throughout my childhood and adolescence. Later, I transitioned to

piano, which I continued until I was about 19. My parents are not professional musicians, but there’s always been a lot of singing in my extended family. My mom has always sung in a choir and I followed her to rehearsals since I was three.

I grew up in that space – it’s always been a part of my life. Becoming an organist sort of just happened, really.

I didn’t choose this path, but music chose me.

I feel like I didn’t choose this path, but music chose me. It was like a pull. I was already studying something else, pursuing a master’s degree in anthropology at Háskóli Íslands, but I felt that when I’m older, I wouldn’t be happy with myself if I had given up on music. So I decided

to throw the other career away and pursue this one.

I wanted to learn choral conducting, so I started researching where I could study that. An organist friend I knew, who has since passed away, encouraged me to go all the way and study organ as well. Becoming an organist requires quite specific education. You can study at the School of Church Music of the National Church of Iceland. I did that and also

studied at the Iceland Academy of the Arts, where I earned a BA degree in Church Music. The programme didn’t have many students – in my first year, I was the only one.

I was getting a lot of encouragement on all sides; my organ teacher was really encouraging me to continue

this path and I also had teachers at HÍ encouraging me to continue as well. Then it came to the point where I was a full-time master student with two kids, also studying the organ and conducting and working on the side. I didn’t have time for everything, so I had to choose. It came to a point when I had to consider what I would think when I looked back. What often keeps many young people from pursuing a career in the arts is their fear of income insecurity and whether it’s sustainable in the long run, but I believe that if you’re doing what you love, things tend to work out.

FAR BEYOND THE KEYS

I’ve been working as an organist for nine years. I have a full-time position here at Háteigskirkja, but I do freelance work, one-off projects all over – like funerals and concerts. Most organists I know have other jobs, though not as organists, except for

those who teach.

One thing I didn’t know when I started this job is how little of it involves playing the organ – just a small part of the job is solo performing. Usually, it’s about accompanying, singing and leading the congregation. Choral conducting is a big part of my job – my main focus, in fact. Beyond that, I also work with the elderly and children, and there’s also admin work.

If someone had asked me if I wish there was more organ playing years ago, I probably would have said yes. But my answer now is no – I love what I do, not only just playing the organ.

I also lead a choir called Kordía, which consists of trained singers. We rehearse weekly and perform concerts – a quartet from the group leads our regular masses, with more singers joining during Christmas and Easter.



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I collaborate with other musicians mostly for concerts – if I'm asked to accompany choirs and singers,

Tómasson – the only organ builder in Iceland – comes here to tune and clean it every year. Our organ is very

One thing I didn't know when I started this job is how little of it involves playing the organ.

and sometimes a band. What kind of music organists play is mostly a personal preference. Some organists only do church music, while others participate in more contemporary stuff and others prefer renaissance stuff.

A VERSATILE INSTRUMENT

The organ is the queen of instruments. This one here is really small, it was supposed to be temporary, but like so many temporary things, it's become quite permanent. Although historically, the organ is a church instrument and most of them are located inside churches, it's useful for so many things. You can play anything on it – it's like a whole orchestra. Unlike the piano that has only one sound, the organ has many colours and many sounds.

But organs can fail too. It hasn't happened to me, but I was at a funeral a few years ago when my friend was playing, and all of a sudden, in the postlude, he stopped playing, but the choir sang on. I was like, "What is happening? Why isn't he playing?" It turned out that the organ had indeed failed. So it does happen, but I've been lucky – my failures have mostly been maybe my iPad that I forgot to charge, or something like that. I get nervous when it's coming to the end and it's down to 8%. But most of us know our parts well enough to carry on without notation.

The organ requires yearly tuning. I can tune some of it, but Björgvin

sensitive to cold, so it tends to pitch higher in the wintertime. We try to keep the door closed, but it's really a matter of keeping the space evenly heated.

LIFE IN A CHURCH OFFICE

I work every weekend, every Christmas and every Easter. I only have two weekends off each semester, plus a summer break. Some days I'm here from nine in the morning till 10 in the evening, while other days I work from home. Sometimes I only work in my office, while on other days I'm all over town. It really depends on the day.

The organ is the queen of instruments.

This schedule definitely shapes my family life. But I chose this and it has its advantages as well. Two of my children sing with choirs, both of them actually here in two different choirs, so I can incorporate them into my life. Otherwise, it would be quite sad to be here, always away from them during holidays.

I consider myself lucky to get to be a part of people's big moments in life, and that includes both happy and sad moments. Death is an integral part of life, so I don't distance myself from it, but I don't maybe go emotionally all in.

CREATIVITY AND TRADITION

Háteigskirkja is turning 60 years old next year. It's a really popular church for all kinds of services – weddings, baptism, funerals, concerts. The atmosphere here is very special – it's a good place to sing and perform.

I love playing Christmas Eve. I love the hymns and everything about playing Christmas but there's something special about playing Easter morning as well – it's early in the morning, everyone is dressed up and everyone is so happy. It's finally spring, at least usually, and the music is also special.

Some performances include me practising for hours, and others include just gathering the sheet music and walking in. It doesn't matter if the occasion is small or big, I prepare so that I am prepared – I want to be able to give my best performance.

There's definitely a space for creativity in my work but it also depends on the church and tradition in the church. The last job I had before this one was at a five-year old church at the time, and we were doing all sorts of stuff that wouldn't be considered traditional. Háteigskirkja is definitely more traditional but I just find ways to be creative within that frame.

I see it as my job to encourage people to participate in hymn singing. I'm not performing for them, I'm performing with them, engaging with the congregation. That is incredibly rewarding both for me and everyone involved. There's nothing like bringing people together in music. ■

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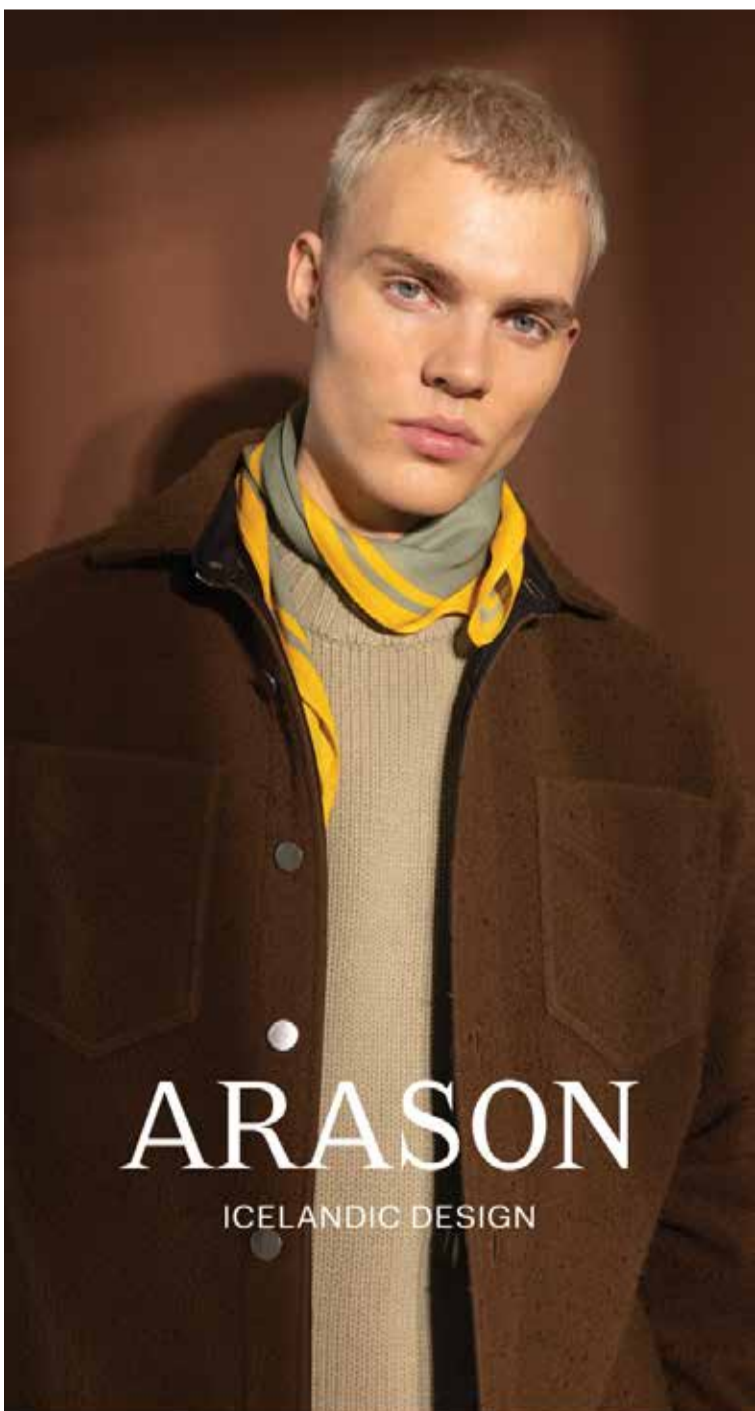
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The Haul

The Airwaves & Election Survival Shopping Bag

It's a busy month ahead; let's get shopping

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGES The Internet

Oof, what a month. November will see us prepping for, experiencing and recovering from Iceland Airwaves and bracing for the elections on Nov. 30. It's time to gear up and get ready. Here's what's in our shopping bag. ■



1



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3



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8

1. *Axel Arigato Observer Puffer Jacket* – For those chilly walks between Airwaves venues – 75.900 ISK, available from *Andrá, Laugavegur 16*

2. *And Anti Matter Bang No Job Top* – To be the coolest person at the concert – 56.900 ISK, available from *KIOSK Grandi, Grandagarður 35*

3. *Treo Tablets* – For those post-party nights when you may be feeling a little worse for wear – 2.070 ISK, available from *Lyfjaver* or other pharmacies in town

4. *66 North Straumur swimsuit* – to soak away the festival or your pre-election jitters at the pool – 15.900 ISK, available from *66 North Hafnartorg*

5. *Hugleikur Dagsson Here's To You Gentlemen* – A print to add to your nihilism about society – \$29 USD, available from *Dagsson.com*

6. *Nordic Angan Black Lava Facial Mask* – For a little self care amidst the madness – 4.106 ISK, available from *shop.grapevine.is*

7. *New Balance MR530 Shoes* – To walk away when it all burns down – 19.990 ISK, available from *Húrra Reykjavík, Hverfisgata 18A*

8. *Keffiyah Scarf* – To stay warm while showing solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for freedom – 6.101 ISK, available from *shop.grapevine.is* in support of the *Iceland-Palestine Association*



Now And Then

Smiðja/Smithy 101 Reykjavík

A monument to the selective ambitions of government

WORDS Jón Trausti Sigurðsson
IMAGES Joana Fontinha & Borgarbókasafn

The massive building — the cushiest of government offices — is located in a part of Reykjavík that has been in use since the very beginning of human settlement on this island. In fact, when archeological work on the site took place before construction of the fancy new building, it was discovered that the plot had been the site of a smithy in the 9th century.

Over the past 1,000 years, numerous other buildings have occupied the plot, but most have been of little consequence and thus of little interest. The building seen in the archival image is a two-storey timber structure built in 1895 by Geir Zoega, a well-known man in his day. In the 70s and 80s it served as the main office of Alcoholics Anonymous and it was later acquired by painter Sigurður Örylgsson, who moved the entire house to Skerjafjörður, where it still stands today.

The new structure was built by and for Alþingi, the Icelandic parliament. At a time in which infrastructure is in disarray countrywide, and when every other school and kindergarten is riddled with mould that the government cannot seem to find the money, resources or time to deal with, parliamentarians have proven that, if prioritised, an oversized, enormously expensive building for their exclusive use can be built in record time. The system works!

We're all anxiously awaiting the time when MPs finally figure out how to apply similar resources and urgency to something or someone other than themselves. That's something all 63 of them can ponder in the luxury of their new building where they're afforded more than 100 square metres per MP, while the rest of us can go fuck ourselves. ■

It was just weeks ago that this domineering new 6,400 square metre building was fully ready for use. Work on its foundations only started in February 2020, so it was built fast at an estimated cost of 5,6 billion Icelandic krónur.

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Musings The Christmas Before The Nightmare

Charlie has a plan to combat Christmas creep

WORDS Charlie Winters
IMAGE The Reykjavik Grapevine Archives

For even with its army of skeletoned boys, sexy blood-covered nurses and expired candy, Halloween can no longer hold back the deluge that is Christmas. Like many, I am ambivalent towards Christmas. I like celebrating Jesus's pagan-themed birthday as much as anyone else, but I'd like to keep my All Hallows' Eve as spooky as possible. So today, we're talking about the Christmas Creep (no, it isn't me) and more importantly, we're figuring out how to stop it!

This problem, I believe, is particularly prevalent in Iceland since a large chunk of the economy is bolstered by selling merch depicting Grýla and the Boys to tourists waddling off their cruise ships to buy the ugliest Christmas baubles I have ever seen. I swear to god if I get another drunk tourist trying to tell me Leppalúði lore I'm going to drown myself in the Blue Lagoon. I'm already dreading the arrival of the terrifying Yule Lad holograms that go up over the city. This has got to stop.

So, what is Christmas creep? Imagine if it was Christmas every day. Wouldn't that be amazing? No? Then you're not thinking about our corporate overlords! Christmas creep is a trend that occurs within many major businesses who have noticed that the Christmas season tends to be their most lucrative time of year. So, they think to themselves, "Hey, how bout we just sell Christmas shit earlier and earlier to maximize those profits! It's clear that customers just love Christmas products. Right?!" And now we've been dealing with Christmas in fucking September ever since Santa sold his rights to be on the Coca Cola bottle after they shot that one polar bear. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that these early Christ-themed guerilla tactics boost sales for large retailers, so even though hating on Christmas creep is common, it seems to be an effective marketing strategy.

Since Alþingi has once again failed to respond to my petition to cancel Christmas and Reykjavík has gone so far as to declare its intentions to become a "Christmas city," I propose another solution: malicious compliance. If Christmas supplies are being peddled to us in October, I want Christmas vacation now! If poor retail workers have to listen to "All I Want For Christmas Is You" one season early, they might as well get their minimum wage bonuses starting in early autumn.

In theory, is it harmful for stores to put up Christmas decorations to scam shoppers into buying more junk they don't need? Probably not. But does it constantly remind me of the gradual decline of our society into a late-stage capitalist hellscape of our own making, the only escape from which is to flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of an age of mercantilism? Yes. ■

Darkness falls across the land, the dancing hour is close at hand. Grizzly ghouls go door to door, to spread the spooks from roof to floor. And though you fight to stay alive, your body starts to shiver, for no mere mortal can resist the — Ah shit, no! It's Santa and his deer, they're beating my ass with Christmas cheer.

Gingerbread houses, Mariah Carey, the smell of skata in the air: what do all of these have in common? They shouldn't be around in fucking October, that's what!

Hello everyone, Charlie here, and I come to you today with a warning.



Opinion

Replacing Fear With Hope

With elections approaching in the U.S. and Iceland, lazy tactics prevail

WORDS Jón Trausti Sigurðarson
IMAGE Hörður Sveinsson

On November 5, voters in the U.S. will elect the next global dictator for a four-year term. This election, even more so than the previous two elections, has been marked by both candidates campaigning on fear. One candidate on the fear of [insert long, often incoherent list here], the other candidate on the (far from unfounded) fear of what the election of their opponent would mean for the future of democracy and the U.S. as a whole. Iceland, meanwhile, will hold snap

elections on Nov. 30. The stakes are lower – elections in Iceland won't affect global security – but what is similar is how candidates are pandering to voters' baser instincts: fear

Fear is a great motivator for getting people to vote, because of its crass baseness. It motivates much like hunger. But its side effects are by now very apparent in the U.S., sparking increased polarization and deep distrust of that other half of the population that votes differently. That distrust is most often not valid – many voters would in most cases find themselves in agreement on many things when it comes down to it.

However, you cannot have the politics of fear without a general and real sense of something being wrong and that wrong needing to be put right. All countries have their

problems, though on drastically different scales, but once stuff feels half broken for long enough, apathy tends to set in, followed by desperation. Iceland's problems are on a different scale than those in America. But they are there and the majority of the population senses that something is wrong after 30 years of laissez-faire capitalism in the West. Whatever caused it, a lot of our basic services and institutions seem to be in need of a major overhaul.

But this won't be solved by adopting a politics of fear. Politics of fear are lazy politics. They are the lowest common denominator; the most stupid; the easiest way to win elections. They are what you resort to when you have no ideas left – when you have no plans to solve the problems at hand but you'd still really like to be in power.

Many of Iceland's political parties

are also engaging in a different way of masking their lack of political ideas: by drafting Icelandic mini-celebrities to populate their candidate lists. Still, it's the increase in fear mongering as election day inches closer that is most problematic. Case in point is the current prime minister's remarks on multiculturalism. His party is polling horribly – probably because the voters no longer believe the Independence Party can deliver on two of their key planks: being business friendly and delivering economic stability. So predictably, having come up short on new ideas and with very few voters still falling for the old ones, the party has nothing to run on but fear in the form of good 'ol lazy racism.

But our problems won't be solved through the politics of fear or by the familiar faces of mini-celebrities shilling for one party or another. The

solution comes through adopting a politics of hope. But the politics of hope require work to be done. You have to come up with complex policy ideas and plans, you have to foster a shared purpose and aim towards some sort of a goal for society, then you have to tell your voters about it and convince them of the right path forward. I know, this is hard work, but for the love of the almighty, it isn't too much to ask, is it?

So, dear political parties of Iceland, I beg you: come up with some political platforms and policy ideas about how to build a better Iceland, so we can have an election campaign run on hope instead of the same stupid, inefficient, lazy and destructive fear (with a sprinkling of mini-celebrities) we've come to expect. ■



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Potent Quotables

Man, my LinkedIn is ridiculous right now. I'm an educated life coach, a Yin Yoga teacher, a Reiki healer and a 9D breathwork facilitator.

Remember Arnór Dan? The musician explains his absence as he prepares his return to the stage on page 12

It would probably be good for the next government to be made up of parties that generally agree on major issues.

Ahead of the snap election, Elías Þórsson looks at the state of Icelandic politics on pages 14-16

I feel like we've grown as lyricists.

Oyama prepares for their Airwaves gig and talks about their new album *Everyone Left* on page 33

If we have 50 people at the concert, it's like 1000 or 2000 people in Berlin.

The Grapevine visits the Skript Festival and takes a glimpse into the musical underworld of the Faroe Islands on page 34

I take pride that it is an old cuisine that is coming into a relatively new culture.

Shruthi Basappa celebrates the local fine dining institution Austur-Índiafjallagið on page 38

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