

The Reykjavík Grapevine



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Volume 22

Issue 1 2025

Best before February 6

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On The Cover

Three days at sea feels like an eternity when you're used to all the comforts of urban life. Why sail to Iceland when you could fly? And who takes the last ship of the year on purpose? Iryna Zubenko took the long way home on *Norræna* from Hirsthals to Seyðisfjörður, documenting life on board this floating time capsule.

Read about how she killed time on pages 14-16.

COVER IMAGE:
Joana Fontinha

Editorial Quiet Resolve

WORDS Catharine Fulton
Editor in Chief

I realised, as I trudged through the snow with my partner and children on New Year's Eve, that it had been a few days since I had been outside. Aside from one day spent in the office between Þorláksmessa and the close of the year, I had ridden out the holiday hubbub in the comfort and quiet of my home and it was magnificent. The quiet, the solitude, the time for contemplation and connection. Those are the conditions in which I can feel most authentically myself. That is the atmosphere, in which I can hear my own thoughts and sit with them for a spell, that I am at my most creative and when I can solve seemingly any problem that arises.

There is power in quiet and introversion that is often overlooked or discarded entirely in this world where the person who talks fastest and loudest is considered the best, or most active and effective simply because they make a show of their *doing* (with nary a thought spared, of course, for how their whirlwind-potentially impacts the doing of others). The quiet ones in our midst are also doing, we are also achieving and thinking and formulating grand ideas.

I pulled Susan Cain's *Quiet* from my bookshelf over the holiday hiatus, too, and was reminded of the waste of talent, energy and happiness that takes place when introverts are dismissed or overlooked. In the word of one inexcusably loud public figure whose boisterousness too many equate with validity of thought: SAD.

Though it was my colleague Iryna Zubenko who boarded the *Norræna* ship for its final sailing of the season from Denmark to Iceland – sink into her feature on pages 14 to 16 – I imagine it is an experience I would have found renewing. Iryna was looking for the romance of adventure and found quiet mundanity.

Leaning into the power of my introversion is my resolution for the year ahead. In being unapologetically quiet, I can only imagine the creativity I'll be able to unleash within myself. I look forward to it.

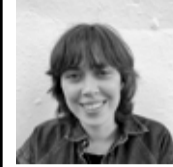
Free Palestine. ■

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 Skoffin and in the post-dreifing art collective, Jóhannes is fascinated by the Icelandic music scene. Among his interests are politics, history and pop culture.



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!?

Politicians, Incoming And Outgoing

A selection of stories making headlines in recent weeks

WORDS The Reykjavik Grapevine
IMAGE Micah Garen

WELCOME, VALKYRIES

On December 21, the leaders of the Social Democratic Alliance (Samfylking), Liberal Reform Party (Vidreisn) and the People's Party (Flokkur Fólksins) presented the makeup of their coalition government and its agenda during a press conference at Hafnarborg in Hafnarfjörður.

Led by Prime Minister Kristrún Frostadóttir, the coalition promises reforms aimed at streamlining public administration, strengthening welfare programs, addressing climate goals, and improving housing accessibility. Among their earliest pledges are the introduction of a fee for tourists at the point of arrival, an increased effort to help immigrants learn Icelandic, and a referendum on EU membership before 2027.

The government – which is being referred to as the Valkyrie Coalition since all participating parties are headed by women – invited the public to submit suggestions for how they can cut costs.

Suggestions include changes to Icelandic embassies abroad, reductions in ministerial assistants, adjustments to housing and travel expenses for parliament members,

revisions to artist grants, reevaluation of the Borgarfirna public transport project, and cuts to environmental spending, among other areas. Approximately 250 proposals were submitted via the government's consultation portal within just over three hours of opening for public input.

Some submissions were more to the point, with one asking: "Wait, you don't already have a plan?"

GOOD RIDDANCE, BJARNI BEN

Bjarni Benediktsson (a.k.a. IceHot1 or The Teflon Man) announced on January 6 that he will not seek re-election as chairman of the Independence Party and he is vacating his seat in parliament.

In a Facebook post, Bjarni explained, "I have decided not to take a seat in the parliament that will convene later this month. I plan to take some time off in the coming weeks, but after that, I will take my final steps in politics and say goodbye to my friends in the Independence Party at the upcoming congress, where we will aim for a renewed vision for the nation."

Following Bjarni's departure, former justice minister Jón Gunnarsson will join the upcoming parliamentary session as an MP. Jón was fifth on the Independence Party's list for the Southwest Constituency.

It is not currently known if or when Bjarni begins his tenure as the next editor in chief of Morgunblaðið.

OH YAY, U.S. MILITARY EXPANSION

A 13,000 square metre stockpile housed in seven warehouses is set

to be built at Miðnesheiði in the coming weeks. The depot will store tools and resources to build a new airport. The cost runs at 13.5 billion ISK, paid in full by the United States military.

Miðnesheiði was the site of an American military base from 1951 until 2006, as part of the United States' commitment to provide defences for Iceland. In 2016, the U.S. Navy announced its return to the area to surveil Russian submarines.

Today, 200 to 300 U.S. soldiers are stationed at the Miðnesheiði base.

A spokesperson for the Icelandic Foreign Ministry's Directorate of Defence told national broadcaster RÚV on December 27 the preparation is part of Iceland's effort to increase its defence resilience. In light of current international developments, a new airport might be needed rapidly.

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE

The next eruption is expected to take place on the Reykjanes peninsula in February. The most recent eruption began on November 20, 2024, and ended on Dec. 9.

Finally, Icelandic police confiscated a record volume of cannabis in 2024. The amount totalled 283 kilograms, based on preliminary data. A spokesperson from the office of the National Police Commissioner claims the cases are few, but involve large amounts of contraband. A large amount of the confiscated cannabis was grown domestically, although police have identified an uptick in imports.

As per Icelandic drug and alcohol laws, the selling, handling and importation of cannabis is illegal. Boo-urns. ■



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The Reykjavik Grapevine is published every month by Fróken Ltd.

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The Reykjavik Grapevine is distributed in and around Reykjavik and at key locations along Iceland's route 1.

It is also available at all major tourist attractions and information centres around the country.

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Word On The Street

New Year, New You?

We took to the streets to ask people what they want to do differently in 2025

WORDS Dagný, Candace & Scott
IMAGES Joana Fontinha



DAGNÝ, ICELAND:

"My food journey has not been great, so I'm cutting down, but as you can see I'm failing [gesturing to a can of Monster]."



CANDACE, UNITED STATES:

"I'm a singer, so my New Year's resolution is mainly to get back into doing some recordings. I want to record a song and get back in a band!"



SCOTT, UNITED STATES:

"I'm supposed to meditate three times a week." "How's it going?" asks his Icelandic friend we didn't catch the name of. "It's not going well. Well, I meditated yesterday!" ■

Word Of The Issue

A Menagerie

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

WORDS Ish Sveinsson Houle
IMAGE Jason Auch / Wikimedia Commons

means "shield back." Notoriously with shields on their backs, this is the Icelandic word for turtle.

Adding to our menagerie, I've chosen two words created by famed poet Jónas Hallgrímsson. First, a catch-all word: *spendýr*. This is a compound of *teat* + *animal*, to mean mammal. Of course, mammal's etymology also refers to the breast, but Jónas just went about the translation a little more frankly. Can't argue with that. Then, also constructed by him is *mörgæs*. *Mör* means fat, and *gæs* is goose, which leads us to a fat goose. Otherwise known as a penguin!

Despite the fact that the word "menagerie" is often used to describe an accumulation of all sorts of things, it is first and foremost a word that describes a collection of (captive) animals. Wait, why am I writing so much about a word in English? That's not why you're here!

Let me explain: this Word of the Issue covers the Icelandic names for a bunch of animals.

This all started with my love for the word *skjaldbaka*. A compound of *skjöldur* (which gets grammatically changed to get "skjald," but don't worry about it) and *bak*. This literally

Speaking of *gæs*, our next word is *gæsalappir*. This is a pre-existing compound word used by other languages, and it literally means goose feet. If you speak Estonian, German, or Hungarian, you already know that this means quotation marks! In Danish and Norwegian, it is slightly changed to mean goose eyes. English is so unimaginative sometimes.

So, now, held captive in the cage of our mind, we've added a turtle, all mammals, a penguin, and maybe two geese (or at least their feet.) Enjoy your new vocabulary, zoo-keeper! ■



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Do Shit

Gig While Keeping On The Tax Man's Good Side

The Grapevine's ongoing guide to getting shit done

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGE Art Bicnick

at the close of 2024 that the cost of groceries was set to increase by 30%, while the cost of electricity is going to rise by 37% this year. We'd laugh, but we're too busy weeping into our empty wallets.

The situation is only more dire for us Útlendingar, who earn less than our Icelandic counterparts even as 53% of us are overqualified for our positions. But, hey, we don't have a frændi or frænka to put in a good word, so what can we really expect?

All that said, you may be considering upping your gig game to bring in a little more money on the side with some freelance projects here and there. Great idea! And it's an idea a whole lot of people had before you, as evidenced by the Side Hustle series we were running here in the Grapevine. Whether you're a part-time model, a burlesque dancer, a sexy candle maker or a princess for hire, you're going to want to know how to earn money and not get an end-of-the-year surprise in the form of a big old bill for unpaid taxes or pension contributions.

THE 2 MILLION ISK MYTH

The first thing that needs to be cleared up here is that no money is tax-free. Unless you're working "black" (for cash under the table) – which you really shouldn't do – any money you earn from your main job or from a side gig is taxable and will require a corresponding pension contribution.

"It's a common misunderstanding that the first 2 million ISK you earn are tax free or that you don't have to pay taxes on it," a representative of Skatturinn confirms. "Actually you are simply exempt from the VAT registry if you are earning less than 2 million ISK per year. You still need to pay taxes."

Accountant Jóel Kristinsson further elaborated that no income is tax-free, but some is exempt from withholding tax. If a contractor, freelancer or gig worker's annual income is less than 550,000 ISK for the year, it is exempt from withholding tax, so no monthly installments need to be arranged with the tax office. The in-

come still needs to be accounted for on your annual tax return, however. Joel echoed Skatturinn in clarifying that one does not have to pay VAT for self-employment income of less than 2 million ISK in a single year – it is an option, though.

For those earning in excess of these thresholds on their gig work, income tax and social security contributions must be sent to Skatturinn on wages every month. If your income is around the 1 million ISK mark, you may get away with filing one remittance form to Skatturinn and one report to your pension fund, but it's best to call ahead and confirm the specifics of your case so you don't inadvertently get yourself into trouble.

OH YEAH, THE PENSION

In addition, a self-employed individual or gig worker is on the hook for making pension contributions. In a standard employee-employer relationship, the employee has a base rate of 4% of their pay deducted as a pension contribution. The

employer then pays 11.5% into the employee's pension. A person working freelance or gig work must pay the entire 14.5% into their pension fund. Failure to file pension reports and make payments could see you slapped with a massive bill from Söfnunarsjóður (SL) pension fund toward the end of the year based on what they calculate as your assumed earnings.

Wait, SL isn't your pension fund? Maybe not, but they're the state's default firm to collect outstanding payments. You can ring up your own pension and arrange to pay the outstanding amount into your existing fund instead to keep things neat and tidy in one place, but the money will still need to be paid. Death and taxes, right?

The moral of the story here is that there's no such thing as free money and spending a little time calling up Skatturinn and your pension fund before you start earning that sweet, sweet side money will save you from the shock of a big bad surprise toward the end of the year. ■

Life in Iceland is very expensive. While nothing here has never been affordable, news circulated



HALLGRÍMSKIRKJA

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Here is a glimpse of what Hallgrímskirkja has to offer in winter & spring of 2025

Cantoque sings Hjalmar H. Ragnarsson

Dark music days

Sunday January 26th at 17 hrs.

Cantoque ensemble | Steinar Logi Helgason | *conductor*

Admission ISK 3.900

Matinée | Saturday February 1st at 12 hrs.

Eyþór Franzson Wechner | *organ*

Admission ISK 2.900

Organ & MIDI | Saturday March 1st at 12 hrs.

Première of a new piece by Hlynur Adils Vilmarsson

Admission ISK 2.900

Iceland University of the Arts

Saturday April 19th at 14 hrs.

Ókeypis aðgangur / Free entry

Choral evensong | Sunday March 30th at 17 hrs.

The Annunciation of Mary

The Choir of Hallgrímskirkja

Steinar Logi Helgason | *conductor*

Björn Steinar Sólbergsson | *organ*

Free entry

Matinée | Saturday April 5th at 12 hrs.

Björn Steinar Sólbergsson | *organ*

Admission ISK 2.900

PERGOLESI – STABAT MATER | Saturday April 13th at 17 hrs.

Hallveig Rúnarsdóttir | *soprano*

Hildigunnur Einarsdóttir | *mezzo soprano*

String quintet | Una Sveinbjarnardóttir | *leader*

Björn Steinar Sólbergsson | *organ*

Admission ISK 4.900

Matinée | Saturday May 3rd at 12 hrs.

Gunnar Gunnarsson | *organ*

Sigurður Flosason | *saxophone*

Admission ISK 2.900

ARVO PÄRT – POULENC – FINNUR KARLSSON

Sunday May 18th at 17 hrs.

The Choir of Hallgrímskirkja | Reykjavik Chamber Orchestra

Álfheiður Erla Guðmundsdóttir | *soprano*

Una Sveinbjarnardóttir | *concert master*

Björn Steinar Sólbergsson | *organ*

Steinar Logi Helgason | *conductor*

Aðgangseyrir / Admission ISK 5.900

Matinée | Saturday June 7th at 12 hrs.

Arngerður María Árnadóttir | *organ*

Una Sveinbjarnardóttir | *violin*

Aðgangseyrir / Admission ISK 2.900

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Service in English | last Sunday of every month at 14.00

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Meditation with organ music | Thursdays at 12:00 - 12:30

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On The Fringes

Oh, To Be In The Sea

Sea swimming could be just the self care you've been looking for

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

rather than a tub at the pool or at home."

After practicing cold immersion and sea swimming for a couple years, Tinna and fellow life- and health-coach Margrét Leifsdóttir began the *Glaðari þú sjóbaðsnámskeið* (happier you sea swimming course).

"We both work in the health industry and we created an intermittent fasting course," Tinna explains of the course's beginnings. "We decided to integrate one sea swimming day into that intermittent fasting course and at the end of the fasting course the group was much more interested in the sea swimming than the fasting so we continued with the same group into a sea swimming month – it's been growing ever since."

CHILLING OUT

Growing in popularity in recent years, cold exposure is thought to offer a range of physical and mental health benefits. Immersion in cold water stimulates circulation, reducing inflammation and aiding muscle recovery, making it a favourite among athletes. The sudden chill also activates the body's fight-or-flight response, releasing endorphins and boosting one's mood, even contributing to reduced symptoms of stress and anxiety.

Regular exposure to cold has been found to enhance resilience, strengthen the immune system and improve energy levels. Beyond the physiological perks, cold plunges foster mental toughness, encouraging a sense of accomplishment and mindfulness, as they challenge individuals to embrace discomfort and adapt.

"What surprised me is how it made me feel, mentally and emotionally," Tinna recalls of her first forays into the cold pot. "I was just delirious-

ly happy. It was just so weird. I was driving home from the session and I was freaking out internally – just so happy. Now I know, of course, there's an influx of endorphins and happiness hormones that happen when you do a cold plunge and that's what I just found so amazing."

NO HOT POT REQUIRED

While the science of cold immersion is not definitive, Tinna underscores how simply showing up at the beach and wading into the sea when its temperature may even be dipping below zero tends to deliver a rewarding sense of achievement.

"If I can go in the cold sea in -13° and not have a hot shower afterwards, then I can also approach challenging things at work or have a difficult conversation with someone, or do other things that are challenging in my life," Tinna says. "That's what we try to teach our ladies – we have few brave men [in our courses], but we have predominantly women. We aim to show our people that you can use the sea and you don't have to have the warmth of a hot pot afterwards. We teach them how to warm up and how you can be self-sufficient."

If you're interested in dipping your toe into the cold sea, Tinna advises to just do it. "Don't wait," she emphasises. "You don't need to wait for August or a warmer time of the year. Just do it now. We think the best time to start is January or February because then you can feel how the sea is slowly warming up and how nature is awakening again after winter, which is wonderful." ■

Consider checking out the details of Tinna's *Glaðari þú sjóbaðsnámskeið* on Facebook or on natturulega.is or challenge yourself to dip into the cold pot at your local swimming pool. Always be smart and safe if venturing into the sea.

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While in the summer months, Reykjavik's Nauthólsvík beach is often alive with sun bathers and children splashing in the little ocean lagoon artificially heated by an infusion of geothermal water, that's not the only time of year that bathers flock to the area.

Venture out to the same seaside locale in the depths of winter and you're still likely to spy groups of bathers, some accessorising their swimsuits with neoprene booties and gloves, wading out into the frigid waters either for a quick dip, to bob around for a few minutes, or to swim the short distance around a rocky outcrop.

"I've been active in cold exposure since 2018," says Tinna Thorlacius, who runs sea swimming courses to encourage others to pursue the experience. "I started myself through a Wim Hof experience, but it didn't really suit me to sit in a tub somewhere; I wanted to be more in nature and use the cold sea that we have around Iceland. So it just made more sense to me to go in the sea

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Islanders Your Favourite Place, In A Glass

Kjartan and Sveinn of Grugg & Makk capture the flavours of Iceland with their wild ales

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

Today, they work their respective day jobs while dedicating their spare time to Grugg & Makk. “It’s always fun when people say right away ‘We don’t like beer,’ and then they taste ours and go, ‘Whoa,’” he adds.

BREWING PARTNERSHIP

Founded in 2022, Grugg & Makk now produces around 3,200 bottles annually, with plans to expand to 4,000 and eventually 6,000 bottles. Available at Vinbúðin, a number of bars and restaurants around town and at local pop-up tastings, the company sprung from Kjartan and Sveinn’s curiosity. Kjartan’s interest in home brewing and wild fermentation developed during his chef days, but the demanding kitchen life – with its 12-hour shifts and constant pressure – had taken its toll. “It’s a very hard job with lots of hours sweating and lots of effort,” he reflects. “When it’s not giving you any joy to send plates out of the kitchen, maybe you should just quit.”

Having collaborated on several projects previously, Kjartan and

Sveinn would spend days discussing different brewing ideas – from the microbial landscape in different parts of Iceland to water sources and their effects on flavour. When they finally applied for a research grant, it marked the beginning of Grugg & Makk.

“The market here is tiny, especially for a niche project product like this,” says Sveinn. Given Iceland’s strict regulations on alcohol and food production, what began as a passion project quickly needed to become a formal company. “When I do projects, I really don’t like to do them unless there is some kind of a result,” Kjartan admits. “For me, the only way this would become a reality was to create a company around it and try to test it on the market. Because of the legal situation around brewing and distributing food products in general, you need to have a full company around it; plus, there is more value in having a product that people talk about and interact with every day – that’s the best way to transmit an idea.”

THE YEAST HUNTERS

Wild ales are made with wild yeast, which means the yeasts aren’t industrially produced – Kjartan and Sveinn collect them from Icelandic nature. “We go out into Icelandic nature and collect them. We don’t get one strain – we get a collection of yeasts that we work with – different cultures from different places. We don’t buy yeast anywhere,” Sveinn explains.

“The first time we went to mass gather yeast, we drove around the Snæfellsnes peninsula, stopping in 10 different places. We were just picking out what smelled and tasted nice,” he continues. The collection process uses a medium designed by the duo, filled with wort, and left in nature with a sanitised cloth over it for 24 hours. “Then we bring it into our lab, where I put it in perfect heat conditions and give it some air, basically creating the perfect environment for it to multiply, which can take up from two to four months to reach the necessary quantity for us to start brewing,” Kjartan explains.

Due to the Icelandic weather, yeast collection is only possible between spring and autumn. “When the ground is frozen, it’s too cold. There’s not so much life going on,” Kjartan explains. However, yeast collected during a single season can last a long time. Because of the lengthy fermenting and brewing process, Kjartan and Sveinn are still working with cultures they harvested in 2020.

“It took two or three years until we were happy to have something that we could produce and reproduce. Just the fermentation itself takes a year,” says Kjartan.

In addition to three wild ales made from yeast collected in Snæfellsnes – Djúpálónssandur, Svörtuloft and Kirkjufell, specifically – the duo has also introduced berry-infused beers, including blackcurrant and blueberry varieties, with a blackberry beer currently brewing. They’ve ensured that any yeast from the imported berries is neutralised, preventing the introduction of imported yeasts. Currently, Grugg & Makk operates

“It’s a little bit too much work to be a hobby, but not quite enough to be a full-time job,” says Kjartan Óli Guðmundsson, laughing as he describes his wild ale venture, Grugg & Makk. A chef turned product designer, Kjartan co-founded the company with tour guide Sveinn Steinar Benediktsson after the two met while studying design at the Iceland University of the Arts. “We started talking about microbes, ideas we’ve been thinking about, home brewing, beer, ecosystems and all kinds of things like that,” Sveinn recalls.

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its yeast lab at Kjartan's house and contracts brewing facilities from Ægir Brugghús. They also rent two storage units. Looking ahead, the duo plans to expand to their own space, where they could produce small batches of beer and host tastings, while continuing to rely on Ægir for larger productions.

WILD WILD YEAST

The wild ales from Grugg & Makk come in 750 ml glass champagne bottles. Kjartan notes that, although canning would be cheaper, the acidity in the beer could corrode the metal over time. "We wanted to have it in 750 ml bottles to show that it's a quality product that we are selling," he says. "It's not cheap, it costs similar to a bottle of wine, and we really want to compare its consumption to wine drinking." The company also recently introduced 375 ml bottles.

Reykjavík Michelin-starred restaurants Dill and Óx pair Grugg & Makk wild ales with their meals, as do other restaurants and bars around town, including Brewdog, Bingo,

Kaldi, Vinstúkan Tíu Sopar and others. The duo is already exporting their beer to several locations, including multiple places in Denmark. They also offer group tastings upon request and weekly tastings at Litli Barinn.

"People have a lot of fun," says Kjartan of their wild ale tastings. "It's interesting to learn about the places in Iceland, the history of beer here, our wild ale project and how it connects to nature. We're mostly working with yeast from Snæfellsnes now, but we're adding more locations, so it's fun for people to taste the beers if they've visited those places."

"We like Snæfellsnes a lot – it's a beautiful area, relatively close to Reykjavík, easy to access to collect yeast and come back. You can also find diverse landscapes, which is something we were interested in researching: would there be a difference between the yeasts found close to the ocean and up on the mountain?" says Sveinn, who has a far-flung goal of brewing beer with yeast from a protected volcanic is-

land. "I'd really love to go to Surtsey. It's off limits, you can't go there, but if we could get scientists to collect for us, or maybe go with them, that would be really cool," he shares.

BOLD BREWS

"You always have to taste something. It's hard," Kjartan laughs at the challenges of the job as he pours me a glass of earthy ale with citrusy notes that needs to stay in the barrel for at least another six months. "Sometimes you've not been drunk for a week, but you've been drinking two glasses or something every day."

Grugg & Makk aim to shake up the Icelandic culinary scene with something unique, even if the consumer market is small. "There is a world of microbes around us that is very different from one place to another, and it's a part of our environment as well. We harvested yeast from human bodies," says Kjartan. Noticing my surprised expression, he adds, "Yeast is everywhere. Everybody has yeast on them. It's in the air." During a dance performance called MOLTA

at the Reykjavík Dance Festival, they asked dancers to collect yeast from their bodies and transfer it into a growing medium. Kjartan reassures that the yeast is sterilised and purified before being used in brewing. The final product, still in development, will contain no human tissue or flavour.

This isn't the last experiment from Grugg & Makk. In collaboration with craft bar Skúli, they're currently brewing a batch using yeast harvested from the tree outside the bar. Kjartan has also been exploring the idea of a "discarded series," where fruits and vegetables discarded by supermarkets could be used to flavour the beers.

"It's never going to be a product that's going to sell like lager or anything like that. It's not the goal either. If you look at the craft beer sales in Vínbúðin, the numbers are really low," says Kjartan. Grugg & Makk's target audience includes foodies, beer and wine enthusiasts, and anyone eager to try new things. "People who are interested in beer

are familiar with something similar and have been liking our product a lot," he explains. "It's similar to when natural wines or IPAs started to gain popularity in Iceland, it takes time, but gradually, you get more people who are interested."

After all, for Grugg & Makk, it's not just about selling beer – it's about starting a conversation and fostering a new drinking culture in Iceland. "It's about transmitting an idea to start the conversation about biodiversity, while also introducing a new beer culture in Iceland – focused on sour beer, wild ales and such, which hasn't been very explored that much here," says Kjartan.

Sveinn adds, "So people driving around Iceland might think, like we do, 'What does this place taste like?'" ■

Learn more about Grugg & Makk and find out where to buy their wild ales at gruggogmakk.com

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Feature

The Long Crossing

Life aboard the last sailing of the year on the Norræna ferry to Iceland

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGES Joana Fontinha

“Do you see that big rock over there?” the hotel reception manager gestured out into the remarkably sunny day on the northern tip of Denmark. “That’s where the bus normally stops.” I nodded to indicate my understanding – my eyesight being what it is – and crossed the road to wait near that said rock, which looked nothing like a bus stop.

The waiting game began.

My brain started doing that thing where it cycles through increasingly apocalyptic scenarios – Should’ve gotten a taxi. There definitely won’t be a bus. I wonder how long it takes to walk to the terminal. Do I start hitchhiking now?

These thoughts only ramped up as the bus’s alleged departure time came and went. Ten minutes later, I had pretty much accepted missing the ferry and becoming a permanent resident of Hirtshals – and then I saw it: a huge bus materialising out of a turn a few streets below, casually backing up towards no one else but me standing near that “rock.”

When it stopped, it was completely empty. “Norröna?” asked the bus driver in Danish.

WHAT IF?

Let me explain. Sitting in a half-empty ferry terminal beside MS Norröna – or Norræna in Icelandic – I was similarly confused about how

and why I’d ended up here. I think it involved several pints with coworkers, someone saying “What if,” and “Who in their right mind would take the last ship to Iceland?” I’m pretty sure my publisher rambled on about something about *Haustskip* – a concept from some medieval novel about the final ship of the year that only he seemed to understand – and me agreeing to this adventure with a dry “I can do it,” thinking I’d be a small step closer to great adventurers like Thor Heyerdahl, whose journeys fuelled my imagination growing up.

The task at hand? Fly to Copenhagen, then Aalborg, take a bus, multiple trains, crash in Hirtshals for a night, catch another bus, and finally sail for 66 hours to Seyðisfjörður.

The ferry company’s staff tried their best to steer me toward a summer booking. I stubbornly insisted on this particular trip: their last of the season.

On November 17, I boarded the Norræna – the largest ferry operated by Faroese company Smyril Line running between Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Iceland. In summer, she makes twice-weekly trips from Hirtshals to Tórshavn and weekly voyages on to Seyðisfjörður, before suspending the Iceland route until spring while maintaining weekly service to the Faroes through winter.

It’s the biggest ship I’ve ever been on – capable of carrying 1,482 passengers, 118 crew members and about 800 cars. The ship boasts over 300 cabins – from fancy suites to spartan hostel-like couchettes – though in November, only a fraction of them are occupied, with just 300 passengers aboard.

WELCOME ABOARD

During summer, Norræna operates more like a cruise ship, complete with all the expected amenities. My travel companion and I were generously accommodated in two separate Nordic Deluxe cabins on

Deck 8. Each cabin was furnished with a double bed, a pull-out bed for potential guests, a TV, a table with chairs, an en suite bathroom, and a minibar stocked with snacks and a selection of drinks. The real highlight was the panoramic window with its cosy nook – an ideal spot for soaking in the endless views. Each of the 34 Nordic Deluxe cabins is named after a bird, with mine dedicated to the *Knópsvanur* – the Mute Swan in English.

Barely 20 minutes after settling in, my name was announced through the PA system, summoning me to reception. Curious, I made my way there, only to be offered even more snacks – a delightfully unexpected touch.

The task at hand? Fly to Copenhagen, then Aalborg, take a bus, multiple trains, crash in Hirtshals for a night, catch another bus, and finally sail for 66 hours to Seyðisfjörður.

A stroll through Norræna’s corridors – in service since 2003 – felt like a nostalgic journey back in time. While the ship has seen updates over the years, the early 2000s vibe remains, thanks to its wood-paneled walls and carpeted floors, reminiscent of a hotel frozen in that era.

As the ship departed the port of Hirtshals and ploughed into the North Sea, the first night was about looking behind every corner, trying to navigate the maze of corridors and observing the mix of characters that gathered on board. I delayed going to bed, dreading the challenge of falling asleep on a vessel slicing through the waves at half-speed.

When I finally tucked myself into the crisp boat-hotel bedsheets, I realised I’d made the mistake of not

closing the bathroom door. With each roll of the ship, it creaked open, only to slam shut with a sharp bang as we tipped into the next wave. I lay there for a while, listening to the door’s unsettling rhythm, procrastinating the inevitable moment I’d have to get up and deal with it. When I finally stood to close the damned thing, I noticed it was well past 1:00 and decided to take a stroll.

Similar to a sleeper train, there’s a constant noise on a ship that never quite goes away. On a train, the source is obvious – the wheels on the tracks. On a ship, though, it’s harder to locate. Is it the hull slicing through the waves? The wind whistling through the ship’s corridors? The rhythmic hum of the engine? Or

to watch the sea at any time of day. The bar closed before midnight, but there were always a few passengers scattered across the deck whenever I visited – five men sitting in silence, gazing at the sky as it turned dark grey; a father-son duo playing Uno; a lone traveller sipping a beer while listening to something, perhaps a podcast, through large headphones. My fellow passengers seemed content to let time idle away, watching the horizon sway ahead of us, while a sea gannet raced alongside the ship.

Though I hoped to encounter a cast of quirky characters, each story I heard was disappointingly dry. See, I’d imagined meeting fellow romantic souls – people drawn to endless horizons and shifting seascapes, birdwatchers spending hours on deck telling off anyone who dared to mistake a gannet for a seagull, or at least an aerophobe or two choosing the long way home due to their fear of flying. In reality, when asked why they were on this late season sailing, my fellow passengers had only mundane responses to offer.

“What do you mean ‘why I’m on this ferry?’ I’m going home,” said one passenger as if I were a customs officer about to deny him entry for looking suspicious. “I want my car with me.”

Travelling between Denmark and the Faroe Islands, this passenger usually opts to fly and rent a car in Denmark. “It’s 36 hours to sail and four hours to fly from my house in Tórshavn to my residence in Denmark. That’s why I fly in the summer. It’s three days of my vacation,” he explains with a weary smile.

“It’s totally relaxing. I’m not bored – I download lots of films. I have everything on my iPad. That’s my cinema,” he says. “It’s the first time I travel alone, that’s because my wife died last year.”

I asked how the trip compares to when he used to travel with her. “Not so noisy,” he says, half-smil-

could it be the sound of someone slowly losing their mind?

After a walk through the empty hallways and a brief, unsuccessful attempt at stargazing on deck, I returned to my cabin and preemptively took a seasickness pill. Then I lay in bed, eyes wide open, for what felt like an eternity. As it turns out, I don’t really like being rocked to sleep.

DECK 10: PEOPLE-WATCHING

The crown jewel of the ferry, in my opinion, was Deck 10, called *Laterna Magica*. Located thirty metres above sea level, it houses a bar and a café offering pastries and a selection of drinks, but most came for the view. Part observation deck, *Laterna Magica* featured comfy couches and armchairs, allowing passengers



ing, half-serious. “In about an hour or two I want to have a drink,” he looked at his watch confirming his evening plans were set in stone.

Meanwhile, at a nearby table, Birnir and his girlfriend celebrated their second consecutive win in the pub quiz. “We are going to Iceland,” said Birnir, sharing the reason for taking the ferry. “We live in Norway, but both of us are from Iceland. I have a car with Icelandic number plates, so I needed to get back to Iceland to sell it.”

The couple had taken a quick ferry from Norway to Denmark and were continuing their journey from there. “I love it – it’s like travelling 20 years in time,” they shared their impressions of the trip. “I like the rocking boat on the waves. We’ve mostly just been taking naps.”

In between relaxed times on the boat, the couple tasted a few of the Faroese beers available on board, but naps interfered with other plans. “We wanted to try out the fancy restaurant tonight and get some steaks, but we took a nap and overslept, so now we’re just getting something else.”

One night, I stumbled across someone who, like me, was travelling all the way to Seyðisfjörður without a car. Philipp, 24, from Germany was off to some adventures. “I finished my studies last summer, so now I’m travelling around, doing a bit of a gap year, hoping to see Iceland again,” he said. “I’ve been travelling for three weeks now across Europe.”

With a typical German pragmatism, Philipp admitted that the ferry seemed like better value for money. “I’ve flown there before. I’ve already seen that,” he said. “Also, I’m travelling with quite a lot of baggage – a big backpack and a small one.” Philipp had booked a bed in the couchette section on the ferry which cost him around EUR 250. “A flight is similarly expensive. I thought, why not check out the ferry and have some nice experience out of it?”

“There are beds for four people, but I’m the only one in there,” he continued. “Man, this is the third ship I’ve taken on my trip and so far every single one has been the same – empty, because no one wants to travel in winter.”

Philipp smiled, the grin of a seasoned budget traveller, as he reminisced about his previous ferry crossings from Gdansk to Stockholm and from Gothenburg to Frederikshavn, “I’ve paid for the minimum amount that you can get on the ship and got my own room,” he said proudly.

Is it the hull slicing through the waves? The wind whistling through the ship’s corridors? The rhythmic hum of the engine? Or could it be the sound of someone slowly losing their mind?

On Norræna, he got a ticket with a buffet breakfast included, “I’ve brought food for everything else. So I’m going to breakfast, eating as much as I can, and then in the evening, I eat something else that I brought,” he explained.

After chatting for a while, Philipp added, “I think this is the longest I’d ever take a ship.” His days have been filled with reading, walking around and taking pictures, but he seemed like running out of options. “I thought about taking a ship to the United States one day, but that one’s a week and a half. It’s fun, but after two days, you’ve seen everything and the waves are going to be even worse. I don’t know if I’d like to do that. Also, it’s much more expensive – every day on a ship you spend between 50 and 100 EUR.”

That same night, while sipping a

beer before bed, I spotted a familiar face – Faroese-Icelandic musician ASA, whom I’d encountered just a month earlier at Skript Festival in Tórshavn, was performing a cover at one of Norræna’s bars. I waited until her set was cut short, the waves too high to keep her seated on a tall stool, before introducing myself. Ása Helena Brynjarsdóttir is a house musician on board, having been recommended to join the ferry’s entertainment lineup. Since March of last year, she’d been spending a few weeks per year cruising between the three countries.

While it’s hard to be away from home, Ása told me she loves working on the ship. She’s made good friends with the crew, and since some of them are musicians too, they often jam together. “Last night, I played with Paula from Poland, who works in housekeeping. She’s an excellent cello player.”

“I’m quite crafty with time,” Ása said when I asked if it ever gets boring. “I bring enough hobbies on board. I like to write, read and make it to all the meals. There’s a routine – morning, afternoon and dinner coffee. In the early afternoon, I’ll sit up here, drinking tea, maybe sketching or writing. I play bingo. Sometimes, I go to the sauna.”

As we talked, Birnir, who I met earlier, asked to borrow Ása’s guitar and played a few songs, the last being Fleetwood Mac’s legendary “Landslide.” One of the passengers in the

audience watched him in awe. “Man, it’s beautiful. Did you write it yourself?” he asked.

ALL HANDS ON DECK

Like some deranged cruise critic, I set about testing every amenity this floating entertainment complex has to offer. The sauna, tucked away on the ship’s lower decks, was just what I needed. There, I met two Faroese women returning home after visiting their children in Jutland. The pool was closed – something about excessive water splashing around during rough seas I was later told. The hot tubs promised romance under the stars but delivered something closer to endurance training. I ended up in the tub with the best view, which, of course, meant it wasn’t sheltered from the wind. Picture me, shivering in tepid water while wearing a hat for 15 long minutes. The onboard cinema tried its best with a new *Beetlejuice* screening, but the combination of swaying screen and rolling waves sent me stumbling in search of solid ground (or whatever passes for it in the middle of the ocean). Perhaps all of this *would* have been more enjoyable in the summer.

The unspoken intensity of ferry bingo caught me off guard. At first, I considered joining – how complicated could bingo be? Then I saw them: a room full of grey-haired Faroese warriors, armed with something called “bingo daubers” (a term I now know thanks to Google) – special highlighters designed to save time once a number is called. These folks weren’t just playing – they seemed to have strategy. The most impressive were the multitaskers – knitting at what can only be described as Olympic speed while maintaining full bingo alertness. It was mesmerising, like watching a craft circle that’s somehow morphed into a high stakes gambling ring.

Night after night, I returned to Norræna’s pub quizzes – a fun escape from the monotony of sea life. The ship might have been quiet, with

most passengers tucked away in their cabins, but the moment the “pub quiz” announcement crackled over the PA system, Deck 10 would spring to life. Families, couples, groups of friends and even the bartender would gather, along with those who’d claim “I’m not really playing” while shouting out answers to prove their mettle.

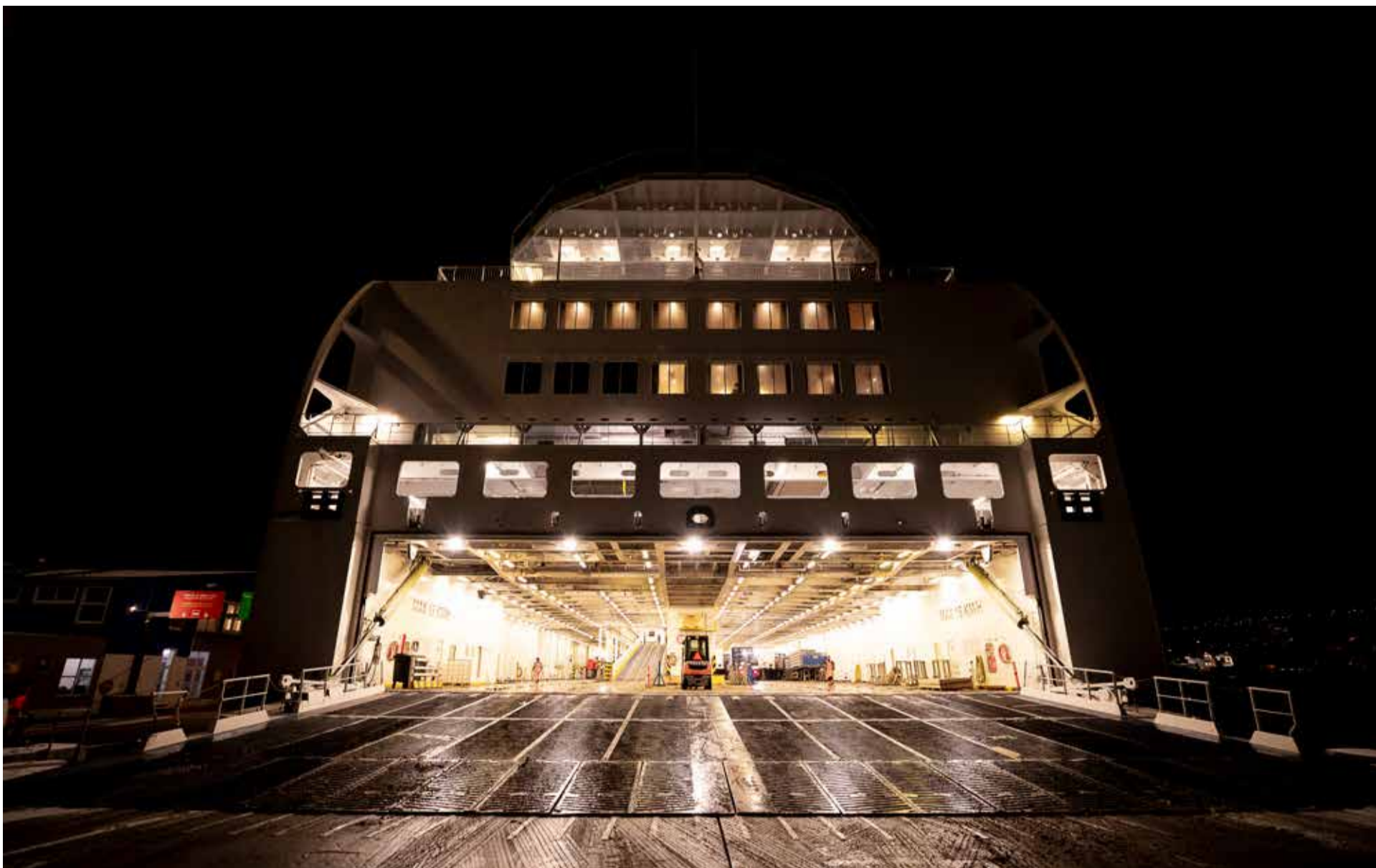
Questions appeared on the screen in a multilingual display of Faroese, Danish, English and German, while our quiz host asked everything from “Which iconic rock band released *The Dark Side of the Moon* in 1973?” to “Where was Freddie Mercury born?” and “How many F1 titles does Lewis Hamilton have?” It took me back to my student days, when cheap beer and trivia nights were our go-to entertainment. On the final night, I even managed to snag third place and win a drink – some random Faroese pilsner.

Before boarding the Norræna, I romanticised sea travel in my mind, imagining I’d spend all my time disconnected from the world reading, walking up and down the ship’s various decks to keep my step count up and journaling while gazing out at the endless blue horizon. Reality proved that reading on board made me desperately dizzy and, as we neared Iceland, even walking became uncomfortable – every step required gripping the nearest handrail or banister.

Approaching Iceland, the vessel transformed more and more into a cacophony of rattling dinnerware. I watched helplessly as an elderly passenger lost his footing, his buffet plate flying off with a splash of impromptu Pollock. The Christmas tree on the top deck couldn’t quite hold its ground either, eventually succumbing to the whims of the North Atlantic.

CLAPPING ALONG WITH THE FAROESE

One particular bunch aboard were the “Faroese accordion players,”



though most called them “harmonica players” thanks to the Danish/Faroese word *harmonika*. It felt like stumbling upon a secret club I had no idea existed.

“130 passengers on this trip are a Faroese group,” bartender Fie told me one evening. “They have the other bar for themselves,” she added with a sigh of relief. Her tone sparked my curiosity.

Fie, being Danish, doesn’t speak fluent Faroese, despite the languages being quite similar. “I had some rough times with various people when I was new here because I didn’t know anything about the language. I do now and speak a little bit, but it’s still very sad. Just because the ferry is Faroese, it doesn’t really have to be all about them, you know? People didn’t want to be served by me because I didn’t really get the first word they were saying. I thought that’s just so rude,” Fie confessed.

“They bring lots of musicians with them,” she continued, “so they dance and sing all night long.”

Intrigued, I decided to check out the notorious *other* bar, quickly realising that blending in wasn’t going to happen. The room was packed with tipsy, elderly Faroese belting out songs to a band of accordion and guitar players. Someone handed me a brochure with lyrics to follow along, but any attempt to strike up a conversation between their spirited singing and enthusiastic clapping proved unsuccessful. This part of the trip, lively as it was, remained a mystery to me.

“This is what you might call a theme trip for the Faroese,” cruise host Kristian later explained. “I’m not Faroese myself, but I’ve been told there’s an unusually high number of musicians in the Faroe Islands compared to the population. We host a trip like this every year.”

Of the group, only about 20 are actual musicians, Kristian noted, but each could bring along a guest. The rest are family, neighbours, or fans tagging along for the fun. Such

theme trips are nothing new, Kristian added. “We’d recently had a board game cruise and sometimes we do a crime cruise – true crime mystery-solving and all that.”

YEARNING FOR TERRA FIRMA

Time at sea moves to its own rhythm, slower and more deliberate than life on land. Your existence begins to revolve around meal times – a lesson I learned the hard way when I showed up past 10:00 for breakfast only to find locked doors. The handful of restaurants and cafes operated on strict schedules due to the low season, while the small duty-free shop offered little consolation, stocking mostly snacks and candy. More than once, I found myself dreaming of a simple cup of instant noodles.

The unspoken intensity of ferry bingo caught me off guard.

My ferry routine evolved into hours of ocean-watching, observing how the waters transformed with the weather – from bright marine blue as we left Denmark to an ominous grey as we battled through rain and wind further north. Even the smallest changes on the horizon brought excitement, be it the stark silhouettes of UK oil rigs piercing the endless blue.

At around 15:00 ship time on Monday (Norræna runs on Faroese time), the Shetland Islands – Scotland’s northernmost archipelago – came into view. Despite the wind nearly slamming the door in my face, I ventured onto the deck, finally finding use for my binoculars. There they stood: tiny, snow-covered islands breaking the monotony of sea and sky. The weather briefly cleared as we passed, painting pink streaks across the sunset sky.

It felt like just a moment passed since the islands appeared on the horizon before they had vanished again, and I wondered how many sailors in times of yore passed by

unknown lands without the chance to dock. I found myself longing for land.

BRIDGE WATCH

“I think we will hurry up to Iceland,” Captain Petur av Vollanum told me as we met on the bridge.

It’s been 13 years since he became the captain of Norræna, but his seafaring career began much earlier. Starting as a young boy training to be a fisherman, he went on to study further, sailing as a mate and skipper before becoming a Maersk captain on what was at that time the largest container ship in the world.

When I asked what drew him to a life at sea, Petur offered a pragmatic smile. “That’s my life and my job. I normally spend four weeks here and

then have four weeks off – so, *actually* I’m working only half a year.”

Weather dictates everything aboard Norræna, the captain explained. “We have to plan everything around the weather – either we are ahead of the weather or behind the weather,” he said, showing me navigation equipment that predicts not just weather patterns but wave heights. He recalled the weather from just last week to imprint just how serious it could be. “When we arrived, there were hurricanes in Iceland. We waited almost 24 hours outside the fjord in Seyðisfjörður, with the wind speeds hitting 56 metres per second. It can be very dangerous – the high mountains make it hard to predict when a windcast is coming and sometimes it comes from the side, pushing the boat off. If a rope breaks, we’ve got problems.”

The ship operates with four rotating navigators – the captain and three mates. The captain’s job isn’t to steer the wheel 24/7 – similar to airplanes, there’s autopilot. “I make the manoeuvring in the harbours, between the islands and all that,”

Petur explains. The rest of the day is typically spent on the bridge, where he’s in charge of charting the course and overseeing the voyage plan.

The seasonal pause in Norræna’s Iceland routes, the captain explained, is simple economics. “It’s not very popular with passengers and the cargo is also very limited. It doesn’t make sense,” Petur said. “We have other cargo ships sailing to Iceland. They can manage that.”

“Want to see how I wash windows?” he asked suddenly, a boyish grin spreading across his weathered face. The panoramic bridge window cleaner brought out the child in both of us – though I’m still not sure who was more amused by the demonstration.

The weather worsened and, by the time I returned to my cabin, the captain had announced a new schedule – we’d arrive in Tórshavn at 6:00 and depart by 8:00, leaving just an hour to venture onto land instead of the promised four. Though disappointed by the brevity of the visit, I managed to walk around the snow-dusted harbour of this tiny capital at dawn, watching cargo trucks roll one by one from the ship’s belly. Next stop: Iceland.

THE VERY LAST LEG

Most of the ship’s passengers disembarked at Tórshavn, likely heading to the comfort of their beds within 15 minutes or so. I said my goodbyes to musician Ása and some of the friendly Faroese crew members, who were being replaced by an equally welcoming bunch for the onward journey. While the ship lingered in Tórshavn’s harbour, I finally managed to fall into a proper sleep, missing much of the view as Captain Petur manoeuvred between narrow mountains and fjords.

Out of the 82 passengers still aboard, I saw no more than five during the day – most of them lounging on the comfy couches of Deck 10. German traveller Philipp listened to my advice for hitchhiking a ride to Reykjavik and came to boast that while in the sauna he

scored a lift from someone returning from a business trip in mainland Europe. Meanwhile, the ship rocked as waves climbed between six and eight metres high. Everyone reassured me this was as bad as it gets, but cruise host Kristian casually mentioned he’d once sailed through 12-metre waves, when passengers were ordered to stay in bed.

Heading farther north, the ship began to move more violently, glass clinking and rattling as it surged forward and back. The movement became more pronounced and, with each wave, I found myself longing to be back home. I had my last dinner alone at Nóatún bistro, where my pizza slid up and down the table, playing a stubborn game of hard-to-catch, as the almost empty vessel made its way to Seyðisfjörður. Around 1:00, the constant rocking finally stopped. Captain Petur kept his promise and we arrived in Iceland nearly seven hours ahead of schedule. I heard that the customs officers had driven all the way from Reykjavik, which explained why we weren’t allowed to disembark until the morning.

Stepping off Norræna, I caught some of them looking at me with a raised brow, wondering why I hadn’t just flown home to Reykjavik. Outside, the picturesque East coast town was buried by a snowstorm and though my journey home wasn’t quite finished, that’s a story for another time.

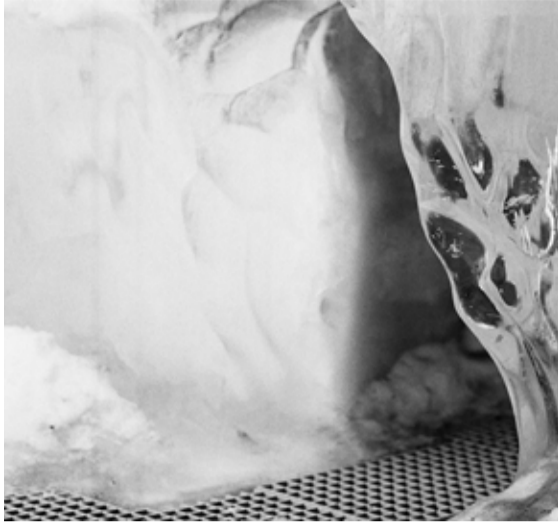
Back on land, I remembered something a fellow passenger had said the night before, finishing his beer as the bar was closing: “You don’t go to Iceland unless you have to.”

At least, not in winter. And certainly not by sea.

But like every other fool I met on this ferry, I’d probably do it again. ■

Trip provided by Smyril Line. Book your ferry crossing at: smyril-line.com

Top Events



THE ICELANDIC PHOTOGRAPHY FESTIVAL
FRIDAY, JANUARY 17 TO SATURDAY, JANUARY 25
FREE ENTRY
MULTIPLE VENUES

If you ask any Icelandic photographer if Reykjavík is a good city for photography, anyone with an ounce of self-respect would say no. The Reykjavík Museum of Photography is cute but tiny, photography exhibitions are scarce, and indie art galleries are the equivalent of puffin stores. Finally breaking away from the endless parade of “took a photo of Skógafoss, will start calling myself landscape photographer” types, the Icelandic Photography Festival brings actual artistry to the table. There will be exhibitions, portfolio reviews and lectures spread around town, with the opening exhibition *Weathered* at the Reykjavík Museum of Photography exploring the relationship between humans and the environment. IZ



OYAMA RELEASE SHOW
FRIDAY, JANUARY 17
3.500 ISK
IÐNÓ, 20:30

After disappearing from the scene for a little while, shoegaze band Oyama re-emerged last October with their dreamy new album *Everyone Left*. Sure, we've caught them melting faces at Airwaves and various off-venue spots around town, but now they're finally giving us a proper release show. Guitar legend Alison MacNeil graces both the album and stage, while the enigmatic K.óla joins as special guest. IZ



ATSUKO OKATSUKA – FULL GROWN TOUR
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2
9.990-19.990 ISK
HÁSKÓLABÍÓ, 20:00

Standup comedian Atsuko Okatsuka is headed to Reykjavík! Known for her whip-smart humour and irresistibly awkward charm, Atsuko has taken the comedy world by storm, with appearances on HBO, Netflix, and her viral drop challenge. Her material is both razor-sharp and refreshingly vulnerable, tackling everything from family quirks to social oddities. Who couldn't use a good laugh to brighten January's darkness? For those willing to splurge 19,990 ISK on tickets, there's also the option of joining a Meet & Greet with Atsuko. IZ



Colourful
Convo

Making Mischief And Playing, Seriously

Dr. angela snæfellsjökuls rawlings opens an exhibition at Slökkvistöðin exploring colour, climate and much more

WORDS Ish Sveinsson Houle
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

angela explains of the project 10 years in the making. “And in particular, we know colours. We grow up knowing colours, and we also grew up having colour names identified for us.”

Curator Daria Testo adds to the point, “colours have been created long before humans existed, and yet we have made them our own and have put names on them.” The two have collaborated before, recently on *Snæfellsjökul fyrir forseta*, and Daria notes that “as long as I knew angela, I have known about this work.”

Much of angela's work explores serious topics in an unconventional and often imaginative way. If there was unclarity about the seriousness of this exhibition's intent, angela is ready to address and explain. “We can make mischief, but we're also deadly serious about this,” she clarifies. “Let's change the colour names now, because climate breakdown, biodiversity loss, eutrophication, ocean acidification, they're not fun to joke about. They're not fun.”

“It makes sense to play, but also be serious,” Daria adds. This is a hard balance to strike, but both artist and curator are completely in tandem.

THE MOVER MOTIONS TO

In addition to the exhibition being open to explore the colours, on

January 26 there will be a “Deliberative Assembly participatory performance.” Daria explains that “it directly corresponds with the actual normal, traditional way of proposing a motion, because it usually is part written and part performed.” To activate the installation, they will be holding an event, open to all, where the motion of proposed colour names will be discussed and explored by those who join, aided by Mover angela snæfellsjökuls rawlings.

Both artist and curator highlight the diverse accumulation of subjects and mediums in this exhibition. “The new proposed names of the colours specifically are treated here as obvious artworks, but they're also case studies, a legal look into what could be the new names of those colours” notes Daria.

angela explains that they often get questions from those trying to make sense of their work, sometimes by trying to find the one box it fits in. They've been asked, “are you serious? Is this a joke? Is this art? Is this activism?” to which they say, “right. Yes. It's all of them. Or it's not, or it may not be in the way that you perceive the convention to be. It's intentionally subverting it.” ■

Slökkvistöðin will hold the exhibition from January 10 to February 2, with information on the exhibition on arawlings.is.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

“Art making, for me, has a lot to do with subverting conventional systems or making strange or estranging what we know all the time,”





Greenland Ho!

Revenge Of The Chewbacca Of The North

The murder and merriment continues in the Norse settlements of Greenland

WORDS Valur Gunnarsson
IMAGE Finnur Matteo Bettaglio

You know the Sagas. They're about Icelanders, right? Well, there's also the *Grænlandinga 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.

After the Vinland Sagas, the next great story of Greenland is *Fóstbræðra Saga*, a merry tale of mass murder featuring weird characters with even weirder names, some of which would turn up a millennium later in the Icelandic-language *Star Wars*.

A generation after Leifur Eriksson's discovery of Vinland, a man called Þorgrímur Einarsson Tröllli (the Troll) has come to power in Einarsfjörður, the second most important settlement in Greenland. Not only the

bearer of an imposing name, in the year 1022 he goes on a trading voyage to Norway, Denmark and England and comes into great wealth. On his way back he has a stop-over in Iceland and kills a man named Þorgeir who has made himself a nuisance by partaking of a little murder of his own. The bloodshed doesn't end there, though, as Þorgeir's blood brother, Þormóður Kolbrúnarskáld (the poet of Kolbrún), is honour-bound to avenge him.

Þormóður arrives in Brattahlíð, Leifur's family home and the leading farm in Greenland, where he presents his recommendation letter from King Olaf the Fat of Norway and is welcomed. As we remember from the Vinland Sagas, one of Leifur's brother's was killed in North America and the other died of plague. Leifur's sister Freydis and her offspring were ostracized. The chieftain now is Þorkell Leifsson, son of Leifur Eiríksson, whom we can presume has now died of old age, probably in his early fifties like his dad.

EVERYBODY LOVES AN AXE MURDERER

Þorkell and his guests sleep in a house separate from the rest of the farm. Þormóður has something of a reputation as a ladies' man and a certain Sigríður seems to visit him often. This greatly angers her

husband who is one of Þorkell's huscarls. The husband's name is Loðinn, which means "furry," but is probably a reference to the seal-skin clothes he wore rather than a commentary on either his body hair or his affinity for anthropomorphic animals.

Interestingly, in the subtitles to the first *Star Wars* films and the accompanying 1978 picture book, Chewbacca's name is translated as Loðinn. Darth Vader was known by the imposing name of Svarthöfði, which means Black Head, and is also the name of a character in the 13th Century *Sturlunga saga*. To round out the Viking connections, the Jedi are known as *Væringjar*, or Varangians, which is what the Vikings in the East were called.

For Christmas, the Chieftain Þorkell has ale brewed for a big *soirée*, inviting the neighbours to partake in some merriment. Loðinn collects everyone's weapons before the festivities to prevent things from getting out of hand. While everyone is unarmed, Loðinn drags Þormóður out of bed but the latter is saved by other guests. As everyone gets ready to leave on their ships, Þormóður takes out an axe he has hidden in his clothes and kills Loðinn.

Þorkell orders him seized but Þormóður makes it on to a ship

and sails away to another fjord. The following summer the people of the Eastern Settlement in Greenland gather at the annual Thing, or Parliament. Þorgrímur the Troll shows up with retinue, which impresses everyone. He sits down and starts telling tales to the gathering, but when it begins to rain, everyone retreats to their respective tents.

Þormóður, who has overslept during the former events, sees an opportunity. He takes his axe and fur skin coat which is black on one side and white on the other. Wearing the black outwards, he goes into Þorgrímur's tent. When asked to identify himself, Þormóður not only lies about his name, calling himself Ótryggur (unreliable), but proceeds to cleave Þorgrímur's head in two down to his shoulders.

KILLING AS COMEDY

Not only is the killing rather unheroic, more of a murder really, but Þormóður calls for help and tells everyone Þorgrímur has been killed, rather than owning up to it which was the custom at the time. The others ask him if he knows who did it, and Þormóður says he saw the culprit leaving but himself was busy supporting Þorgrímur by the shoulders. The hapless neighbours now take over supporting Þorgrímur by the shoulders while Þormóður leaves.

Perhaps Halldór Laxness, who rewrote *Fóstbræðra Saga* as *Gerpla* (The Happy Warriors), was right in his estimation of the older work. This story only makes sense as high comedy. People supporting Þorgrímur by holding up his shoulders with his head cleaved in two was no doubt seen as the height of hilarity to 13th century Icelanders when the story was written.

Þormóður goes on to murder most of Tröllli's nephews in revenge for the death of his blood-brother, but after being speared in the leg decides enough is enough. He goes back to Norway and enters the service of Olaf the Fat, who is later killed at the Battle of Stiklestad in the name of Christianity and will thereafter be known in Norway as Olaf the Saint, although most Icelanders still prefer the original moniker.

Þormóður presumably died in that same battle, his death is unrecorded but his brave exploits in Greenland are still recounted. One might spare a thought for poor Loðinn, though, whose only crime was dragging the man who cuckolded him across the floor and is forever known for his silly name. Still, he had the last laugh, of sorts. It was precisely sealskin attire that made the Inuit more cold-resistant than the Norse. Perhaps the Greenland Norse would have survived if they acted more like Loðinn. ■



Ask The Curator

The Ever-Changing Wonderland

The new exhibition at Ásmundarsafn blends the heritage of Ásmundur Sveinsson with contemporary works in progress

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGE Atli Freyr Steinsson

In an unassuming corner of Laugardalur sits Ásmundarsafn — one of the Reykjavík Art Museum's three locations for the past four decades and, before that, the home and studio of pioneering Icelandic sculptor Ásmundur Sveinsson (1893-1982). The building itself is a quirky work of art, designed by Ásmundur himself and inspired by Greek and Arabic architecture encountered during his travels.

When Ásmundur constructed the house, the surrounding area was still the grassland of a neighbouring farm called Undraland — Wonderland in English. Fittingly, Wonderland is also the name of an upcoming exhibition that offers visitors a peek into Ásmundur's studio and work. But there's more to it than that. I caught up with curator Markús Þór Andrésson before the opening to find out what the exhibition has in store.

STUDIO RETURNS

Since becoming a museum, Ásmundarsafn has regularly showcased contemporary artists alongside Ásmundur's work. "Now the idea is to turn towards focusing on the building's original purpose — a studio where people were working," Markús explains as he shows me around the space.

The museum aims to capture the atmosphere of Ásmundur's original studio while hosting a selection of artists who will use the space as their creative workshop. "It's not exactly a residency — maybe more an exercise in displaying art in flux, art in movement, or art in development," says Markús.

In short, Wonderland splits into two parts — rotating exhibitions of five

artists using the studio throughout the year, and a more permanent exhibition of Ásmundur Sveinsson's art and legacy. The first artist to occupy the space is Unnar Örn.

Unnar has borrowed thousands of postcards from the collection that memorabilia collector Andrés J. Johnson bequeathed to the National Museum of Iceland. "Unnar is always very interested in the way we think about history because history is documented, written and handed down to us through a process of collecting and thinking about elements that are considered valuable. He's very skeptical towards museums as institutions, because as institutions, museums behave in a certain way — we tell the same story over and over again," explains Markús.

"Unnar is always trying to shake these things up," he adds. "He's interested in how the selection takes place, and what's the logic behind it? What's the individual ambitions behind it? What's the institutional gain? What does the zeitgeist have to do with it?" As part of the exhibition, Unnar is going to rearrange the postcard collection in his own unique way, while also including the museum and its garden in the creative process.

The other artists participating in the exhibition throughout the year include poet and artist Ásta Fanney, who will represent Iceland at the Venice Biennale in 2026; sculptor and performance artist Halldór Ásgeirsson; the winner of the 2024 Icelandic Art Prize, Amanda Rizzo; and Sara Riel, best known for her public art and graffiti.

BACK TO ÁSMUNDUR'S WORLD

I follow Markús to a horseshoe gallery in the back of the building. "As you can see, it's quite chaotic," Markús says, pointing at sculptures of different sizes and textures spread throughout the room. This style was intentional, he explains, designed to mimic Ásmundur's original studio. Here, we can see the wide variety of materials he worked with throughout his life, along with his preserved drawings and tools. "You have to think about the time when he is doing these things," he

says, showing me weird-looking scissors used to enlarge the sculptures. "There was so much poverty, no materials, nothing coming from abroad. He had to work with whatever he could find around him. Ásmundur created his own concrete, made his own materials and tools. He was a brilliant craftsman."

Among the diverse pieces, the display features more well-known works like the Water Carrier, a larger version of which — cast in bronze — can be seen on the corner of Lækjargata and Bankastræti downtown. "In the 1930s, in the beginning of his career, Ásmundur was doing these sort of half figurative people," says Markús. "He was a great admirer of the working class, creating pieces like the Water Carrier, which has a very strong and powerful body language, but also a very serene and respectful atmosphere around it. As he said himself, he doesn't want to feel sorry for the working class. He just admires their diligence, power and energy."

A LIVING EXHIBITION

Markús refers to Ásmundur Sveinsson's studio as "a jewel," and says the museum's challenge lies in figuring out how to make the space meaningful for today's audience. "How do we use it to respect the history of the place, the person behind it, and to address today's art world?" he muses, pointing out that balance is key.

"We have a feeling that the general art audience in Iceland have the idea that once they've seen something, they don't have to go back," Markús adds with a smile. "One of the challenges that we are addressing in this exhibition is that this is a place that is alive and worth visiting several times — to see the artists' works in progress, observe how things develop, understand artists' minds, and be able to interact with them."

The ideal time to visit? "Popping up in the middle of an artist's work in progress would make the most sense," Markús suggests. "That's when things are really brewing." ■

Wonderland opens at Ásmundarsafn on January 11.

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Film Feature

Vigdís: The Making Of The Nation's Role

New series follows Vigdís Finnbogadóttir's path to presidency

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGES Rán Bjargar & Supplied still

“We were all kids in the 80s when Vigdís was president. She was very influential on our generation – on *my* generation,” says director and actor Björn Hlynur Haraldsson (*Jar City*, *Verbúðin*, *Dýrið*, *Villibráð* and more), speaking of a woman who, in 1980, made history not only as Iceland's first female president but also as the world's first democratically elected female head of state. Rather than following the capitalist zeitgeist of the era, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir dedicated herself to protecting Iceland's environment and cultural legacy, and broke the glass ceiling for the next generation of women.

Now, her journey to the presidency is chronicled in *Vigdís*, a four-episode mini-series that premiered on RÚV on January 1. Each episode runs for an hour, following Vigdís from age 17, when she finishes school, through her studies in France, up until her election as president in 1980.

“Rakel [Garðarsdóttir], the main producer and the one who had the idea to make a series about Vigdís, is my wife. She basically just told me to do it,” Björn laughs, explaining how he got involved in the project. “I was really happy to be on board, and I had been on the side with them before – reading the scripts and being supportive.”

The idea for the project first began to take shape more than a decade ago. First, the script was in the works, then came the classic filmmakers' quest to secure funding. But there was always one issue. “We didn't really know what it was supposed to be – maybe a film or a

longer series,” Björn explains. Writing a real person's story is tricky, he adds, as you have to rely on facts but also find a compelling narrative. “We

Björn directed the first two episodes, while actress and director Tinna Hrafnadóttir took the helm for episodes three and four.

You could make a series about Vigdís and then meet her at Melabúðin. We live in a tiny town and, as a society, we have to treat each other with respect when telling stories like this.

just wanted to give it time. We had to do it right with this story and we didn't want to rush into something that wasn't.”

In 2024, everything fell into place for the crew, and the series was filmed in just 60 days over the summer.

A LEGACY IN TRUSTED HANDS

Vigdís, now 94, has been supportive of the project from its inception. “She's been involved through the years,” Björn says, adding that Rakel,

scriptwriters Björg Magnúsdóttir and Agústa M. Ólafsdóttir, and one of the lead actresses met with her to better understand her character. “We all knew what kind of the outwardly presidential person she was, but we had to uncover more of her personal side,” explains Björn.

According to him, the former president gave the creators complete carte blanche for the project, without reading the script. “She put it in Rakel's and Agústa's hands and said, ‘I trust you to do this,’” Björn says. “She would have said no if it were done by people she didn't trust,” he adds with a smile.

Watching your own life story on screen could feel strange – perhaps even uncomfortable – but it's not something entirely new. I bring up *The Crown* and the rumors of royal family members secretly watching and commenting on the show. Björn laughs. “There was more fiction in *The Crown*. They were not real-

SJÁVARGRILLIÐ
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ly involved to begin with. So much has been made about the U.K. royal family that they've probably never been asked if it could be made into a movie or something," he says. "Iceland is such a small community, everyone knows each other, so it has to be done in the right way," he smiles, adding, "You could make a series about Vigdís and then meet her at Melabúðin. We live in a tiny town and as a society, we have to treat each other with respect when telling stories like this."

PORTRAYING AN ICON

Playing a national icon and the world's first female president is a monumental task, shared between two actresses — Elin Hall portraying young Vigdís and Nína Dögg Filippusdóttir as her older self. Both choices couldn't be more fitting.

In recent years, Elin has been steadily making waves in the Icelandic film industry. Between her lead

role in critically acclaimed *Ljósbrót* and being named a 2025 European Shooting Star for her impact both at home and abroad — all while developing her music career — she slips into the post-war era with remarkable ease. Her uncanny resemblance to young Vigdís is merely a bonus.

"We saw a picture of Elin that looked very much like the picture of Vigdís

Björn points out that casting two actors to capture a single character's journey across different periods is a daunting challenge — particularly in Iceland. The rest, in his words, is just "work."

"The only challenging thing I can think of is finding the right people because Iceland is so small. If we go over to Scandinavia or London,

Finding someone having both the look and the immense talent was like hitting the jackpot.

at a similar age and said, "Wow, she really looks like her in those years," Björn explains. "But that wasn't the main thing. Luckily for us, she is a great actress as well. Finding someone having both the look and the immense talent was like hitting the jackpot."

for example, we can have a casting session with 1000 women that could play her easily. But here, it's one or two."

Capturing old Reykjavik came with its own challenges. "Reykjavik today is very different from the old days. A lot of things have been torn down,"

says Björn, noting that making a period piece in Reykjavik is becoming increasingly difficult. "Everything in the frame has to be perfect, you cannot shoot a scene by a window and have a Tesla drive by," he says. Still, shooting entirely on location, the team pulled it off, and Björn is happy with how it all turned out.

REWRITING THE RULES

"A woman of her generation was not really expected to do anything else but to find a husband and settle down. But Vigdís had a really strong urge to get an education, see the world, meet people," Björn emphasizes. "I said it to the young actors in the first episode, 'We don't realise how much of a rebel she was.' Wearing trousers — men's trousers — to MR [Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík] downtown — no one thinks about it today, but back then, when she did it, it was an act of rebellion. It was such a massive thing. No one had done that before."

For those who lived through Vigdís' presidency, Björn hopes the series offers a chance to view her life from a more personal angle, while for younger generations, it will underscore what an important figure she is in Iceland's history. Although the series only covers her life up to the point she became president, leaving out her 16 years in office, Björn hints that the future may hold more — depending on how the series is received.

"She broke some molds for women especially, and for me as well," he says, summing up. "Follow your dreams. Don't let anyone or anything stop you. That's basically what [the series] is about — and the hope that things will get better with time." ■

Watch *Vigdís* with English subtitles on RÚV 2

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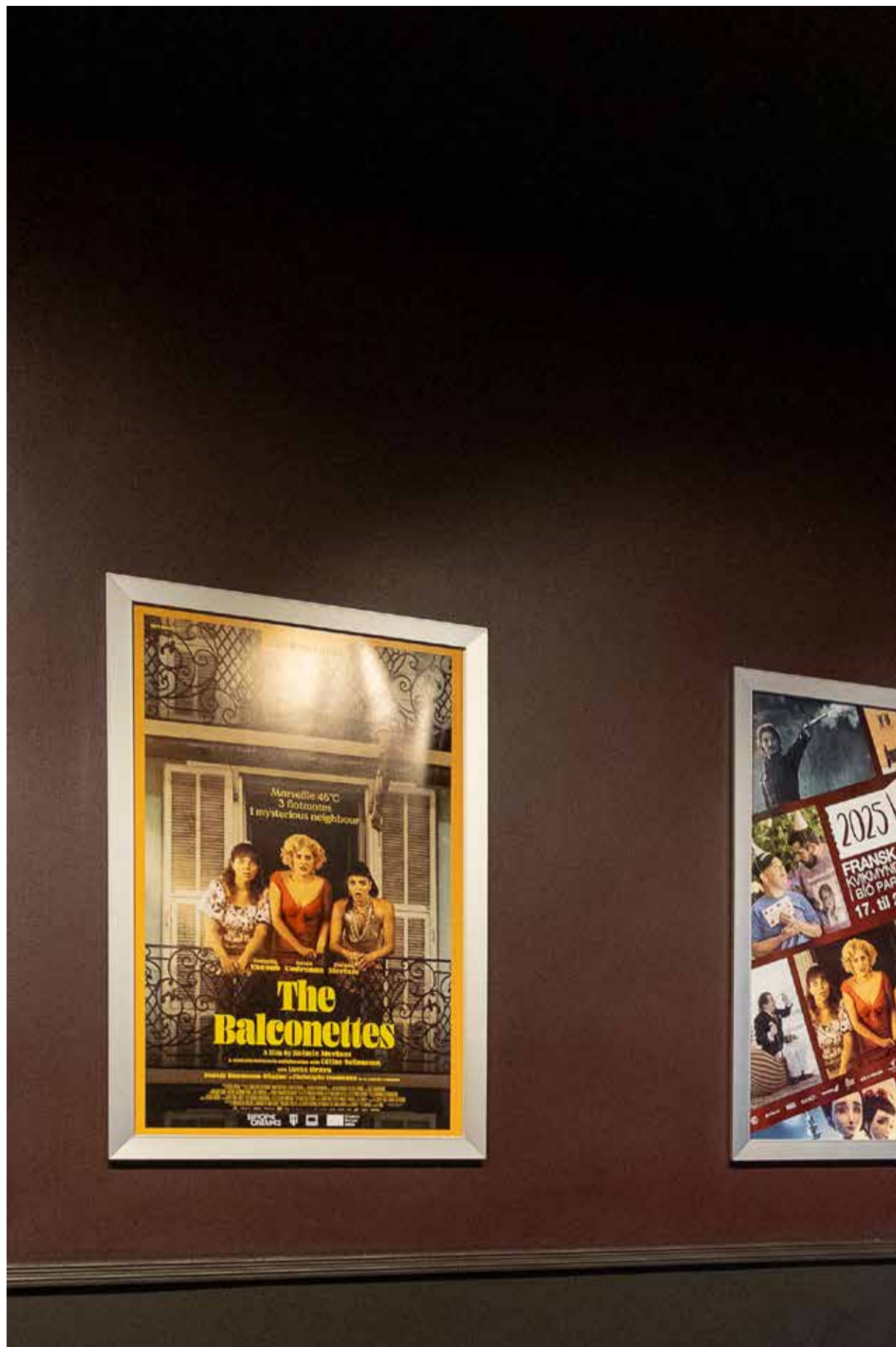
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Festival Fun

Thank God For French

The French Film Festival brings a certain je ne sais quoi back to Bíó Paradís

WORDS Valur Gunnarsson
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

middle of January. I even remember pre-gaming when a friend borrowed a Serge Gainsbourg DVD from the library on the eve of the big fête.

Thanks to Bíó Paradís, we can now watch “foreign” films all year round, but the French Film Festival in January remains a special event. Now in its 25th year, it is as old as the century itself and possibly older than some of the cinemagoers. The French remain the only people who still go to the cinema almost as often as they did before covid and the only country where attendance has gone up year-over-year. Meanwhile cinemas continue to be shuttered here in Iceland and elsewhere around the globe. What’s more, many of the major French blockbusters are homemade.

Back in the dark ages before Bíó Paradís opened its doors – and the eyes of Icelandic filmgoers – the only time one could see non-Hollywood films in Icelandic cinemas was during the French Film Festival. Connoisseurs would silently endure Christmas and New Year’s Eve before the real festivities began in the

One of these is *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the latest retelling of Alexandre Dumas’ classic tale. Another is *A Little Something Extra*, about a father and son who seek refuge from the police in a summer camp for disabled people. The latter is also the opening film of this year’s festival. Personally I am most stoked for *Daaaaaall!*, a biopic of sorts about

the famed surrealist painter.

The Bíótek screens three classics monthly (typically on the last Sunday of the month), and those will also have a French focus over the course of the festival. A trio of ‘70s classics by Claude Sautet, all starring Romy Schneider and with one even featuring Yves Montand. *Sacre bleu!*

Even French Canada gets a nod in the festival lineup with *Universal Language*, about a man who travels from Montreal to Winnipeg to visit a dying mother. The *Lingua Franca* here is not French, or even English, but Farsi. Perhaps they missed a trick not having it in Icelandic, since Winnipeg is in the region of the new world we usually refer to as “Western Iceland.” All films are, however, shown with English or Icelandic subtitles, so viewers won’t lose the plot no matter the on-screen parlance.

TRANSTALES, STRIPPERS AND ASSISTED SUICIDE

Independent from the French Film Festival, there is no end of joy to be had in Bíó Paradís. The Icelandic/Norwegian-Icelandic/Danish



n Cinema

standoff continues with *Elskling* and *Hygge*. A couple of films portray transwomen while simultaneously tackling other weighty themes. *Woman of...* shows the struggles of Aneila in two different systems as Poland transitions from communism to capitalism. *Emilia Perez* is almost a fairy tale of sorts, where a Mexican druglord not only transitions but also seeks a life very different from his dark past.

Anora, on the face of it, does not seem to be about very sympathetic characters. It centres on the son of Russian oligarchs who marries a New Jersey stripper, mostly to get back at his parents, it seems. But filmmaker Sean Baker excels at finding depth in types who at first don't seem to have much of it. Heavies in parental employ come to split the couple up but nothing transpires as one would assume. The film gets better as it moves along and steers well clear of any genre tropes. *Anora* is showing up on many a best-of 2024 list and perhaps even surpasses Baker's own *Florida Project*.

The Room Next Door is the latest film by legendary Spanish direc-

tor Pedro Almodovar. It's seen as a lesser work in his oeuvre by many, not nearly as energetic as many previous films but then that is the point. It tackles the weighty subject of assisted suicide with sensitivity and no easy answers. Tilda Swinton and Julianne Moore trade lines in what often feels like more of a play than a film – quite a good one, though. As can be expected, both actresses excel, but perhaps it's ironic that great actresses in their 60s can only get parts in films about killing yourself.

PARTY FRIDAYS AND BLACK SUNDAYS

For those who want to warm up for the French Film Festival, there is a party screening of *Before Sunset*. If you managed to miss it over the past 21 years, the story is about French-American couple Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy, is a sequel to the hopelessly romantic *Before Sunrise* and asks what happens when starstruck lovers grow up.

Director Richard Linklater portrays the passage of time better than anyone, as evidenced by watching actors actually grow up and grow

old in his masterpiece *Boyhood*. The *Sunset* trilogy – capped by 2013's *Before Midnight* – also captures reality in a way many films avoid, although this lands sort of in between the romanticism of the first film and the authentic-sounding bickering of the third.

For more manly men, Lee Marvin stars in 1967 classic thriller *Point Blank* on the first Black Sunday of the month. The highlight of any week (or at least they should be), Black Sundays are held every other Sunday at Bíó Paradís, dedicated to cult classics.

See you at the concessions stand. ■

The French Film Festival runs January 17 to 26 at Bíó Paradís. Check out the full film lineup on via the local chapter of the Alliance Française, af.is or just head down to Bíó Paradís and enjoy what's playing. Check bioparadis.is for all show times.

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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 JÓMFRÚIN
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 Jómfrúin. 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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See you at Njálsgata 64, 101 Reykjavik



New In Town NÍNA

HVERFISGATA 20

Reykjavik is a funny place. You blink and an establishment you thought was still there has cleared out for something entirely different. Those were our thoughts when we heard of (one of) the newest bars in the nightlife scene opening just across the National Theatre. NÍNA, brought to us by the same who run the Gen Z magnet Auto, focuses on two things: sports and wine. If you're intrigued, so are we. Attracting all the important influencers on its opening night, I hope I won't have to write another blurb about Hverfisgata 20 for some time. JB ■

OPENING HOURS:
 Mondays-Thursdays 17:00-01:00,
 Fridays 17:00-03:00,
 Saturdays 12:00-03:00,
 Sundays 12:00-01:00.
 Table reservations available at nina@ninabar.is.



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FOOD HALL & BAR

PÓSTHÚS

PÓSTHÚSSTRÆTI | 101 REYKJAVÍK

BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2024 BEST FOODHALL

HAPPY HOUR 16:00 - 18:00

Art Exhibitions

10.01.25–06.02.25

Gallery openings, happenings, showings and pop-up exhibitions all around the capital region

Opening

ÁSMUNDARSALUR

Ásmundarsalur Sveinsson – *Wonderland*

Going back in time to explore Ásmundur Sveinsson's studio and the history of Ásmundarsafn, different artists will explore their works in progress here, beginning with Unnar Örn

Opens January 11
Runs until December 31

BERG CONTEMPORARY

Hallgrður Hallgrímsdóttir & Nina Zurier

Opens on January 17

GERÐARSAFN (KÓPAVOGUR ART MUSEUM)

Group Exhibition – *Stare*

Exhibition explores the photographers and their inner personal narratives while breaking photographic medium norms, part of the Icelandic Photo Festival

Opens January 25
Runs until April 19

GLERHÚSÍÐ

Atli Ingólfsson – *Algerving*

The esteemed composer puts forth an exhibition in collaboration with Dark Music Days

Opens January 25
Runs until March 24

GALLERY GRÓTTA

Irene Hrafnan Bermudez – *Thinking About Language*

An exhibition consisting of sculpted reliefs on the wall or floor, photo-

graphs, and drawings

Opens January 23
Runs until February 15

HAFNARBORG CENTER OF CULTURE & FINE ART

Helgi Vignir Bragason – *Still Lifespan*

Photography exploring building and construction materials, combining still-life images, photography, and sketches, part of the Icelandic Photo Festival

Opens January 25
Runs until March 30

HAFNARHÚS (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)

Ragnar Kjartansson – *World Light*
A cinematic adaptation of Halldor Laxness' *World Light* using four screens

Opens February 7
Closes on September 21

HOF CULTURE HOUSE (AKUREYRI)

Ásta Sigurðardóttir – *Sunday night to Monday morning*

Showcasing linoleum cuts created in tandem with Ásta's famous 1951 short story "Sunnudagskvöld til mánudagsmorguns"

Opens January 25
Runs until March 30

THE HOUSE OF COLLECTIONS

Resistance

Works from the collection, exploring "resistance" in all its meanings: opposition, scientifically, specifically to consumption and the climate crisis, resistance as essential action

Opens February 3
Runs until March 26

IPA GALLERY

Hlynur Helgason – *Not a Knowledge at All*

The artist combines image production and artificial intelligence to create cyanotype works, part of the Icelandic Photo Festival

Opens January 17
Runs until February 2

18 GALLERY

Kristján Guðmundsson – *As Far as the Space Allows*

Opens January 30
Runs until March 8

18 GRANDI

Ragnar Kjartansson – *The Brown Period*

Opens January 18
Runs until December 18

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ICELAND

Group Exhibition – *Intimacies of the Everyday*

Selected works from discrete series within each artist's medium, exploring the necessity of intentional and dedicated observation to attain certain images

Opens January 25
Runs until May 4

THE NORDIC HOUSE

Group Exhibition – *Is This North?*

Works from artists that call The Arctic their home, exploring if that connects them and how their northern dwelling imprints on their work

Opens January 25
Runs until April 27

MUSEUM OF DESIGN AND APPLIED ARTS

The Most Beautiful Books In The

World

The Best Book Design from all over the World competition has been held for over 60 years, visitors are able to browse all 14 awarded books of 2024's competition

Opens January 23
Runs until March 23

LISTASALUR MOSFELLS-BÆJAR

Alda Rose Cartwright – *Ég er hér*
Solo exhibition of silkscreen and graphic work, exploring nature and vegetation

Opens January 11
Runs until February 7

ÓFEIGUR LÍSTHÚS

Christine Gisla – *Longing for Peace*
Juxtaposing a photographer's focus on finding beauty within an earth that is raging with conflict, part of the Icelandic Photo Festival

Opens January 18
Runs until February 12

GALLERY PORT

Hrafn Hólmfríðarson & Þórsteinn Svanhildarson – *Either side of the table*

Two photographers put on a joint exhibition exploring disability, part of the Icelandic Photo Festival

Opening January 18
Runs until February 1

REYKJANESBÆR ART MUSEUM

Ívar Valgarðsson – *Ocean*

179 photographs and paintings create a room-sized installation, including work spanning Ívar's career

Opens January 18
Runs until April 19

REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Group Exhibition – *Weathered*

An exhibition exploring impact of people on nature, and photography's impact on that relationship, part of the Icelandic Photo Festival

Opens January 17
Runs until March 16

SLÖKKVISTÖÐIN

angela snæfellsjökuls rawlings – *Motion to Change Colour Names to Reflect Planetary Boundary Tipping Points*

Exploring ecological and societal change through exhibitions, a written motion, and a participatory performance

Opens January 10
Runs until February 2

PULA

Björk Viggósdóttir – *Infinite Randomness*

Multimedia installation exploring the unknown, using sound, image, colour, movement to capture the viewer's attention

Opens January 11
Runs until February 16

Ongoing

ÁSMUNDARSALUR

Ólafur K. Magnússon – *Fragments Of Our History*

Legacy exhibition, photography

Runs until February 20

GERÐARSAFN (KÓPAVOGUR ART MUSEUM)

Finnbogi Pétursson – *Parabóla*

Mixed media

Runs until January 19

Guðnýs Ýr Finnbogadóttir & Þorgerður Ólafsdóttir – *Unstable Ground*

Sound and video installation, mixed media

Runs until January 19

Glerhúsið

Unnar Örn Museum of Amnesia

Mixed media

Runs until January 19

GALLERY GRÓTTA

Guðrún Einarsdóttir – *Nature Reserve*

Oil painting

Runs until January 12

HAFNARBORG CENTER OF CULTURE & FINE ART

Arrgunnur Ýr – *Kahali*

Paintings

Runs until January 19

Pétur Thomsen – *Settlement*

Photography

Runs until February 16

HAFNARHÚS (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)

Hreinn Friðfinnsson – *From Time - To Time*

Works from the collection

Runs until January 12

Erró – *1001 Nights*

Paintings

Runs until March 23

Stay and turn to stone! Folklore in Icelandic Art

Group exhibition, paintings

Runs until May 25

KJARVALSSTAÐIR (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)

Hallgrímur Helgason – *Havoc*

Paintings, illustrations

Runs until February 9

KLING&BANG

Joe Keys – *Else*

Sculptures, found material

Runs until February 9

Ólöf Bóadóttir – *Pressured Speech*

Installations, mixed media

Runs until February 9

Permanent exhibition

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ICELAND

Looking Inward, Looking Outward: 140 years of the National Gallery of Iceland

Group exhibition, works from the collection

Runs until March 30

GALLERY SIGN

Kristín Karólína Helgadóttir – *Global Village*

Found images

Runs until June 15

Art Picks



Infinite Randomness – Björk Viggósdóttir

Saturday, January 11
Marshall House
Free entry

In this multimedia installation, Björk Viggósdóttir orchestrates an encounter between seemingly unrelated elements – suspended rice paper, ink strokes, video projections and rhythmic soundscapes – to create a transformative environment where "the world paints itself without us knowing the source of the pigments. Symbols invert themselves." Through a carefully curated palette of blue and white, complemented by bone-white porcelain and ethereal projections, the artist invites visitors into a prophetic sphere where the line between observer and infinity blurs, transforming the gallery into a living stage of perception. IZ



Sitt hvoru megin við sama borð

Saturday, January 18
Gallery Port
Free entry

Sitt hvoru megin við sama borð (Either side of the table) is an exhibition within the Icelandic Photo Festival, featuring a joint project by two photographers whose lives are intertwined with disability, although in different ways. Hrafn Hólmfríðarson suffered a brain stem hemorrhage, while Þórsteinn Svanhildarson's daughter was born with a rare syndrome that causes intellectual and physical disabilities. Through their work, the photographers share their perspectives on living with disability and how it shapes their daily reality. IZ



Jónsi – FLÓÐ (Flood)

Closes on January 19
Hafnarhús (Reykjavík Art Museum)

Although it was a few issues ago that we spoke to Jónsi about his first European exhibition, FLÓÐ ("Flood"), we really cannot stress enough how much you should go see it before it disappears. With unique visual, sound, light and scent palates, FLÓÐ stirs deeply physical and emotional reactions that may leave you surprised, perplexed and a little bit dizzy. Take a whole afternoon and sink into the flood before it says goodbye to Hafnarhús on January 19. RX/IZ



Sitt hvoru / við sama megin / borð

Hrafn Hólmfríðarson
Þórsteinn Svanhildarson

18.01 / 01.02
Gallery Port



Events 10.01.25–06.02.25

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

Friday January 10

Cousin trouble dj set
21:00 12 Tónar
XJAZZ Reykjavík
19:00 Iðnó
Inspector Spacetime
22:00 Kaffibarinn
DJ Óli Dóri
23:00 Kaffibarinn
NÚ METAL
23:00 LEMMY
Kristín Anna
20:00 Mengi
Young G&T
22:00 Röntgen
Artist Talks
16:00 SÍM Gallery

Saturday January 11

DJ Markív
21:00 12 Tónar
SEIDR: Pole Performance Art
21:00 Gaukurinn
XJAZZ Reykjavík
19:00 Iðnó
Straumur: Katla Yamagata
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Danni Bigroom & Björn Salvador
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Morgan Garrett / MC MYASNOI
20:00 Mengi
Að standa á haus: Hjalte Ross & Dread Lightly
20:00 RVK Bruggfélag
Tónabíó
Spacestation Concert & KBG
22:00 Röntgen

Sunday January 12

Sunshine Sunday: Cozy Vibes
17:00 Gaukurinn
Vinyl Sunday: Simon (fknhdsm)
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Monday January 13

Arts and Climate Change Workshop
16:00 Dalur Hostel & Cafe
LoFi Monday
17:00 Gaukurinn
Icelandic Tango Community: Open Dance
19:30 Iðnó
DJ Vala
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Mánudjass
19:30 Le Kock

Tuesday January 14

DJ Júllala
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Pub Quiz
20:00 Röntgen

Wednesday January 15

DJ Silja Glömmi
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Mikael Máni
20:00 Mengi
Vinyl Wednesday: Uoon
21:00 Röntgen

Thursday January 16

Kátt á línunni
20:00 Catalína
ReykjaFreaks
21:00 Gaukurinn
Simon (fknhdsm)
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Klaki + Snorri Rodriguez & Himintunglín
21:00 LEMMY
Sinis-Ásgeirsson dúó: Ottoman Classical Music
20:00 Mengi
Tigermjól
21:00 Röntgen
DADA
18:00 Space Odyssey

Friday January 17

French Film Festival: Daaaaaali Screening, food & wine
19:00 Bíó Paradís
Rinos and the Gender Benders
21:00 Gaukurinn
Oyama Release Concert & K.óla
20:30 Iðnó
Kjörk
23:00 Kaffibarinn
GulaR BauníR!
22:30 LEMMY
DJ Ívar Pétur
22:00 Röntgen
DJ Ísold
20:00 RVK Bruggfélag
Tónabíó

Saturday January 18

French Film Festival: Nina and the Hedgehog's Secret
14:30 Bíó Paradís
Swap Market & DJ Set
16:00 Dalur Hostel & Cafe
The Shopsies
21:00 Gaukurinn
Kári Egils
20:00 Iðnó

Markús & The Diversion Session
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Young G&T
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Morgan Garrett & MC MYASNOI
20:00 Mengi
DJ Mellí
22:00 Röntgen
Einakróna & La Medusa Violenta
20:00 RVK Bruggfélag
Tónabíó

Sunday January 19

Vinyl Sunday: Jón Halldór
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Monday January 20

LoFi Monday
17:00 Gaukurinn
Icelandic Tango Community: Open Dance
19:30 Iðnó
Brynja (Girls Gang)
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Mánudjass
19:30 Le Kock

Tuesday January 21

Karaoke Night
21:00 Gaukurinn
Fu Kaisha
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Wednesday January 22

Jack and the Cuckoo-Clock Heart with Mathias Malzieu
19:00 Bíó Paradís
MC Björ
21:00 Gaukurinn
Mary Jane from UA
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Vinyl Wednesday: DJ Silja Glömmi
21:00 Röntgen

Thursday January 23

Blues Night
21:00 Gaukurinn
Ragnheiður Gröndal Trio
18:00 Hotel Holt
Maggi Legó
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Richter
21:00 LEMMY
In3dee
21:00 Röntgen
LHI Jam Session
20:00 RVK Bruggfélag
Tónabíó
OSME
18:00 Space Odyssey

Looking Inward, Looking Outward

140 Years of the National Gallery of Iceland



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

12.10.2024
-30.3.2025

Listasafn Íslands
National Gallery of Iceland

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11.01.–31.12.2025

Undraland

Wonderland

Ásmundur Sveinsson



Artists with work in progress

Unnar Örn January 11
Ásta Fanney Sigurðardóttir March 29
Halldór Ásgeirsson June 14
Amanda Rizzo August 23
Sara Riel November 8

Ásmundarsafn
Sigtúni
105 Reykjavík
+354 411 6430

Open daily
13h00–17h00
artmuseum.is
[#reykjavikartmuseum](https://www.instagram.com/reykjavikartmuseum)

Event Picks



XJAZZ Reykjavík
Friday, January 10 & Saturday,
January 11
Iðnó
6.900–9.900 ISK

Hold your horses, there's a new music festival in town. XJAZZ Reykjavík is an offshoot of the annual, Berlin-based XJAZZ Festival, celebrated continuously for 10 years. Now it's time for Reykjavík to play host, made possible in part by the involvement and cooperation of the Extreme Chill Festival. This is not the two festivals' first collaboration, as they'd already worked together in 2015 and 2016. Artists performing include Ingibjörg Turchi, Sebastian Studnitzky, Dj Flugvél og Geimskip, Paddan, Hekla, and many more. Get your tickets on midix.is. JB



The Balconettes: An Evening with Noémie Merlant
Saturday, January 25
Bíó Paradís
2.190 ISK

Don't we all love Bíó Paradís for the chance to meet directors and sometimes actors between screenings? It's an opportunity to ask the crew, after watching an intense film, questions like, "How did you pull it off?" or "Was working with this or that director really as bad as they say?" As part of the French Film Festival, you'll have the chance to watch this brand-new French horror comedy set in bloody Marseille. After the screening, there will be a talk with the director, writer, and actress Noémie Merlant. IZ



юyuki&viktsya/madonna+child/ Lindy Lin/YULI4IK
Thursday, January 30
Mengi
2.500 ISK

Things are cooking in the Reykjavík grassroots scene, as evident by the exciting January schedule happening at Mengi. On January 30, four artists in the field of experimental music – as vast as it may be – perform at the Óðingsgata institution. Curated by local composer Masaya Ozaki, the all-female lineup consists of both domestic and international talent. Prepare for a musical adaptation of The Shining twins, rageful feminist poetry and a punch in the mouth from the inside. JB

ÁSMUNDARSAFN

Events

10.01.25–06.02.25

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

Friday January 24

- Rams**
22:00 Bird
Tónhýlur Akademía
21:30 Gamla Bíó
- Hylur**
21:00 Gaukurinn
Dark Music Days Opening Event
16:00 Harpa (Eldborg)
Dark Music Days – Icelandic Symphony Orchestra
18:00 Harpa (Eldborg)
Dark Music Days – Elín Gunnlaugsdóttir: Busy & Halfway Down
20:00 Harpa (Hörpuhorn)
Dark Music Days – Masaya Ozaki: Borderline
20:30 Harpa (Underground Car Park K2)
Dark Music Days – Ásta Fanney Sigurðardóttir
21:00 Harpa (Eldborg)
Þorgerður
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Scott McLemore's Multiverse
20:00 Mengi
DJ Karítas
22:00 Röntgen
DJ Arnar Eggert
20:00 RVK Bruggfélag Tónabíó

Saturday January 25

- Dark Music Days – Eyjólfur Eyjólfsson & Berglind María Tómasdóttir*
13:00 Ásmundarsafn

- The Balconettes Screening with Noémie Merlant*
18:30 Bíó Paradís
DJ Party Night
21:00 Gaukurinn
Dark Music Days – Family Programme
11:00 Harpa (Hörpuhorn)
Dark Music Days – MÍT
14:00 Harpa (Kaldalón)
Dark Music Days – Hildigunnur Einarsdóttir & Guðrún Dalía: New and Newer
16:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)
Dark Music Days – Riot Ensemble
18:00 Harpa (Kaldalón)
Dark Music Days – Short Film Screenings
19:30 Harpa (Kaldalón)
Dark Music Days – CAPUT ensemble
20:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)
Dark Music Days – John McCowen: SOLO
22:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)
Tonarunur & Arctander
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Fusion Groove & Karítas
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Simon fknhdsm
22:00 Röntgen
Gleðilegt foking ár & Juno Paul
20:00 RVK Bruggfélag Tónabíó
Framtíðarfestival/Future Festival
10:00 The Reykjavik City Library Grófin

Sunday January 26

- Black Sunday: Legend*
21:00 Bíó Paradís
Dark Music Days – Hjálmar H. Ragnarsson Artist Conversation
16:00 Hallgrímskirkja

- Dark Music Days – Cantoque Ensemble*
17:00 Hallgrímskirkja
Dark Music Days – Iðunn Einarsdóttir og Þórður Hallgrímsson: Pipe Mass
13:00 Harpa (Kaldalón)
Dark Music Days – Skerpla: For Boys and Girls
15:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)
Dark Music Days – Guðrún Óskarsdóttir & Heleen Van Haegenborgh: Folklore for strings and keys
19:00 Harpa (Kaldalón)
Dark Music Days – Short Film Screenings
19:30 Harpa (Kaldalón)
Dark Music Days – Reykjavik Chamber Orchestra
21:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)
Vinyl Sunday
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Monday January 27

- Pub Quiz*
20:00 Bodega
LoFi Monday
17:00 Gaukurinn
Silja Glómmi
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Mánudjass
19:30 Le KocK

Tuesday January 28

- Karaoke Night*
21:00 Gaukurinn
Jónbjörn (Lagaffe Tales)
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Pub Quiz
20:00 Röntgen

Wednesday January 29

- DJ Júllala*

- 21:00 Kaffibarinn
Vinyl Wednesday: Dj No service
21:00 Röntgen
Nico Guerrero
18:00 Space Odyssey

Thursday January 30

- Ndja*
21:00 Gaukurinn
DJ Guðný Jóns
21:00 Kaffibarinn
PUNCH IN THE MOUTH FROM THE INSIDE: ioyuki&viktsya, madonna + child, Lindy Lin, YUL4IK
20:00 Mengi
DJ Brynja
21:00 Röntgen

Friday January 31

- Agnar Eldberg + Kristó & co ft. Karl Henry*
21:00 Bird
DJ Party Night
21:00 Gaukurinn
Simon (fknhdsm)
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Pussy Riot & SiGRUN
20:00 Mengi
Fusion Groove
22:00 Röntgen
Dj Markiv
20:00 RVK Bruggfélag Tónabíó

Saturday February 1

- HATARI*
21:00 Gaukurinn
Organist Eypór Franzson Wechne
12:00 Hallgrímskirkja
Marla
22:00 Röntgen
Katla Yamagata & Frid
20:00 RVK Bruggfélag Tónabíó

Sunday February 2

- Polish Comedian Mike Topolski*
21:00 Gaukurinn
Atsuko Okatsuka
20:00 Háskólabíó
Vinyl Sunday
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Monday February 3

- Pub Quiz*
20:00 Bodega
Mánudjass
19:30 Le KocK

Tuesday February 4

- Karaoke Night*
21:00 Gaukurinn

Wednesday February 5

- Bring the Laughs: Stand Up Comedy*
21:00 Gaukurinn

Thursday February 6

- Hliðarspor: Opera*
20:00 Gamla Bíó
ReykjaFreaks
21:00 Gaukurinn
Flying Elbows
21:00 LEMMY
The Reykjavik Grapevine Music Awards
18:00 Mengi
DJ Día G
21:00 Röntgen

Friday February 7

- ApocalypticK*
21:00 Gaukurinn
Dan & Phil
20:00 Háskólabíó
DJ Óli Dóri
22:00

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Hallgerður Hallgrímsdóttir & Nina Zurier
Bystander
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Every day from 16:00 to 1:00
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,
Cocktails 1.500 ISK

BÍÓ PARADÍS

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

BODEGA

Every day from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.000 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

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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 1.200 ISK,
Cocktails 1.900 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

PRÍKIÐ

Every day from 16:00 to 20:00
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RÖNTGEN

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

SKÚLI CRAFT BAR

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Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

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21:00 on weekends
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Featured
Happy Hour

Röntgen

HVERFISGATA 12

The sun has finally decided to start to ascend higher into the sky once more, giving us longer days. However, it's still fucking dark and freezing, but we can work with that. What better way to enjoy the inevitable end of winter than huddling up in Röntgen. A frequent mention in our Best Of Reykjavik publication, Röntgen quickly became a favourite among locals and tourists alike. With an impeccable taste for DJs and drinks and space for dancing, it's a fantastic spot for a cheeky post-work happy hour. JB

HAPPY HOURS:

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Deathmetal sandwich and beer
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990 ISK all day, every day

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

HLÖLLABÁTAR

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2.195 ISK every day until 14:00

ISLENSKI BARINN

Soup of the Day
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LEMON

Combo of the Month: large sandwich &
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or sandwich

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The Grapevine Recommends:



"What if Icelanders had settled in North America during the Viking Age? And why didn't they? Could a religious war between Pagans and Christians in Iceland have led to an exodus to the newly discovered continent?

In the late 18th century, the Icelandic population was nearly wiped out by a volcano and there was a plan to

transport the survivors to Denmark. What if this had occurred? And did the volcano cause the French Revolution?

What if Iceland had been occupied by Germany during WWII instead of under British and American protection? Hitler had a plan drawn up but why was it never put into practice?..."



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22

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Music News



Árni Grétar Jóhannesson, Futuregrapher, Dead At 41

Reykjavík-based electronic musician Árni Grétar Jóhannesson, known under his artist moniker Futuregrapher, died after driving into Reykjavík harbour. Árni's brother, Ólafur Sveinn Jóhannesson, confirmed his death in a conversation with Vísir following a public Facebook post. Alongside Futuregrapher's vast discography, he founded the la-

bels Móatún 7 and Möller Records. On December 31 around 14:00, nearly all available fire emergency responders in the capital area reported to the scene. Árni was subsequently transported to Landspítalinn's intensive care unit where he passed away. He is survived by his two children, aged 16 and six. JB



Dance Like Laufey In Fortnite

Jazz and pop musician Laufey's dance moves have now been immortalised in the free-to-play online video game Fortnite. The young artist's Charleston from her music video "From The Start" is now available for purchase through the video game's online store – a frequently updated database of meme-worthy moves and icons influenced by

the zeitgeist. Laufey joins a host of celebrities featured in the game, including Snoop Dogg, Pharrell and Jim Carrey. Fortnite is one of the world's most popular video games, boasting a player base of 650 million. In contrast, Laufey's track has been streamed 575 million times and her album Bewitched won a Grammy award in 2023. JB



Lúpína, Sunna Margrét, Elín Hall Confirmed For SXSW 2025

Three Icelandic artists have been confirmed to perform at the next South By Southwest festival, SXSW. The festival takes place between March 7-16, 2025, in Austin, Texas. Elín Hall, Lúpína and Sunna Margrét are set to perform, representing the diverse music scene stemming from Iceland. SXSW is one of the world's biggest showcase festivals, cele-

brating music, film, tech, education, and culture. It is recognised as a seminal opportunity for burgeoning musicians. In addition to the acts playing, Iceland Music will host events during the festival, building opportunities between Icelandic musicians and international music professionals. JB



Icelandic CEO Of American Music Shop Lays 99 People Off

As reported by Music Tech on November 18, CEO of the U.S.-based music shop The Musicians' Club Baldvin Oddsson announced a mass layoff of 99 of the company's 110 employees. The firing occurred after the sacked staffers failed to attend a meeting. The decision was announced to staff via Slack,

with Baldvin ending the termination letter saying, "Get the fuck out of my business right now." Baldvin defended this controversial decision on LinkedIn, stating that website traffic and sales by his company had increased in the days following the incident. *Note: Baldvin is pictured far right.* JB



Speaking In Tongues

Speaking In Tongues

Ásta Fanney Sigurðardóttir explores ultimate freedom in Glossolalia

WORDS Jóhannes Bjarkason
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

ing in tongues, Glossolalia continues Ásta's years-long exploration of language as a means of artistic expression. A common theme in her works is the idea of molding art forms into continuous, experiential pieces that play on people's expectations and ideas about mundanity.

"I'm thinking about this format of communicating something through language," says Ásta in her hafnar. haus studio, having just recently returned from back-to-back exhibitions in Luxembourg and Taiwan.

"I find it a fascinating phenomenon, how you make yourself legible. Because sometimes, words aren't the best tool to use when you're trying to express something," she says. "I'm examining this margin: where the spectrum is between language and understanding."

you don't know the words and the mind lags behind," she says about her upcoming Glossolalia premiere.

According to Ásta, language is one of the great, governing forces of cultural existence. "We perceive the world through how we speak. That's how reality is made. We change it by changing our outlook," she suggests.

A LACK OF LABELS

Ásta doesn't want to spoil too much about her piece, opting to rather discuss the various concepts Glossolalia prompts. Functionally, the piece incorporates methods of music, installation, video, sound and performance art, partly centred on the connection between reality and fantasy.

I enjoy stretching the barriers and going completely out of bounds, or travelling into the piece's centre and letting it implode.

For the upcoming Dark Music Days (Myrkir Músíkdagar) – a festival platforming contemporary composers – artist Ásta Fanney Sigurðardóttir will premiere Glossolalia in Harpa's Eldborg auditorium.

A poet, visual artist, musician, writer and the recently confirmed Icelandic delegate at the 2026 Venice Biennale, Ásta can not, and will not, be labelled. She imagines her role as wearing many hats, all affixed to a rotating set of helicopter blades – whirring so fast they become stroboscopic, melting into one.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

The Latin word for the act of speak-

Ásta's fascination with language was also the subject of her Taipei performance piece Phantom Tongue, in which she posited a world of phonetic invention – turning nonsensical utterings into fluid language.

"Language can also deceive us. Sometimes, there aren't words for what you're thinking, or what you feel. So I'm examining what happens in this space between – when

"The subject matters in the piece are very specific," Ásta clarifies, "but it's a lot about the liminal space between imagination and reality. I'm also going into how we use language to express stories about ourselves, human history and the earth. It's all over the place," she laughs. "[The piece] touches on the question: what narratives are around us and what story are we telling ourselves?"

With a focus on the internal and ex-



ternal realities of human condition, it could be argued that Glossolalia includes a faint element of spirituality. "I think I work a lot with something related to spirituality, although I wouldn't claim to be spiritual," she says. Overall, Ásta rejects attempts to box Glossolalia in.

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

Commenting on Glossolalia's spatial dimension, Ásta expects the art to rapidly explore the spectrum of distance with the viewer. At times, she describes, the piece moves rapidly to and from the spectator.

I think I work a lot with something related to spirituality, although I wouldn't claim to be spiritual.

"It's interesting how things are marketed. Like now, I'm about to say, 'This is a spiritual piece.' Because the systems have been put into place, people start building expectations," she retorts.

"It's more of a piece that grasps at what is intangible. It's trying to show something that's invisible. Talk about something that is profane. You're pointing to something that's dissipating, and that's the piece," Ásta adds.

Reflecting the artist's philosophies, Ásta's language surrounding the piece seems to imbue it with a life on its own. "You can't really pin it down to any specific kind of piece. It doesn't want to be defined in a specific way. Because then, the possibilities are so open — anything can happen," she says excitedly.

"That's a part of how I operate with performance. I enjoy stretching the barriers and going completely out of bounds, or travelling into the piece's centre and letting it implode," she concludes.

"It perhaps works with moments which are, like, 'Here is distance,' and suddenly there's instant closeness. This movement can be an interesting medium in itself, to be stretching the moment like a piece of gum," Ásta says. "It's more mundane, in a way that it almost shouldn't be performed in Eldborg," she smiles.

Set in Harpa's largest and most opulent auditorium, Ásta relishes the opportunity to transform the venue. The home to the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra, Eldborg is inherently saturated with classical tension and high cultural connotations.

Admittedly, Ásta is in awe of Eldborg's possibilities for an unconventional staging. "It's exciting because it's so overwhelming," she remarks. "It has an intense vibe and it's dangerous territory. That's why it becomes such a fascinating subject — it's so charged that it can't be neutral."

Here, Glossolalia encapsulates Ásta's core philosophy: the idea of

endless possibilities. In harmony with her thesis is Ásta's rejection of any sort of dependence on a single medium. When asked if she feels drawn to a certain method, she dismisses the question.

"It's funny to think about mediums like they're an independent entity. A floating set which is connected and disparate," she points out. "I think the main thing about these sets is how people perceive them and relate to them. And that's where the outlook comes in and what people think it is."

"These floating sets, they don't exist. The only thing that exists are boxes behind bars which people have decided on. This box is not, 'This is poetry.' This box is just our expectations and rules within this art form," Ásta argues.

Ásta shares that, before working on a piece, her process includes scoping out the intended venue to identify its possibilities, context, and preconceived rules. "There's constantly an invisible structure keeping you in," she explains. "You think there isn't, but there's always something. That's interesting to deconstruct," Ásta livens up. "To think, 'How can I open this up? Can I open this up more?' That's sort of how I operate. Ultimate freedom, always," she grins. ■

Dark Music Days take place between January 24-26. See Ásta Fanney's Glossolalia premiere on January 24. General admission to the festival is 15.000 ISK, with single tickets available at Tix.is.

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RÁS 2

Awards Season

It's Almost Time For The 2025 Reykjavík Grapevine Music Awards

Gear up for the big night with a peek at this year's nominees

WORDS The Reykjavík Grapevine

AND THE NOMINEES ARE...

After intense, multi-day deliberations, a panel of highly knowledgeable music experts came together to draft this year's list of nominees. The panel of judges include local promoter Agnes Hlynisdóttir, DJ and music writer Alexander Le Sage De Fontenay, RÚV music critic Júlía Aradóttir, musician and event manager Maria-Carmela Raso, record purveyor and festival organiser Pan Thorarensen, and the Grapevine's music editor Jóhannes Bjarkason. Without further ado, the following is a list of nominees for the 2025 Reykjavík Grapevine Music Awards.

ARTIST OF THE YEAR

Bára Gísladóttir
CYBER
Emiliana Torrini
Ex.girls

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Sideproject – Sourcepond
SiGRÚN – Monster Milk
Supersport! – Allt sem hefur Gerst
Young Nazareth – 200 101 Vol. 1

SONG OF THE YEAR

Aron Can – "Monni"
Kaktus Einarsson feat. Damon Albarn – "Gumbri"
Oyama – "Cigarettes"
Spacestation – "Í Draumalandi"

BEST VISUAL PRODUCTION

Briët & Birnir – 1000 orð, directed by Erlendur Sveinsson
BSÍ – lily (hot dog), directed by Snæfriður Sól Gunnarsdóttir
Krassoff – Holdgeringur Lauslætis, directed by Krassoff & Freyja Vignisdóttir
Múr – Heimsslit, directed by Hrafnkell Tumi

BEST LIVE ACT

Hasar
MC MYASNOI
Osmē
Xiupill

YOU SHOULD HAVE HEARD THIS

Jónbjörn – Gáru
Katla Yamagata – Postulín
Kött Grá Þjé – Dulræn Atferlis-meðferð
Tonik Ensemble – Music is mass

ONES TO WATCH

Amor Vincit Omnia
Flesh Machine
Jadzia
Knackered

SHOUT OUT

Árni Matthíasson
Ása Dýradóttir
Drif ■

The Reykjavík Grapevine Music Awards ceremony takes place at Mengi, Óðinsgata 2, on Thursday, February 6. The doors open at 20:00, entry is free, drinks will be chilled (and also free), and the music will be live and lively. See you there.



Hammer time

Just Outside The City Limits

The Kátt á línunni concert series brings the grassroots music scene to Kópavogur

WORDS Ish Sveinsson Houle
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

You could say the same for Pétur's curation of this series, with BKPM; Sucks to be you, Nigel; and Juno Paul in the inaugural performance. K.óla, Lótto, Katla Yamagata will be playing next on January 16.

"I moved there two or three years ago. Not Hamraborg, but close by, and I'm really content," says artist, musician, curator, and Kópavogur resident Pétur Eggertsson as we meet for coffee. "It has everything I want – except concerts."

We're meeting to discuss Kátt á línunni, the concert series Pétur is curating in his fight to change the lack of concerts in Kópavogur. With its first iteration back in November, Kátt á línunni is taking advantage of the spacious venue/restaurant/bar Catalina, just outside the fingertips of Reykjavík.

Pétur's curation of the series highlights a different genre each month – November's was all about alternative rock and January zeroes in on experimental pop, while electronic and punk will be featured in February and March, respectively. When Catalina hosted the yearly Hamraborg Festival's closing concert, and amid a thinning out of grass roots spaces in Reykjavík, Pétur took note of the venue's potential.

The scene right now is exactly what I wanted it to be when I was 20.

"It was on everyone's lips that night," says Pétur. "It was pretty obvious that this was a great venue." The festival had booked Xiupill, MSEA and Ghostigital – all household names in the scene at the moment.

"This is a bit of a reminisce for me," explains Pétur. Having previously worked for the famed Kimi Records, Pétur put on shows at Sódóma Reykjavík, "which were a very similar vibe, I gotta say," he notes. "Three bands a night, maybe a DJ, and, you know, kind of accessible price-wise."

PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

Though helped by past experience, Pétur is curating Kátt á línunni with an eye firmly on the current scene. "I actually reached out to Molinn [Youth Program] to see who's doing stuff in Kópavogur that I need to know about, because I think it's important to have at least one local act," he says of Katla Yamagata.

Probed more generally about his thoughts on the state of the grassroots scene, Pétur smiles instead of launching into the usual, warranted but saddening monologue about the decline of venues.

"Oh, it's super exciting," he says emphatically, beginning a story about a recent December weekend that held some incredibly experimental back-to-back-to-back shows. "I just had a thought watching Yang Soup, just being like, 'okay, the scene right now is exactly what I wanted it to be

when I was 20.' So, a young me was very happy."

In addition to Kátt á línunni, Pétur also became a co-curator of Hamraborg Festival for 2025. Asked whether he sees the music side of

the festival grow as a result of this concert series, he answers, "I would like to see it morph. Just like new sprouts happening. I would love to see it – maybe not grow – but develop."

101 & 200

Discussing Catalina as not just a live music venue, but a restaurant and bar, we both noticed that the first concert included both people who came to Catalina for the concert, and people who came to Catalina and found a concert.

Pétur hopes that more people will come intentionally to the concerts, both from Reykjavík and Kópavogur. "I really want to see if I can get the locals to turn up to the shows. And not just – but also, of course – the people from 101," he says, thinking out loud. "A combination would be lovely, absolutely."

Because there's only been one concert so far, Pétur is excited to see how the series changes, particularly as the genres change each month. "That's just an experiment, really, to see what people are going to turn up for in Hamraborg? Are they going to turn up for a club night, or are they going to turn up for a rock show? I'm not really sure. So I'm going to try out a few different things," he says.

The next show is intended to be more musically accessible. The three artists have been tasked with doing their own experimental take on pop songs, so if that's your speed, hitch a ride to Kópavogur. But, if you're looking for something with a little more bite, the electronic February event "is gonna be way more out there." There's something for everyone within Kátt á línunni. ■

Kátt á línunni will take place on Thursday, January 16 at 20:00, at Catalina in Hamraborg. Entrance is sliding scale, with a suggested donation of 2500kr, and you can find more information on Facebook or Instagram @kattalinunni

What a great year 2024 has been for music in Iceland. With the new year rolling in, it's almost time for the Grapevine to select the best of the best. Which artist destroyed 2024? Who should you be looking out for in 2025? Those questions – and many more – will be answered at the 2025 Reykjavík Grapevine Music Awards in February.

A YEAR OF LOSS AND RECUPERATION

Although Icelandic musicians were as prolific as always, external economic developments led to stricter conditions for the local live music scene. As outlined in the Grapevine's August cover feature, the venerable Kex Hostel was shut down in favour of increased tourist accommodation. Although celebrated institutions seemed to bear the brunt of the effects of mass tourism, independent music ventures seemed to be more prevalent this year, with artists and collectives spearheading exciting new trends. Notable events included Iceland Airwaves 25th Anniversary, Ice Guys' record-breaking series of Laugardalshöll shows, and a host of other great gigs, concerts and festivals.

On February 6, the Reykjavík Grapevine invites you to Mengi to celebrate the best of the best of Icelandic music in 2024. The winners in each category will be announced at the ceremony and our new issue – with the Reykjavík Grapevine Music Awards gracing the cover – will drop.



Pianophone

The Spice Of Life

Musicians Magnús Jóhann and Óskar Guðjónsson create beautiful connections on *Fermented Friendship*

WORDS Irina Shtreis
IMAGE Eva Schram

Being idiosyncratic artists with a distinct body of work, Magnús Jóhann and Óskar Guðjónsson share connections that extend beyond the realm of music. Such details were discovered during the year-long exchange and communication that resulted in *Fermented Friendship*, a ten-piece instrumental album, featuring Magnús Jóhann on piano and Óskar Guðjónsson on saxophone. Although the musicians would not entirely agree with the concept of the record, all of its tracks pertain to the overarching theme.

"*Fermented Friendship* is something that we were discussing," Óskar explains. "We were discussing our friendships with other people. When Magnús suggested we do this record, my first thought was, 'OK we have to get to know each other.' Doing something for a longer period,

you usually ferment something."

"Some fermentation processes go absolutely wonderful, some go sour. For me, the connection in music has always been linked with friendship," Óskar adds.

THE KJARVAL CONNECTION

The two discovered their differences and similarities that fuelled the creative process. Consequently, interesting parallels can be found in family histories, too. Both Óskar Guðjónsson and Magnús Jóhann had grandfathers who worked as harbour keepers in Höfn and the Westman Islands, respectively.

"I remember these magical stories of my grandfather jumping from one ship to another to steer because the Höfn harbour is so difficult," Óskar reminisces. "The water is always changing, you must understand and feel nature to do this job. Jumping from a smaller to a bigger boat was kind of a magical fairy tale thing for me," he confesses.

The shared cultural experiences and personal revelations are manifested on the opening track "Jóhannes Kjarval." The iconic Icelandic painter has been an inspiration and a formative influence for several artists, including Björk, who dedicated a track from her debut album *Björk* to Kjarval.

In the case of Magnús Jóhann, the connection with the painter turned out to be somewhat more psychic. "My grandfather was the keeper of the Westman Islands' harbour," he says. "There was this boat travelling to the east coast of Iceland. Kjarval was supposed to be there but was missing from the boat. Though the boat was about to leave, my grandfather made them stay and sent a party to find Kjarval. He was sitting on a cliff and painting," he recounts.

"Eventually, Kjarval caught his boat and was so impressed with my grandfather doing his job that he started sending him letters and prints of his paintings. My grandfather would send him cod heads and dried fish in exchange," Magnús smiles. "So they had this little acquaintanceship or friendship."

FERMENTING MUSIC

Similar to the long-term correspondence – "fermenting" the connection – the album documents the evolution of friendship through pieces where the saxophone and piano are in a constant dialogue.

Some pieces, such as "Salt and Vinegar," reference fermentation more directly. The exotic spice of harmony delivered by Óskar dissolves in the waves of piano gently manipulated by Magnús Jóhann. At some point in the conversation, the album's par-

allels with Icelandic food tradition – which relies heavily on fermentation – become apparent.

Meanwhile, other compositions suggest more oblique references, such as the album's second track, "Greindargerjun," which translates as "fermentation of intellect."

"I think it's a bit of a happy accident because 'fermented friendship' is something Óskar scribbled on the sheet music for this composition," Magnús describes. "It gave us the title for this record as well as the realisation that it encapsulated what we were doing. We would meet up for the whole winter, once a week, talk and play music. When we finally went to the studio we were kind of so marinated and fermented in this vacuum space."

"It's a good title that implies attempts to try things and see what happens," adds Óskar.

Perhaps it's the shared cultural landscape the two derive from that creates an almost synonymous connection on the record. Does being Icelandic allow friendship and collaboration to run smoother than between people of different backgrounds?

"We share common ground because we know a lot of the same people. We were born in the same

country, we have similar upbringings," Óskar muses. "People make very fine threads where they connect on the emotional level just by eating the same food."

"It would be different if one of us would be foreign," Magnús agrees. "I grew up listening to Óskar's records with [contemporary jazz unit] ADHD, so in a way, the common ground was already there."

Fittingly, *Fermented Friendship* features a version of the track "Stel-puskott" from ADHD's 2024 album 9. "A song is a song and it can be played by anybody whenever they want to," Óskar comments on the continuity between the work with the band and the duo's project.

"What matters is beneath the surface," he philosophises. "In music, I look for something that touches me in a way that makes me either laugh or cry. It's always a very emotional thing to try to understand what is there." ■

Catch Magnús Jóhann and Óskar Guðjónsson exhibit their fermented friendship at their release show in Harpa's Norðurljós on Friday, January 17. Tickets are from 7.990 ISK, available at tix.is. Listen to *Fermented Friendship* on available streaming services.



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24 hours in Stykkishólmur

WORDS Jóhannes Bjarkason
IMAGE Art Bicnick

ings balance on protruding cliffs; the other half are a sprawling suburb in the making. The town's geography and sporadic mix of traditional and postmodern architecture lend it an air of mysticism and a feeling of je ne sais quoi.

ELECTION NIGHT HAMBURGERS

As we drove in, we saw the Library of Water rising upwards in the midst of the town centre. A former library turned museum and art residency, it has hosted the works of American visual artist Roni Horn since 2007. But that's not our current destination. This would be our final destination before travelling back to Reykjavik.

Having survived the drive, we arrived comfortably at Hótel Egilsen, a simultaneously impressive and modest-looking building in the town centre. The hotel's warm and cozy interior had a quintessentially "Iceland farmhouse" aesthetic, with armchairs one could drown in while snuggled up with the right book. After settling in, it was dinner o'clock.

Seeing as Stykkishólmur's bistro fare consists exclusively of two restaurants — that's Sjávarpakkhúsið and Narfeyrarstofa — and neither of us were in the mood for a proper sit-down atmosphere, we opted for the town's sole hamburger house, Skúrinn.

At first glance, this basketball-themed grubhub had all the charm of a wayside gas station, selling multitudes of cigarette products and small beer cans out of a mini-fridge.

Meals in hand, we sat down in the poster-plastered cafeteria, whose tables were strewn with the candidate brochures of the upcoming elections. A massive flatscreen TV occupies. On a Friday night, Skúrinn is definitely the place to be.

As the evening progressed, more guests pile in. Suddenly, someone turned on the TV and the election night debates were on high volume. We sat among a handful of locals, all sharing the quiet agreement to refrain from making spontaneous political slights.

The food was exactly what we expected — the company, even better. Retreating back to Egilsen and our lovely room, we fell asleep with the wind threatening to break through the windows.

ALIEN JESUS

On a good day, looking from the port of Stykkishólmur you can see as far as the southern edge of the Westfjords and the slightly closer landmass of Fellströnd. In between, the great sea waste is littered with the many islands of Breiðafjörður — an endless cluster of islets and atolls and a common simile in Icelandic vernacular. Unfortunately for us, this was not a good day.

With reports of a storm rolling in across the northwest, Stykkishólmur was hit with its surplus and clouds obscured the view. As the day dragged, snow piled beside buildings, glazing the streets.

Though cognisant of our goal to enter the Library of Water, my eyes were fixated on the strange church situated on a small hill in town. Stykkishólmskirkja is undoubtedly one of the town's landmark features, selected among the world's top ten most beautiful churches by Reader's Digest (a trusted source, if ever there was one).

Structured as if it's ascending towards the heavens, two great, curved staves form the vestibule, with its roof partially topped by a semi-dome. Basically, it looks like a giant, Christian spaceship ready to transport the congregation to their alien god. The church's galactic aes-



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We navigate our car out onto the less-trodden Snæfellsnes peninsula in the dim-lit dusk of late November. The frosty twilight paints the mountains in a wash of dusty purple — a beautiful sight that I clung to as we turned into the Vatnaleið mountain pass.

There are a few things as frightening as winter driving over Iceland's mountain passes. A quick jolt could send you hurling towards the nearest abyss. Wind rocked the car, but my partner's steady hands on the steering wheel kept us on course.

We were on our way to Stykkishólmur — a seaside town on the peninsula's northern coast facing the great, big mouth of Breiðafjörður. It's a requisite stop for those wanting to travel by the the Baldur ferry to the Westfjords via Flatey.

Stykkishólmur's relative proximity to the capital area makes it — and Snæfellsnes in general — an ideal destination for an adventurous day trip or a quick weekend getaway.

The peninsula offers plenty of quirky and interesting stops along its periphery, with Stykkishólmur being one of them. Half the build-





g Glaciers

thetics even transcend the exterior, permeating the interior design.

Behind the altar, an otherworldly depiction of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child hangs high. The painting shows Mary in front of a deep-blue background radiating a white glow — as if she's floating in space. Her expression is devoid of any emotion as she holds her infant like a sacrificial offering. Baby Jesus is certainly nonplussed about the ordeal, seemingly grinning.

It's terrifying, to say the least, and an obvious stop on our itinerary.

Unfortunately, when we pulled up on a Saturday morning, the church was closed. Still, I managed to take a peek through the glass entrance and saw the sci-fi scene with my own eyes.

THE LIBRARY OF WATER

Having sufficiently defiled my eyes with a sacral depiction, it was time

for something nice: The Library of Water.

We sought refuge from the storm in that forlorn, lonely building, slamming the doors behind us. For a moment, everything went quiet — except for the all-too-familiar sound of wind whistling through every possible crevice.

Housed in the Library of Water are the installations *Water, Selected* and *You Are The Weather*; as well as the book series *To Place*, and the spoken testimonies of locals compiled in the book *Weather Reports You*, all created by Roni Horn. Coming up on its 18th year, the exhibition reflects the artist's intimate involvement with geology and geography — glaciers, in particular.

Water, Selected consists of 24 irregularly placed columns in the room, each one filled with water sourced from different glaciers in Iceland. Meanwhile, *You Are The Weather* features inscriptions of words de-

scribing weather phenomena plastered on the floor. In a side room, *Weather Reports You* and excerpts from *To Place* are on display.

Upon entering the building, guests are asked to remove their shoes and grab a pair of provided slippers. Immediately greeting guests are the columns, which reach from floor to ceiling. As you walk through the space, your suddenly cosy feet grace the floor's inscriptions.

"Unpredictable," "Hamslaus," and "Þrúgandi," included some, fittingly descriptive of the strong storm enveloping the cliff. From this precipiced vantage point, I looked outside and spy a flock of ravens physically exerting themselves as they flew against the headwind. Brutal.

VANISHING GLACIERS

It's unsurprising that an exhibition so focused on the elements involves the weather playing a significant

part in the viewer's perception. Allegedly, the glass columns refract and reflect light onto the floor, thereby highlighting the floor's descriptive adjectives.

During my visit in the dead of winter, light was a cruelly lacking component as thick clouds overcast the sky. Needless to say, there was limited refraction happening.

Despite the exhibition's long-running stint, its permanence and impact are still relevant, partially sustained by the contemporary conversation around climate change. Glaciers are to land what whales are to the ocean: powerful mammoths and evocative symbols in the language surrounding man-made degradation. With each vanishing ice cap, humanity stares at geological conservation spanning millennia turn into something as fleeting as water.

Looking back on the disappearance of Ok glacier, ceremoniously

pronounced dead in 2019 by ministers of the previous government, my head spun with pessimistic thoughts about eternity and the tangible passing of time.

Perhaps, in the not-too-distant future, all that remains of our glaciers will be Roni Horn's aquatic columns. Future generations might be examining these remnants in the same, disturbed way we perceive deformed animals encased in formaldehyde.

Riddled with these daunting contemplations on the state of the Earth and the future we're bequeathing to our children, we drove back to Reykjavík to cast our votes in an election, blindly putting our trust in politicians running on platforms that universally failed to address the crisis at hand. ■

Thanks to Hótel Egilsen for providing accommodation. Check out egilsen.is if you're headed to Stykkishólmur.

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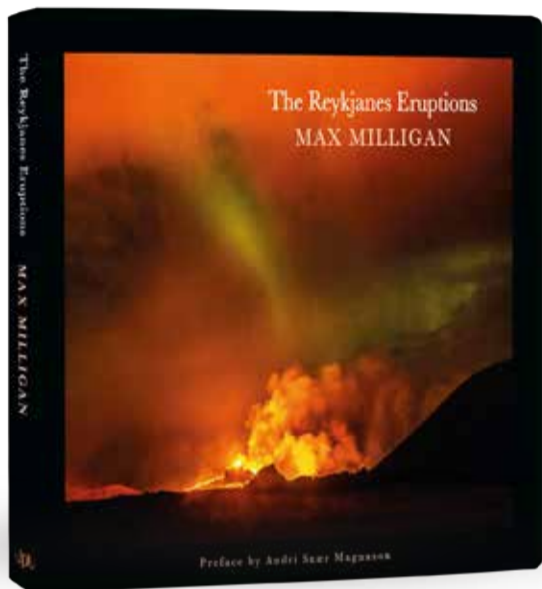
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Yeehaw

The Joy Of The Tölt

Experiencing the Icelandic horse in a uniquely Icelandic landscape

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGE Catharine Fulton

once again as we descended from the Hellisheiði mountain pass down into the valley below.

Though the options for daytrippers are ample in Hveragerði, we were in town to get up close and personal with a few of Iceland's famed horses.

DON'T CALL THEM PONIES

The Icelandic horse is a magnificent animal. They have trod the land since the time of the settlement, believed to be a cross breed of the horses brought to Iceland by the first to arrive between 860 and 935, and ponies imported by a wave of Norse settlers from Ireland and Scotland. Clearly aware of what a special breed they had created, Alþingi passed the first law prohibiting the import of other horses into Iceland in the year 982.

That regulation stands today, with the import of other horse breeds being a strict no-no. But the rules are about more than protecting genetics. Icelandic horses sent abroad are also prohibited from ever returning to Iceland. This measure is in place to protect the animals

from a slew of veterinary diseases that the Icelandic breed has thus far avoided. It is also for this reason that international riders are not permitted to bring their own gear to use on an Icelandic horse.

I regale my riding companion for the day with these details and other nuggets of Icelandic horse trivia I've amassed over years of working with-in or adjacent to Iceland's booming tourism industry – hey, someone wrote all those blog posts before the rise of AI – while reminding her for the hundredth time not to call them ponies.

While I have my riding buddy beat when it comes to random factoids about Icelandic horses, she's far more knowledgeable about horsemanship, having been riding competitively since childhood. Though an experienced equestrian, she's eager to experience the gaits that make the Icelandic horse really special. Most horses are capable of three gaits, or ways of walking – walk, trot and canter. But the Icelandic horse can also tölt and the best of the bunch can kick it into gear with a flying pace.

The sky was up for the occasion when my companions and I headed due east in early November, leaving the familiarity of Miðbær behind in favour of the steaming hillsides of Hveragerði. An expansive white rainbow – formed by the sun's rays being scattered by fog – monopolised the otherwise dazzling blue sky over Reykjavík, greeting us



Tölt is a four-beat lateral gait that is supposedly very smooth for the rider. As we pull into the parking lot of Eldhestar, we're all excited to try it out.

TEA AND THE GANG

Greeted warmly by Tea, a young Swedish woman working at Eldhestar on a gap year before starting law school, we were soon suited up in warm coveralls, outfitted with helmets and ushered out to the paddock to meet our noble steeds for the afternoon.

I was paired with Hljómar, a big boy who I'm hoping will be patient with a first-time rider — yes, I've written about Icelandic horses, I've pet them on the side of the road, I've sent my kid to horse camp every summer, but I had not ridden one until that afternoon in Hveragerði. My riding companions mounted Rauðhetta and Skessa.

After a couple circles around the paddock to find out comfort zones and a quick lesson on holding the reins and giving the horses a squeeze with our legs to encourage

them forward, we were out onto the trail, through a tunnel under the Ring Road and headed up the mountain-side that rises behind the town.

The Horses and Hotsprings tour we were enjoying that afternoon delivered exactly what its name promised: horses and (you guessed it) hotsprings. Hveragerði is a geothermal hotspot, as evidenced by the steam rising from various points across the terrain and the abundance of greenhouses in operation. The trail we rode on our noble steeds headed into the geothermal zone, where we rode past steaming fumaroles and bubbling mud pits while Tea explained a little about the geothermal activity in the area and how it increased significantly following an earthquake in the region in 2008.

THE JOY OF THE TÖLT

Hljómar was no Sleipnir — Tea even equipped me with a stick to give him a little tap when he just didn't feel like keeping up with the group, though I didn't have the heart to use it, opting for encouraging words that did little more than give me the

sense that Hljómar and I were really bonding. But when we managed to tölt it was magical. All of a sudden the bounce of a trot dissipated entirely and it felt like this massive animal was somehow hovering above the ground.

Tölting through a small forest on the outskirts of the geothermal zone was like a dream, and my much more experienced riding companion was given the go-ahead to break free from the group and put her skills to good use. She was in heaven.

The white rainbow now dissipated as the sun began to dip toward the horizon, we rode our horses back into the paddock and dismounted onto the mucky ground, removing their saddles and sending off to rome in an adjacent field. For us, it was back over the mountain pass toward Reykjavík, leaving the horses and the hotsprings behind. ■

Eldhestar is located in Hveragerði, just 47 km from Reykjavík. Book your riding tour at Eldhestar.is.



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A Year In Food

Recapping A Year Of Food Highs And

2024 set the stage for what could be a defining 2025 for Iceland's food and beverage industry

WORDS Shruthi Basappa
IMAGES Joana Fontinha

One of the things that is perhaps not talked about enough in this job is just how privileged and rewarding being a food writer is. Even at a time when global media has steadily disinvested from traditional print media and axed budgets for food writing, and stalwarts in the industry are retiring and leaving behind a vacuum that most people in the business agree cannot be filled by social media influencers, I am one of the lucky few who gets to continue to write about food and its impact on culture and society.

As traditional media cedes power to social media influencers and the democratisation of tastemakers seems to be complete, there are still those that cherish, invest and nourish food writing. Helen Rosner is still going strong at the New Yorker, and Pete Wells has paved the way for Priya Krishna and Melissa Clark at NYT.

Unlike our global counterparts, food in general has never really been

taken seriously in Iceland. This is obvious in our food laws; in the gaps between the hospitality industry, and agriculture and animal husbandry; in the chasms between tourism, business and cultural ministries; and in the alarming lack of understanding that planning regulations and health department stipulations have a large impact on the quality of urban life citizens get to enjoy and experience.

Barring the Grapevine, who for the past 21 years have dedicated food coverage, local media still treats food writing as a PR jaunt. "Recipes" that barely conceal industry sponsored posts calling for 450gm of cream cheese to make two litres of soup are still rampant. As tastemakers, food writers play an influential role in shaping culture. Sure, there is the supposed glamour of incessant eating out and a life that seems, from afar, like one most people would want to swap places for. For me it has been the sheer pleasure of meeting people and swapping stories over a shared love for food.

And when it comes to the food, there is, fortunately, more good food than bad. Although, if I am being honest with myself and you, dear reader, it has been a year where both creativity and consistency seemed to be in short supply. In a year where eating out was especially taxing on the wallet, every meh meal

felt like a stinging slap of a reminder that dining out is a gamble often not worth taking.

The old horses continued to show up the younger ones, teaching everyone exactly why they are the big guns in the industry. They also underscore two key ingredients in the secret recipe for success in the food industry: consistency and perseverance.

Having finally shaken off pandemic blues and loan woes, buoyed by predictions of a stable economy, only to be squashed by rising cost of living, inflation and wage battles that have hurt everyone, the dining landscape echoed the highs and lows of life this past year. Not that it mattered to self-appointed "experts" on social media who are happy to declare most everything the "best," as they wax eloquent about the eggs benedict that clearly shows broken hollandaise on hulking sourdough toasts.

So let's break it down and wrap up the highlights and lowlights of 2024, shall we? We may just get a glimpse of the months ahead in doing so.

SVEIT, VIRÐING AND EFLING

In what is bound to be a battle of epic proportions, the end of the year saw some spectacular back and forth between Efling, one of Ice-

land's largest unions; SVEIT, the association of restaurant owners; and a new labour union Virðing. This is a fight that was a long time coming, and one that will continue to play out in early 2025.

The restaurant business has largely been unorganised in terms of representation as an industry with collective bargain rights. In an attempt to remedy that, SVEIT was formed around the time covid struck.

Efling has been aggressive in their tactics recently, going so far as to have mini vans with slogans stuck on the sides, parked outside restaurants accused of wage theft, discouraging potential diners from patronising them.

In a country that sees record high participation in labour unions compared to our Nordic neighbours, early months of the year are a suspense show where industries, unions and the government clash over what is now an annually recurring saga of wage negotiations that never seem to work out. It wouldn't be amiss to note that there is a wedge of mistrust between the parties.

What should be noted here, however, is that the labour union stipulations massively impact the nature of the business, with far-reaching consequences that are rarely limited to the industry alone. Take, for

instance, the current system of work hours and overtime schedules: overtime starts at 17:00, with an additional percentage of hourly wages to be paid on the base rate. These figures climb further on weekends.

A direct consequence of this? Early closures of cafes and coffeehouses that has deepened the dearth of places one can socialise between work and dinner is palpably felt across the city. By comparison, Denmark and Sweden both have overtime after 20:00 on weekdays, and after 16:00 on Saturdays. So if you were wondering why places started to close as early as 15:30 in some cases, now you know.

This is a developing story that has seen everything from back and forth retaliations in the form of articles and statements in the local dailies, to SMSs, emails, team visits disrupting work shifts, claims of bogus entities, counterclaims of intimidation and harassment, all making for a nail-biting spectacle.

CLOSURES

Nothing like ripping off the bandaid, eh?

Nebraska, the clothing store-slash-restaurant, is now shuttered, resting that rumour mill that had been expecting this news for the better part of 2024. Hygge Microbakery will now take its place and



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LOWS

from the looks of it, an early 2025 opening is in the cards.

Embroiled in controversy and allegations of wage theft, Italia has shuttered doors, swiftly ending its revival in a new location. Who can forget the Efling van that shamed both the restaurant and potential diners if they dared patronise Italia? Seafood restaurant Mar is now scheduled to open in its stead.

Beloved Sono Matseljur bowed out of the Nordic House, ending their mezze-inspired vegan reign as one of the city's best kept secrets. Plantan will take over the reins of the picturesque restaurant in the storied house.

Valkyrie, the pet friendly vegan bistro in Skippholt, joins Ruby Tuesday and other predecessors at the same location in shuttering. A corner location in a predominantly residential neighbourhood should work on paper, but let's see if the next concept manages to break the curse.

Not yet a closure, but 2025 will be Slippurinn's swansong year. Chef Gísli Matthías Auðunsson is keeping his cards close to his vest about what's next, but promises a year to remember. Bookings are now open for the summer and, if I were you, I'd reserve a table for each month they are open, in order to do justice to their seasonal menu.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

Some of my favourite dining memories happened in the quiet unexpected moments where no promises were made and no expectations weighed down an encounter.

As I shared a juicy steamed bao of ground lamb, the musky sharpness of grassy cumin jolted me to attention that this is no ordinary bao – the playful use of cumin lamb, a roasted on a stick/skewer classic, but tucked into a steamed bun as filling, remains one of my favourite bites of the year. Dr. Bao, where Kasbah once was, is home to these baos. And whilst the food was lovely – special shout out to their sauce table – it was that down to earth hospitality of SE Asian mom and pop spots that continues to draw me in.

Dill reopened after a brief renovation hiatus, and the eye watering expense of Michelin dining notwithstanding, the non-alcoholic pairing was especially striking. In lieu of tart kombuchas that often verge on vinegar, sommelier Ben Boorman has reigned in that funkiness, instead shining light on koji ferments from Muri, and house brews that taste like the landscape.

Austurindia's 30th anniversary menu had me firmly in its grip and I happily rode that wave of nostalgia and excitement. The lamb sheekh kebab

is a core memory by now, but really, it was the joy of sharing my love for this food with friends and family that made it even more memorable.

Tjörushúsið's pepper rich plok-kfiskur seems straightforward, but my repeated attempts to find comparable competition makes each of its appearances on their buffet table extra special.

Skál's opening party at their new location had some of their best food yet – the warm loaf of garlic herb bread that was pure jade from its lascivious stuffing, the sole with blanquette, their spring-in-a-salad gem salad is a memory that shines bright – especially when contrasted with the bumped prices and shrinking portions lately.

MATHÖLL MANIA AND OTHER TRENDS

There is perhaps a secret global competition for most mathölls per capita underway in Iceland. The mania shows no signs of slowing down, as even if one dies, another seems to have already taken its place.

You know the fevered frenzy has reached its peak when even Keflavik airport has a "main food street" Aðalstræti, in its midst where you cannot escape the clutches of cook-ie-cutter mania. Why go to a new mathöll, when you can experience

12 at once?! Akureyeri has löunn Mathöll now, and the new ownership is betrayed by the absence of Yuzu or Flatey in the roster.

Smáralind is playing naughty and teasing us with their lavish renderings of a "restaurant area" scheduled to open at the end of the year, with 13 new establishments. They promise that each one will be a never before seen concept, cuisine and execution that will remain true to its roots and claims and that it is most definitely not a mathöll. Okay I made up those last bits, but one can hope.

Brixton is an Icelandic restaurant named after a British neighbourhood, serving American inspired sliders is yet another reminder that we love to revive dead trends from the past. This time with the 1920 and then 2009 chart topper making a comeback.

Ramen Momo opened a new location with generous seating but a harried hold-the-table system where you first have to order and pay to get a seat making for amusing encounters between guests and staff.

Wolt's Spotify-inspired "Wrapped" for the year shows us what we have always known: the burger is the king of all foods, and that we will have fried chicken on top of fried chicken every chance we get. The highlights were a national-shame-laid-bare

factoid that Icelanders are the least organised diners with the lowest pre-orders and our obsession with convenience and questionable judgement skills were both indisputable with one order – a burger that was delivered over a two metre distance, or as Veitingageirinn helpfully measured out, 20 burgers laid side by side.

LOOKING AHEAD

2025 will be pivotal in how the hospitality industry will be viewed, shaped and taken care of. A healthy, vibrant, robust urban life isn't just made of streets, buildings and the spaces within. It takes a concerted effort where seemingly disparate things come together to create that perfect slice of life.

The ability to walk to a bakery for an early morning loaf of bread, grab a working lunch at your local cafe, read a book or catch up with a friend over hot chocolate or coffee, drinks with colleagues after work, hobnob and giggle over dinner, is not happenstance. Regulatory frameworks, policies and regulations have an enduring impact on how we live, where we eat, and quality of culture the city can claim as its own.

Here's hoping that this maker of memories industry will be supported to grow from strength to strength in this new year. Skál! ■

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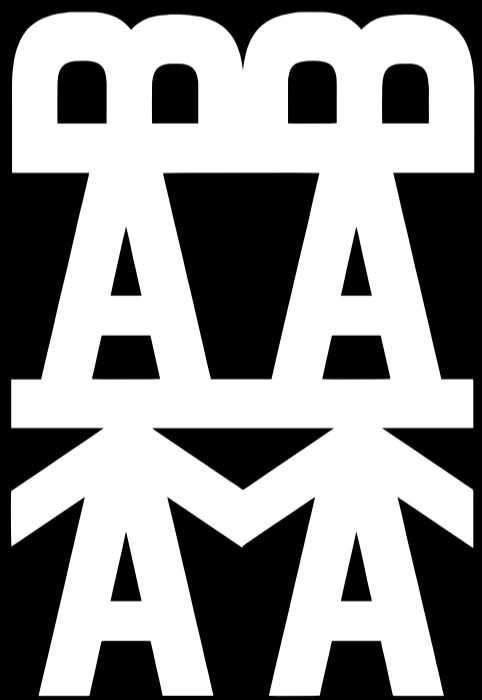
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WORDS Grayson Del Faro
IMAGE Kári Sverris

percussion, delicate vocals and a mention of empanadas, her performance was warm, fresh, and memorable. I don't expect to see Lido in Reykjavik again, but maybe someone can take her suggestion and sell some damn empanadas here?"

In the same year, way across the world, María Jiménez Pacífico was visiting her native Colombia. She walked into a grocery store and gazed longingly at a wall of ready-made empanadas and arepas, the typical pastries and patties stuffed with spiced fillings. She said, "Wow, wouldn't it be amazing if Iceland had this too?" Years passed before she decided to realise the dream that she and I share with Lido, but once she did, she didn't stop until it came true.

FROM FASHION MODEL TO BUSINESS MODEL

"It's important when you're cooking that you put your heart in it," María tells me. "This beautiful process

of creating something is not just mix-and-match. No, you want to do something that will bring you memories or that will bring you to a place. So, that's what I'm doing with Mijita."

María emigrated from Colombia to Iceland with her family in 2004. After studying acting and cinematography here, she worked as an actress and model around the world. That's what she was doing in Colombia in 2017 when she first had the idea for Mijita. "Then my father passed away and 'mijita' was the last word he said to me," she remembers, explaining the origins of the name that means "my little daughter."

In 2022, she received a grant from the supermarket conglomerate Hagar to import the machinery necessary to produce arepas and empanadas. The intention was to sell them in grocery stores, but it was a long process and she was eager to get started. "So then I rented a wooden shed so I could have the place to cook," she says. "And then I

When the Colombian-Canadian indie pop star Lido Pimienta played Airwaves way back in 2017, I ended my rave review of her set with the following lines: "With exquisite



adas

made everything beautiful. From the beginning, it was very important for me to show that we have a concept. We are not only food; we are an atmosphere."

They set up the shed at the Reykjavik Street Food Festival in 2022 to huge success. By the following year's festival, they had a purpose-built food truck in all the colors of the Colombian flag and won the festival's Best Vegetarian option. By the end of 2023, Mijita's food hit the shelves of Hagkaup and Melabuðin, and they were ranked Top 3 at the 2024 festival. In December, Mijita opened up a kitchen in Kópavogur that offers take-out and delivery via Wolt. She has her sights set on further expansion.

NO SECRET TO SUCCESS

In a city known for a rotating carousel of repetitive restaurants opening and quickly falling into bankruptcy, María has found success in a seemingly risky business. "I put

all of what I learned from my modelling, because being a model is being a product," she explains. "I understood how to make arepas and empanadas a success because it's not only about the looks, but also the genuineness."

She brought her grandfather over from Colombia to help recreate her late grandmother's recipes. "He's like the soul of the company," she admits. "He's the one that is helping me to keep the flavours genuine, because we are reproducing the recipes from my late grandmother. I am reproducing the memories from my childhood."

The star of the show is "el cerdito" filling. "It's 14 hour slow-cooked pork. Not two hours, no, 14 hours!" María assures me. They also have traditionally vegan and vegetarian options using spiced beans and cheese. Not only that, but because much of Latin American food uses cornflour, all of their food is naturally 100% gluten free. To top it off, their

business model aims to be zero waste.

Although international dining experiences in Iceland have been limited until quite recently, María believes it's not necessarily for lack of interest. "Icelanders are also open to new things," she claims. "Maybe they should be more open to spicy food... when they get flavour, they immediately say, 'Oh, this is spicy!' For them, it's totally new. But they try, you know!"

"If you want to travel through your taste buds, all the way to another culture that you have never been to, you just respect what foreigners are bringing to you," María reminds me.

Mijita's success to date indicates that, thankfully, Iceland is willing to offer that respect. Hopefully María's labour of love inspires restaurateurs from other cultures to follow in her footsteps. "I think the key is to be true to yourself," she concludes. "There is no big secret!" ■



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Plant Power

C'mon, It's Just One Month

It's Veganuary again and you have no reason to skip it

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGE Art Bicnick

NO EXCUSES

Unlike a decade ago when Veganuary first entered the vernacular, the options for eschewing animal products in Iceland today are plentiful. The range of fresh vegetables and fruits in grocery stores is far better (hey, I said "better", not great), canned beans and dried lentils are plentiful, tofu is a shop staple, and ready-made vegan protein and cheese alternatives are everywhere. Ella Stína ground "beef" is "chef's kiss."

While a smattering of restaurants offer special Veganuary menus at this time of year, most eateries will have at least one vegan option on the menu year-round. But giving Veganuary a shot could also be a boon for your bank account. If you're prone to splurging too often on restaurant meals and take-out, the push to eat vegan may inspire you to cook for yourself at home instead.

"Veganism is very cheap if you eat more of the little-processed foods (beans, veggies, rice, peanut butter, tofu) and less of the vegan marked objects, like Oumph! or Violife," Hannah Rós Sigurðardóttir Tobin suggested in the Vegan Ísland Facebook group. "Although they taste very good, they are expensive."

Batch cooking a big pot of chili sin carne or a savoury lentil dahl is dirt cheap, easy and will sort your lunches for a week. Craving a treat or a meal out? Places like Plantan and Vegan World Peace are a couple favourites where you won't have to ask

for exclusions or substitutions. Even if you're not embarking on Veganuary, you should hightail it to Plantan for their sjónvarpskaka. It's a delight no matter your dietary preferences.

A quick perusal of our Best Of Reykjavik sister magazine suggests making reservations at Sumac or grabbing a falafel at Chickpea. Delish!

BE SMART, BE KIND

Aldis Amah Hamilton suggests in Vegan Ísland to "start slow with the fibre and drink PLENTY of water," as well as to educate yourself about macro nutrients – which is sound advice, vegan or not.

Making smart choices is essential to ensure balanced nutrition and overall well-being. A key when dabbling in veganism or adopting it outright is ensuring your diet includes sufficient protein, iron, calcium, vitamin B12 and omega-3 fatty acids – nutrients that are naturally less abundant in plant-based sources. Incorporating diverse foods like lentils, chickpeas, tofu, quinoa and fortified plant-based milks can help you meet nutritional needs.

"Stay kind to yourself, too," advises Kristín Helga Sigurðardóttir in Vegan Ísland. "Mistakes happen, especially at first. Accidentally eating animal products is not the end of the world – just learn from it so you can avoid it next time."

Happy Veganuary! ■

If there's one thing you can count on with the advent of a new year, it's the declaration of resolutions and haughty goals for the months ahead. You know the types: This year I'm going to be better and fitter and faster and read seven books per week and climb every mountain in Iceland barefoot and blindfolded.

If keeping up a resolution over an entire year just feels too daunting, how about setting your sights on a single month instead? One culinary goal that has been an annual favourite of many is the adoption of Veganuary. What's Veganuary, you asked, having just emerged from a decade-long hermetic stint? It's setting yourself the goal of adopting a plant-based diet for the month of January. The great thing about this goal is that it's only a one-month commitment – though you may just find yourself feeling so great that you'll carry the habit into February, March and beyond.

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The Haul

New Year, New Me

A shopping bag to inspire self care and slowing down

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGES The Internet

2025 is shaping up to be a doozy, what with a genocide ongoing; Donald Trump threatening to annex Canada, and seize control of Greenland and the Panama Canal (while the U.S. expands its military presence in Iceland); the climate crisis accelerating at the same rate as the wealth of the industries fuelling it; and the cost of living continuing to skyrocket here at home.

To keep yourself from burning out between protesting, reading the news and budgeting for your survival, it's important to take some time for self care. So here's a shopping bag with that in mind ■



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8

1. A weighted blanket to sooth your anxiety – *Odonvide blanket*, 14.990 ISK – available at IKEA, Kaupþún 4, Garðabær

2. A redlight mask to reduce inflammation – *Icelandic Wellness Rauðljósa Gríman*, 54.900 ISK – available from heilsaogutlit.is

3. An organic lip balm to fight that winter chap – *Eyvör Lip Balm* from *Sóley Organics*, 1.690 ISK – available from shop.grapevine.is

4. A good book to cosy up with – *"The Mark" Friða Isberg* (translated by Larissa Kyzer), 5.299 ISK – Available from Eymundsson, Austurstræti 18

5. Some tea to sip while reading *"The Mark"* – *Dorma Calming Herbs*, 1.690 ISK – available from shop.grapevine.is

6. A paint-you-own flower pot to stretch your creative muscles – *Take Away Kit*, 6.600 ISK – available from Noztra, Grandagarður 14

7. An apple a day to keep the doctor away and because it'll make you feel better than junk food – *Apple*, 95 ISK – available from Krónan or other grocery stores

8. A notebook to keep track of your thoughts and practice gratitude – *Leuchtturm1917 Notebook*, 2.590 ISK – Available from Nakano, Grensásvegur 16

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Musings

New Year, New Iceland

Charlie makes some resolutions for the nation

WORDS Charlie Winters
IMAGE Art Bicnick

Every year you set a goal for yourself. This year it'll be different, you tell yourself. You're going to go to the gym, get around to writing that book and finally take a shower. But you never do it, do you?

New Year's resolutions are often a bust. But not this year. This year is going to be different. Because this year we're in this together. You and your old boy Charlie are about to set some resolutions for the ENTIRE COUNTRY. These are Iceland's New Year Resolutions.

Resolution #1: No more fucking elections. Please, God, let's aim to get our government through at least one year without crumbling. I can't go through the pressure of choosing again. It's so hard, there are so many options and I don't know any of their policies. But there is actually something we can do to ensure our government makes it through the year!

Stop trying to deport kids. Jesus Christ, guys, come on. You're a rep-

utable government, for fucks sake. At least double-check that the kid you're kicking to the curb isn't marketably cute enough to dismantle the world's oldest democracy. I know you guys are xenophobic, but you should really be better at this.

That's essentially the gist of Resolution #2: Make government-sanctioned xenophobia more efficient.

Resolution #3: Melt that tourist trap. Can we just blow up the Blue Lagoon already? By "we" I mean the volcano. I feel like I've been edged by lava for months now. The "will they, won't they" trope is so overdone. Perhaps we can ask the Valkyrie Coalition to cause an artificial eruption and get it over with already.

Resolution #4: Learn how to drive a car! This one is just for me... but come to think of it, I feel like some of you could also benefit from adding this to your list. I've seen you at the roundabouts and I can assure you the problem isn't just that Icelanders do those things differently. Icelanders, meanwhile, could benefit from a primer on turn signals. And won't someone coach Land Rover drivers on how to identify legal parking spaces?

Resolution #5: Stop eradicating queer spaces. Guys, there's like four places we're allowed to hang out

anyway and it's getting harder to find more. Kiki has become our last bastion and we must hold the gates. Let them come! There is but one queer on the dance floor that still draws breath!

Resolution #6: Trains. If there's one thing that we desperately need in this country, it's trains. I want to ride a train in Iceland. Do you know how cool it would be to just sit in a little cabin with a little window and watch the countryside roll by on your way to Akureyri? Ah, magnificent! Don't bullshit me with the "It's too cold!" argument. They have trains in Siberia. Grow up. And don't hit me with the "Just take a plane?" I'll take a plane when they let me see the sheep from my economy class aisle seat.

Setting goals for oneself is important, but it's also important to remember how far we've come.

Iceland is one of the best countries in which to live. Personally, I feel extremely privileged to have moved to such a beautiful place and I can't possibly imagine how good it must have felt to grow up here. There is a lot wrong with the place and there is a lot to fix, but for now my Resolution #7 is this: Just, like, be happy, you know?

I want the sun back. ■



Now And Then

Hey, Remember When Those Whaling Ships Were Sunk?

Revisiting Iceland's other core memory from 1986

WORDS Jón Trausti Sigurðarson
IMAGES Joana Fontinha & Borgarbókasafn

There were two things that happened in Iceland in 1986 that have been engrained on the collective memory of the nation. First is the Reykjavik Summit between then U.S. president Ronald Reagan and General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev, which took place in October of that year. There is currently a TV mini-series in post-production that was shot on location at Reykjavik's Höfði House. With Michael Douglas as Reagan and Christopher Waltz as Gorbachev, it'll surely rival the real deal.

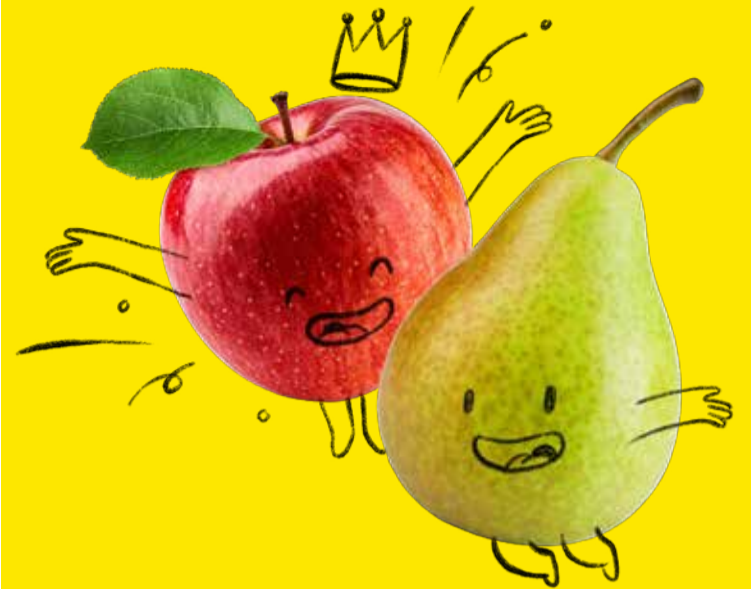
The second milestone event of '86, as pictured here, took place within a month of the summit, on November 7, when anti-whaling activists from the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society sank the Hvalur 6 and Hvalur 7 whaling vessels in Reykjavik harbour. Sea Shepherd founder Paul Watson has subsequently become one of very few people to become persona non grata in Iceland. The sabotage was inspired by the International Whaling Commission's implementation of a moratorium on commercial whaling in January 1986, which Iceland, Norway, Japan, the Faroe Islands and the Soviet Union ultimately ignored. International pressure and the subsequent boycott of Icelandic fish resulted in Iceland banning whaling in 1989.

That ban was revoked in 2006 and has been an ever present bone of political contention in Iceland (and elsewhere) since. During the summer of 2023 whaling was halted by then fisheries minister and Left-Green Movement MP Svandís

Svavarsdóttir due to animal welfare concerns. That pause persisted until Iceland's last coalition government imploded on October 13, 2024. With the Left-Green Movement announcing they wouldn't partake in a caretaker government, control of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries went to interim prime minister Bjarni Benediktsson, who – under a cloud of scandal regarding whaling permits in general, which will not be elaborated here – decided to issue a five year whaling permit. Of course, he did this on December 5, after elections made clear his Independence Party wouldn't be invited to form a new coalition.

So, whaling as a practice sank, metaphorically, and then emerged from the depths again. What is still on the ocean floor, so we don't mix our metaphors here, is the economic and public relations aspects of whaling. The local culture wars around whaling are, however, very much afloat. ■

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Horoscopes

New Year, Who Dis?

Get grounded to conquer the year ahead

WORDS The Astral Grapevine
IMAGE Art Bicnick

It's 2025, people – I know, it's weird; wasn't it 2020 yesterday? – time to get your shit together before another quarter of a century blows by. We looked to the stars to help you set some life goals for the year ahead.



Pisces
(February 19 – March 20)
Dream less, do more. Your plants are dying and so is your phone battery. Stop crying at rom coms and start hydrating with actual water, not iced coffe.



Leo
(July 23 – August 22)
Okay, we get it, you're amazing. Now let someone else shine, superstar. Dial back the dramatic selfies and maybe learn to take a compliment without adding "I know."



Aries
(March 21 – April 19)
Slow down, turbo. Not every problem needs a headbutt. Learn to chill, delegate and maybe not try to win at yoga. It's relaxation, not a competition.



Virgo
(August 23 – September 22)
Relax, perfection isn't real and neither is the 87-step skincare routine you started. Burn your to-do list, embrace chaos and stop proofreading texts before sending them.



Taurus
(April 20 – May 20)
Stop hoarding candles and throw pillows. Try saying yes to plans occasionally – you're not a houseplant. Spice things up; Netflix and naps aren't a personality.



Libra
(September 23 – October 22)
Make a decision – ANY decision. Your friends are tired of "What do YOU want to eat?" Stop trying to make everyone happy. It's okay if Helga is slightly annoyed.



Capricorn
(December 22 – January 19)
Workaholic, party of one – take a day off. Put your spreadsheets away, try hobbies that don't involve achievement and maybe smile once in a while.



Gemini
(May 21 – June 20)
Finish one thing. Just one. Start with that book, project, or conversation you abandoned mid-sentence. Maybe write things down before your brain sprints off again.



Scorpio
(October 23 – November 21)
No, not everyone is out to get you. Trust a little, love a lot and maybe delete that revenge spreadsheet. Therapy is cheaper than hitmen, Scorpio.



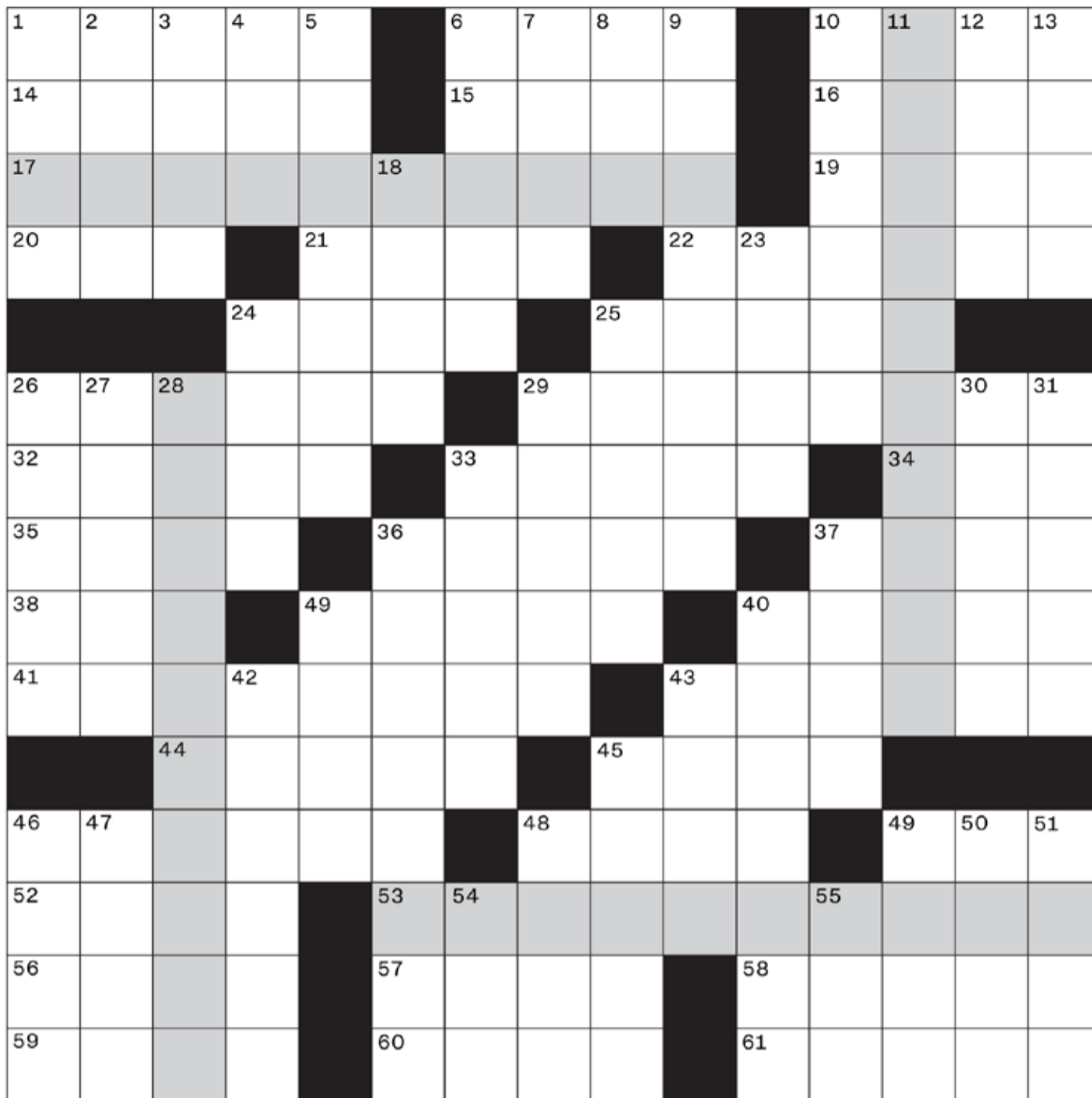
Aquarius
(January 20 – February 18)
Stop acting like the misunderstood genius in an indie movie. Call your mom back, care about something mainstream and remember, you're not too cool to have feelings.



Cancer
(June 21 – July 22)
Stop crying over that one thing from five years ago. Bake fewer emotional support cookies, let people solve their own problems and learn to say, "Not my circus."



Sagittarius
(November 22 – December 21)
We know you're fun, but your suitcase is still packed from three trips ago. Plant roots, pay bills on time and stop ghosting your responsibilities. ■



Crossword

Wow! It's Our January Crossword

This month's theme, as we all yearn for a fresh start in 2025, is beginnings

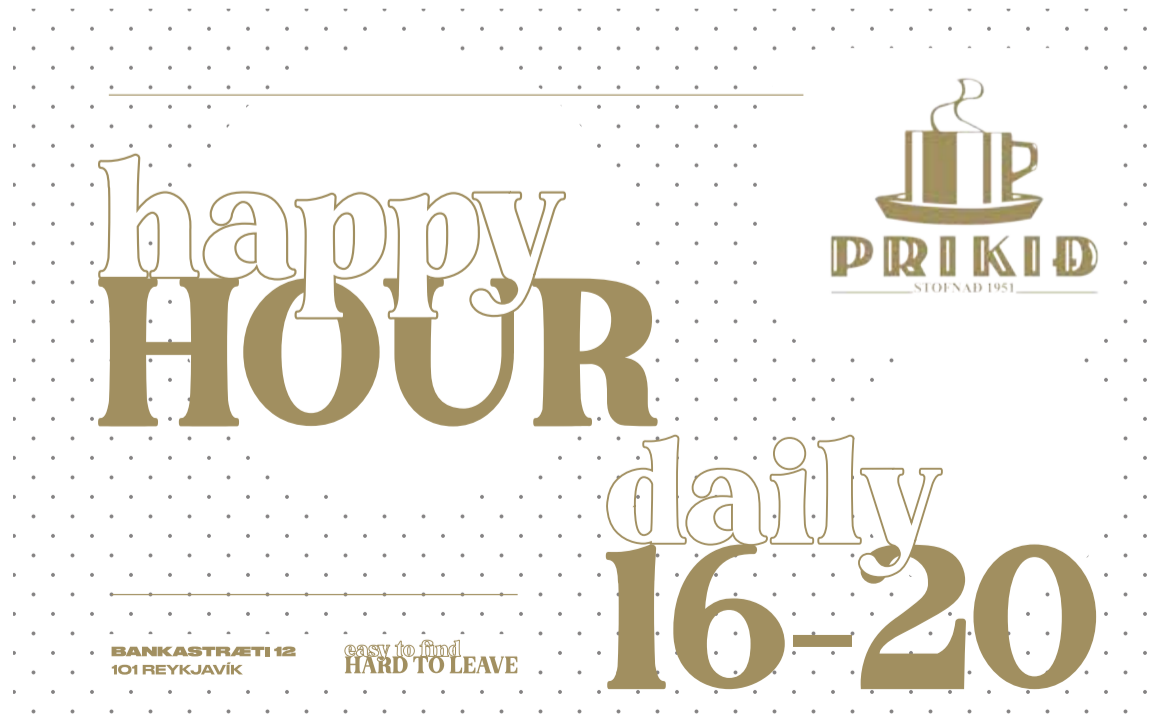
CROSS WORDS Ish Sveinsson Houle Agnar Freyr Stefánsson

- ACROSS**
- 1 "New Year, ..."
 - 6 Prepare for a photo
 - 10 Driver's section
 - 14 Range dividing Europe and Asia
 - 15 Air around a volcano
 - 16 German auto
 - 17 This Reykjavík Grapevine is our ___ of the year!
 - 19 Nói's candy for kids, but liquor for adults
 - 20 Nourished
 - 21 Atop
 - 22 Givers' receivers
 - 24 Card game and pizzeria, for two
 - 25 Part of Deig's Super Baked offer
 - 26 Edge
 - 29 Sneaking
 - 32 A fatty acid that's a bit fishy
 - 33 Hues found in dirty slush
 - 34 Title for Lancelot

- 35 Days in Tenerife
- 36 Common wall colour
- 37 Actor Jared
- 38 The ___
- 39 Gymnast Simone
- 40 Late artist Richard
- 41 Like some non-dairy milk
- 43 Holmes and ___
- 44 Therefore
- 45 Beams obscured by the clouds
- 46 Emitting sound left and right
- 48 Bunks
- 49 Sport that can end in a KO
- 52 Unit for light
- 53 What is just beginning!
- 56 Moan of discontentment
- 57 Ceramic square
- 58 A lot, slangy
- 59 Ectoplasm and snot, for two
- 60 Wait in neutral
- 61 Genesis

- DOWN**
- 1 "___ said"
 - 2 One of the Great Lakes of North America
 - 3 Hospital section
 - 4 Metric liquid meas.
 - 5 Finland's neighbour by sea
 - 6 Old times
 - 7 ___ buco
 - 8 Moo ___ pork
 - 9 Agree upon, "see..."
 - 10 Google
 - 11 Hors d'oeuvres, to an Englishman
 - 12 Close
 - 13 There are two in 48-DOWN
 - 18 Privy to
 - 23 Hydrocarbon suffixes
 - 24 Name brand fluffy shoes
 - 25 Hauls
 - 26 Settings

- 27 Protein-building acid
- 28 On your marks?
- 29 Wept
- 30 Part of TNT
- 31 Sound of pain
- 33 Gelatine-based dessert
- 36 Twice-baked cookie
- 37 Allows
- 39 "The Dark Knight Rises" villain
- 40 Skeptic's retort
- 42 Has, as in a child
- 43 Push through water
- 45 Actress Zellweger
- 46 Coolness, colloquially
- 47 Hawaiian root
- 48 Jingling thing
- 49 Gibson and Brooks
- 50 One of the guys
- 51 Remy, for one
- 54 Blocked from view
- 55 Tokyo dough? ■





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Potent Quotables

It's never going to be a product that's going to sell like lager.

Kjartan and Sveinn of Grugg & Makk talk wild ales and wild yeasts on page 12

Time at sea moves to its own rhythm, slower and more deliberate than life on land.

Iryna Zubenko ponders the endless hours at sea as she sails toward Iceland on page 14

It's more mundane, in a way that it almost shouldn't be performed in Eldborg.

Artist Ásta Fanney Sigurðardóttir discusses Glossolalia ahead of its premiere on page 30

The town's geography and sporadic mix of traditional and post-modern architecture lend it an air of mysticism and a feeling of je ne sais quoi.

Jóhannes Bjarkason reflects on his short visit to Stykkishólmur on page 34

It has been a year where both creativity and consistency seemed to be in short supply.

Shruthi Basappa looks back at the year in food on pages 38

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