

**Special Issue**  
The City Awards



**Spring Edition**  
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# BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2017

## **Dining**

The 60 Best Eateries  
New Nordic Cuisine

## **Drinking**

The 30 Best Nights Out  
The Cocktail Scene

## **Shopping**

The 30 Best Shops  
Vintage Reykjavík

## **Activities**

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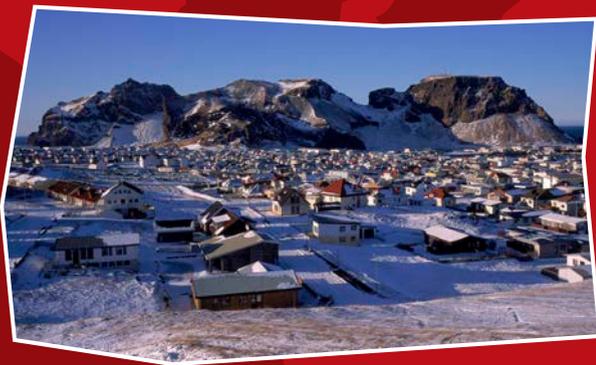
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**AN INTRODUCTION:**

# Velkomin!

It's the most wonderful time of the year! Nope, not Christmas. Or summer. It's winter. A warm one, admittedly. But I digress: it's also that time of year when we at The Reykjavik Grapevine active the hive mind of our various writers, friends, panels of experts, and our extended family of contributors, and spend a month or so thinking, discussing, arguing, storming out of the room, arguing again, storming out again, and—finally—deciding on the very best shops, bars, restaurants (and more) the city of Reykjavik has to offer. Today's Reykjavik is changing faster than at any time in its history. Shiny hotels are shooting up everywhere, fancy new restaurants seem to open every week, and dusty old classics and favourite hangouts are moving locations, only to be replaced by something else shiny and new (and probably selling stuffed puffins). Reykjavik is in a state of flux, and it's an interesting moment in the life of the city.

Which that in mind, cutting through the noise and paring down all the amazing restaurants, bars, cafés, galleries, shops and other favourite

spots is harder than ever. Any Best of Reykjavik list is a constant work in progress—it's the result of lots of back and forth between people with varying tastes, and strong opinions on pretty much everything. Which, we assume, you have too. So if, after reading this list, you feel the compulsion to raise a figurative or actual eyebrow, high-five us, scream bloody murder, or anything in between, you can give us a shout (or shout at us) via [letters@grapevine.is](mailto:letters@grapevine.is).

Finally: if this is the first publication of ours you happen to have picked up, be sure to look out for our the most recent issue of The Reykjavik Grapevine, which you'll find conveniently placed in shops, bars, and pools all around the city. You can also check it out at [grapevine.is](http://grapevine.is). We also have two free apps you might find useful—**Appy Hour**, for scoring cheap booze, and **Appening**, for shows and events around town. Get them in the Apple or Android app stores.

Okay, that's all! Get out of this intro! It's done! Go, already! You've got a whole Best of Reykjavik 2017 to read!  
**JR**

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**BEST OF REYKJAVIK 2017**

**Spring 2017 Edition**

**by The Reykjavik Grapevine**

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or

**Icelandic roll- 4 pcs**

Gravlax roll with Brennivín (Icelandic traditional Snaps) and dill. Avocado, mango, cucumber, dill mayo, rye bread crumble



**MAIN COURSE**

Choose between

**Rack of lamb**

Onion purée, slow cooked leeks, chimichurri, baked carrot

or

**Grilled salmon**

Mango-cucumber salsa, plantain-chips, chili foam, dill

**DESSERT**

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**THE AWARDS:**

**How We Picked the Winners**



The word "conclusion" is a little strong in this case. We have argued, fought and, in one case, slammed our head against the wall. We interviewed panels, tried blind taste-tests, and, in another case, consulted what we believe to be an oracle. This was not an easy or accurate endeavour.

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

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

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

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

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

**THE GUIDE-GUIDE**

**How To Spot The Winners**

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

Also, these are the stickers from our previous "Best of" selections, given to winners from prior years.





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Our 15 square and creative burgers would love to "meat" you.



THE BIG BO



THE LAMBURGER



MISS REYKJAVIK



FAT SIGURJÓN



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MORTHENS



MR. ROCK



FACTORY BURGER



THE TRUCKER



LAMB PRIME STEAK BURGER



ARIBA, SON OF SALSA



THE PRESIDENT



ANIMAL PARK



RESCUE (112)

## THREE LOCATIONS

1. Reykjavík Höfðatorg Tower.
2. Reykjavík Kringlan shopping mall.
3. Akureyri Hotel Kea ground floor.

**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2017**

# Dining

Delicious even if you can't pronounce it

One of the most-asked questions by visitors to Iceland is: "Where do we eat?" It's a tough question to answer, as Reykjavík has restaurants catering to many different palettes, and on top of that, it seems like they're always rising and falling in popularity for one reason or another. But we try to stay on top of things where eating out is concerned. With the help of a panel of self-proclaimed experts, we've been able to piece together a guide that gives you a pretty good idea of what's here in 2017. Use the guide, check out the Facebook page of restaurants and make reservations, if need be, for a true epicurean experience in Reykjavík. And if you have recommendations to the contrary, then drop us a line. We are listening. And we're hungry.

**Best burger**



## Sæta Svínið

Hafnarstræti 1-3

That we love our burgers in this town may come as a surprise to some. Beloved local burger joint **Búllan** used to rule the roost in this category, but a new generation of more modern burger joints has finally caught up with it. **Sæta Svínið** is one such new kid on the block, edging out stiff competition with their custom beef blend patties, made to desired doneness. Serious burger aficionados will appreciate the meat:fat ratio. This gastropub is also one of the few that offers lamb sandwiches.

Runners Up

**Kex**

**Skúlagata 28**

The Kex "freedom burger" has loyalists who love it and haters who, well, hate it. Whichever side you're on, we say that this is one heck of a consistent burger. Once you go spicy, there's no going back, and the potato wedges are the cherry on the meaty cake.



reasonably priced (for Reykjavík) and has quick service. It's a lunchtime spot worth checking out.

**Block Burger**

**Skólavörðustígur 8**

Block Burger is an office favourite. You can see their white paper to-go bags stacked on writers' desks, accompanied by empty Fizzy Lizzy soda bottles. Modelled heavily on the American chain Shake Shack in presentation, Block is

Previous Winners

- 2016: **Búllan**
- 2015: **Búllan**
- 2014: **Kex**
- 2013: **Vítabar**
- 2012: **Grillmarket**

**Best veggie burger**



## Bike Cave

Einarsnes 36

Bike Cave is the cafe you need to know about—relaxed, not New Nordic, in a suburban neighbourhood close to the domestic airport, with a resident Sphinx cat in tow. It's been described as the best place to get a "messy vegan burger." With a choice of two veggie patties (black bean and chilli or potato rosti) we were already feeling spoilt when they also turned up with their "luxury vegan burger"—soy granule patties with a hint of peanut butter, sweet mustard and onions. This one comes pretty darn close to the mouthfeel of a meat burger. But the best part still remains that all of this tasty fare will set you back 895-1195 ISK, sans fries.

Runners Up

**Búllan**

**Geirgata 1**

Hamborgarabúlla Tómasar is beloved among Icelanders for slinging honest, sweaty burgers to the masses. Their chickpea-and-barley-based patties are specially made for the burger joint, and boast a texture that's more sumptuous than the soy-based variety. We approve!



**Kaffihús Vesturbæjar**

**Melhagi 20-22**

Kaffihús Vesturbæjar, also known as Kaffi Vest, has become a hip spot for Reykjavík's west-side movers and shakers. They have not just one, but two great choices. Of these, our favourite is a bean-based burger in crunchy breadcrumb crumbs, served with rosemary potato wedges and an avocado-based mayo-style dip. Plain delicious, vegan or not.

Previous Winners

- 2016: **Búllan**
- 2015: **Brooklyn Bar**
- 2014: **Hamborgarabúlla Tómasar**
- 2013: **Hamborgarabúlla Tómasar**
- 2012: **Hamborgarabúlla Tómasar**

**Best pizza**



## Hornið

Hafnarstræti 15

Pizza joints have always held the collective fancy of the world as a sort of comfort zone where you can break bread with your grandma and screeching toddler or as a 101-downtownian nursing a hangover or heartache or both. **Hornið** is one such comforting old-school pizza joint. With thin-crust pizzas and a no-frills Italian-American flair in the decor as well as the toppings, this is a local treasure. While the Hawaiian has die-hard fans, we swear by their Quattro Stagioni.

Runners Up



**Hverfisgata 12**

**Hverfisgata 12**

The "Nameless Pizza Place" at Hverfisgata 12 has been pushing that doughy envelope with topping combinations that'll leave you scratching your head at first, but rubbing your belly later. Try the beetroot pizza or the soya mushroom, sausage and pickled chilli number, and make a night of it with some excellent cocktails from the bar.

**Kaffi Laugalækur**

**Laugarnesvegur 74a**

There has been a sourdough uprising recently, even in pizza. We're not complaining—the "flatbreads" at this newest cafe in town have us revisiting the place. Try the "Litla Gula Hænan" special: succulent chicken nestled between perfectly pickled onions and a fresh salad and house pesto. Delicious and healthy... ish. A welcome addition to the Laugardalur neighborhood.

Previous Winners

- 2015: **Hverfisgata 12**
- 2014: **Hverfisgata 12**
- 2013: **Gamla Smiðjan**
- 2012: **La Luna trattoria-pizzeria**
- 2011: **Gamla Smiðjan**

## Best bakery



### Sandholt

Laugavegur 36

Sandholt wins this spot again, but not for lack of competition. They simply deliver consistently. The laminated pastries are hands down the best in Iceland; try their buttery croissants or seasonal Danish pastries, locally known as “vínarbrauð” with rhubarb and raspberries, or the classic, vanilla custard. Their sourdough is deservedly well-known and if a whole loaf is too much, they oblige by slicing just what you need.

#### Runners Up



### Brauð & Co Frakkastígur 16

Brauð & Co. has burst onto the bakery scene in 101 Reykjavík. Regulars swear by their “snuðurs”—cinnamon bread rolls smothered with a sugary glaze. They take it a step further and stuff the classics with blueberries and whatnot, eliciting inappropriate satisfied moans. Get there early to snatch a warm one.

### Bernhöftsbakarí Klapparstígur 3

This much-loved bakery moved from its original location downtown to a smaller place close to their supply kitchens, but none of the warm service or charm was lost in the process. Their “runstykki” are bread rolls available for 80 ISK apiece—a steal any way you look at it. Try the curry cranberry rolls and grab an almond florentine when it makes an appearance.

#### Previous Winners

2016: Sandholt  
2015: Sandholt  
2014: Sandholt  
2013: Sandholt  
2012: Mosfellsbakarí

## Best Indian



### Austur-Indíafelagið

Hverfisgata 56

Still going strong twenty years on, Austur-Indíafelagið is an institution. It has been consistently dishing out quality Indian fare without compromising on authenticity. A small rotational menu with regional dishes, this is the place if you are celebrating a birthday, a promotion or wooing your partner. Make a meal of the delicate salmon pollichathu, kozhi mappas and kulchas and share it family style. Keep your eyes peeled for the vegetarian and vegan dishes as well. Call ahead to make reservations.

#### Runners Up



### Hraðlestin Hverfisgata 64, Lækjargata 8

Not many would know, but this restaurant, known for everyday Indian street fare, is the only one that makes masala chai an Indian mom would be proud of. The thalis are lovely and in recent times they’ve stepped up their game with the vegan thali on Wednesdays and dosas for brunch on weekends.



### Gandhi Pósthússtræti 17

Stick to their strengths, Kerala cuisine, and you will not be disappointed. Their “Kerala food festivals,” are definitely worth trying to understand the nuances of this piquant regional cuisine, and their warm gajar ka halwa (carrot pudding) is the best in Iceland.

#### Previous Winners

2016: Austur-Indíafelagið  
2015: Gandhi  
2014: Gandhi  
2013: Austurlandahraðlestin  
2012: Ghandi

## Best Thai



### Ban Thai

Laugavegur 130

Ban Thai is one of those rare gems in Iceland that consistently deliver tongue-tickling, satisfying Thai fare despite the challenges of being on a distant island, nowhere close to Thailand. Don’t be fooled by their extensive menu, these guys mean business. They have something for everyone—creamy coconut curries from the South or fiery “jungle” dishes from the North. Our favourites are the laab (minced meat salad with generous piles of fresh herbs) and the green curry with strips of crunchy bamboo shoots. As a regular on our panel quipped: “Anything good enough for Russell Crowe is good enough for me.”

#### Runners Up

### Mai Thai Bistro Laugavegur 118

If you haven’t eaten at this charming little supermarket sit-down, we suggest you rectify that. Reykjavík may not always deliver on popular world cuisine, but Thai food is a largely satisfying affair. Skip the popular pad Thai and ask for the simple stir fried veggies, or any of the curries—they’ll even do a brown rice fried rice for those who hanker for extra fibre.



### Yummi Yummi Hverfisgata 123

The square by Hlemmur promises to be a food destination, and the Little Thailand vibe in the triangle is completed by this newly renovated takeaway. Besides the surly-sweet service, it is the kapoo moo sab that keeps us going back for more.

#### Previous Winners

2016: Ban Thai  
2015: Ban Thai  
2014: Ban Thai  
2013: Yummi Yummi  
2012: Ban Thai

## Best coffeehouse



### Reykjavík Roasters

Brautarholt 2

Roasters may have made some changes that didn’t sit too well with regulars at their original location, but they’ve won over patrons old and new at this new location. Their coffee is the best in Iceland—no small feat in such a coffee-crazed country. Roasters come out tops in creating the quintessential coffeehouse experience that goes beyond good coffee. The speciality teas are brewed just right, and the croissants and chia pudding on offer will keep the vegans/gluten-free and the toddler equally happy.

#### Runners Up



### Kaffihús Vesturbæjar Melhagi 20

If there’s any one place on this list with staunch loyalists, it is Kaffi Vest. While some can’t seem to agree (we’re looking at you, 101 rats) on their coffeehouse status, we do agree that they have good coffee, delicate macarons and friendly service.



### Newcomer: Borðið Ægisdæla 123

It’s refreshing to see neighbourhood establishments cropping across town, and Borðið has been making quiet waves in the cafe and dining scene. Their coffee is undisputedly the best bang for your buck (295 ISK!) and their raspberry cake and kanillsnuður a l’Americain make for a toothsome treat.

#### Previous Winners

2016: Stofan  
2015: Kaffihús Vesturbæjar  
2014: Reykjavík Roasters  
2013: Kaffismiðjan  
2012: Kaffismiðjan

**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2017**

# Dining

Iceland's not cheap so it better be good

**Best sushi**



## Fiskmarkaðurinn

Aðalstræti 12

Helmed by one of Iceland's best-known chefs, Hrefna Sætran, Fiskmarkaðurinn (The Fish Market) is hands down our panel's favourite sushi restaurant in town. We suggest making a meal of just the sashimi platter: beautifully presented at the table with a lot of flair, deftly sliced fatty salmon and trout, glistening scallop are mercifully left unadorned, with a sprinkle of roe here and a delicious mound of wakame there. Pair this with the wasabi cocktail and you have a light, refreshing meal.

Runners Up



**Sakebarinn Laugavegur 2**

Housed in a beautiful old timber house in the heart of downtown, Sakebarinn's window seats alone should be reason enough to drop by. They do a variety of sauce-laden sushi rolls—the local favourite—but we recommend sticking to the sushi and sashimi platter.



**Sushi Social Þinghóltsstræti 5**

This Japanese/South American fusion place had to change names recently—but there's still plenty of samba in the menu. Everything comes with lots of lime, sauce and chilli, their tempura batter is pleasingly light, and the cocktail menu should help any sushi purists through the fusion-cooking trauma.

Previous Winners

- 2016: Fish Market
- 2015: SuZushii
- 2014: Sushisamba
- 2013: Sakebarinn
- 2012: SuZushii

**Best vegetarian**



## Kaffi Vínýl

Hverfisgata 76

Reykjavik now has a dedicated vegan café. Kaffi Vínýl offers wholesome vegan fare in generous portions, with soy-based Oumph meat substitute, and various non-dairy milk options for the beverages. They have a huge record collection and DJ several times a week, with the crackle of vinyl lending a warm atmosphere—Vínýl is also of our preferred places to start a night out. It's casual in all ways, so the service can be patchy, but one bite of an Oumph sandwich makes up for it.

Runners Up



**Bergsson Mathús Templarasund 3**

It isn't all-vegetarian, but Bergsson championed the salad bar trend—think Ottolenghi. The homemade hummus, pesto, and freshly baked bread are great, but it's the hearty soups and spinach lasagne that make it a firm and lasting favourite.



**Gló Laugavegur 20 & more**

Gló's busiest days are the first days of the week, when people make a collective promise to eat clean and stay healthy after the weekend. They serve the occasional chicken dish, but vegetarians won't be short of options—try the fresh pressed juices, fresh salads, raw lasagna and specials on rotation.

Previous Winners

- 2016: Kaffi Vínýl
- 2015: Teni
- 2014: Gló
- 2013: Gló
- 2012: Gló

**Best place for a fancy meal**



## Dill

Hverfisgata 12

If you're a gourmand looking for a memorable meal when in Reykjavik, Dill has to top the list. Dill showcases the best of Iceland with seasonal menus, paying homage to the island's bounty, often found no place else, executed with all the tweezer-precision of modern cuisine. Don't even think twice about splurging for the seven-course menu—it's the only way to do it. Top-notch service and friendly sommeliers round off an already perfect experience.

Runners Up



**Grilliö Hótel Saga, Hagatorg**

Grilliö's sweeping panoramic views and stable of seasoned chefs, along with old-school fine-dining flourishes like the crisp linen, have us swooning with delight. So great is this place, we've never stopped talking about a luscious chocolate mousse with olive oil we had there years ago.



**Grill Market Lækjargata 2a**

The tasting menus with produce sourced from local purveyors have been a hit with diners since Grill Market opened its doors. We suggest choosing one of the set menus and letting the chefs go to town.

Previous Winners

- 2015: Dill
- 2015: Dill
- 2014: Dill
- 2013: Gallery at Hótel Holt
- 2012: Grill Market



Fun, food  
& drinks.



## BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2017

# Dining

## Not everything is shark and sheep head

### Best goddamn restaurants



## Matur og Drykkur

Grandagarður 2

If you were in Reykjavík for just 24 hours, or you were entertaining out-of-town guests, then where would you go? This was the question posed to our panel and the answer overwhelmingly was Matur og Drykkur. In just two years, they've gone from newcomer to firm favourite with locals and visitors alike. The cod head is an Instagram sensation, of course, but we recommend trying one of the tasting menus, or going to town with the appetizers. Don't be afraid to try suspicious-sounding dishes (sheep dung-smoked trout?)—you're in very capable hands here.



Runner Up



**Newcomer:** Messinn  
Lækjargata 6b

Messinn may be modelled on the well-known Westfjords restaurant Tjoruhúsið, but it's fast becoming a

## Snaps

Þórsgrata 1

We love Snaps so much, we had to split this award. It's a beloved casual-chic bistro with a forget-you're-in-Reykjavik vibe thanks to its lush greenery and warm lighting. On a grey day, nothing beats sitting by the greenhouse walls with their excellent French onion soup. Did we mention they make a stellar creme brulee as well? A true keeper.

Reykjavik restaurant of choice. What keeps us coming back is how the food keeps getting better every time we dine there. Our favourites include their savoury plockfiskur, velvety graflax, and a perfectly seared trout with honey and almonds.

Previous Winners

2016: Snaps  
2015: Snaps  
2014: Snaps

### Best family meal



## Hamborgara-fabrikkan

Höfðatún 2, Kringlan 4-12

It may not always be the first place that springs to mind as being family-friendly, but The Hamburger Factory comes out ahead of the other contenders simply because of the thoughtfulness that goes beyond the children's menu. There are plenty of distractions for young diners, and orders are taken earlier and the food served in time to keep young temperaments in line, making this a popular choice for those venturing out with the kids. And all this without compromising on service!

Runners Up



**KEX Hostel**  
Skúlagata 28

Kex might not spring to mind as the average family-friendly diner, but this converted former biscuit factory has a lot going for it. While they don't have a dedicated children's menu, the small plates easily double up as kiddie snacks, and the quirky decor keeps even the most distracted child occupied.



**Laundromat**  
Austurstræti 9

Laundromat continues to enjoy its family-friendly reputation. The spacious play area downstairs keeps them little humans occupied, and if you're a breastfeeding mama or daddy-on-duty, the view from the main dining space makes for some great people-watching.

Previous Winners

2016: Laundromat  
2015: KEX  
2014: Laundromat  
2013: Laundromat  
2012: Laundromat  
2011: Laundromat

### Best cheap meal



## Bike Cave

Einarsnes 36

If you're looking for a no-frills, quality meal at honest prices with a fantastic view to boot, then Bike Cave is definitely the place to be. Sure, it's not bang in the middle of downtown, but the simple cheeseburger, two veggie burger patty options and kjötsupa all come under a 1000 isk each! If that isn't a cheap meal, we don't know what is.

Runners Up



**Bónus**  
Laugavegur 59 & other locations  
The in-house Bónus brand of sandwiches are pretty much the cheapest on-the-go meal in the country. Icelandic favourites include the rækjusalat. "It's a deluge of mayo with shrimp and boiled eggs—kinda how we like it here," said our panel, who were also partial to the smoked salmon and roast beef.



**Súpubarinn**  
Borgartún 26

This is a true hidden gem not many locals know about, let alone tourists. Tucked away in the basement of a nondescript building on Borgartún, Súpubarinn offers lunch at throwaway prices. The expansive salad and soup bar, and even the hot food counter, are perfect for both the working man and the króna-weary traveller.

Previous Winners

2016: Noodle Station  
2015: K-Bar (RIP)  
2014: 10-11 after 14:00  
2013: "Sub of the month" at Subway  
2012: Íslenski barinn



## BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2017

# Dining

## Make it worth the wait

### Best brunch



### Vox

Hilton Nordica, Suðurlandsbraut 2

If the Hilton tag has you scared about prices, fret not. Vox has been consistently drawing the hordes in with their value-for-money brunch since it began. So much so, it's even a popular wedding gift in Iceland. Vox offers a large selection of salads, cold cuts, desserts and a live counter with specials spanning global cuisine. It's perfect for travellers wanting to dine in style, families with children (half price for kids under twelve, and under-fives are free!), and for celebrating a birthday.

Runners Up



### Coocoo's Nest Grandagarður 23

This family-run restaurant in Grandi offers an Italian style aperitivo hour, and their decadent brunch menu starts on Friday and runs through the weekend. It's a comfortable, homely joint, and the walk along the old harbour will help with your hangover.

### Slippbarinn Mýrargata 2

Grandi has several good things going for it. The Marina hotel sits pretty by the harbour, and the brunch at Slippbarinn is worth making the pilgrimage on a weekend. Bubbly and chic, Slippbarinn's spread is large enough without being overwhelming.

Previous Winners

2016: **Coocoo's Nest**  
2015: **Slippbarinn**  
2014: **Coocoo's Nest**  
2013: **Vox**  
2012: **Vox**

### Best seafood



### Fiskfélagið

Vesturgata 2a

The Fish Company has been steadfastly dishing out some of the best seafood in Iceland. Don't try too hard to make sense of the ingredient and country mash-up (like "Iceland-cucumber" or "Australia-ginger"), just focus on the food. Our former food editor described it as "fish so buttery, it must be on laxatives." The tasting menus on offer are a wonderful play on textures, theatrics and flavour. Iceland's credentials as a great fishing nation are firmly reinforced here.

Runners Up

### Resto

#### Rauðarástígur 26-29

Having worked in well-known seafood restaurants, the chef couple behind Resto decided to bring their considerable expertise to bear at their own place. Unassuming and laid back, Resto is a word of mouth hit. Any seafood you order here will be made from top-class ingredients, done to perfection.



### Matarkjallarinn Aðalstræti 2

Matarkjallarinn has proven wildly popular with their fresh seafood and "Taste of Iceland" menus. If it's on offer, don't leave without trying the Appelsín-cured salmon—a lovely take on graflax using Appelsín (the Icelandic version of Fanta orange soda).

Previous Winners

2016: **Fiskfélagið**  
2015: **Fiskfélagið**  
2014: **Fiskfélagið**  
2013: **Fiskfélagið**  
2012: **Fiskfélagið**

### Best must-try dining experience



### Dill

Hverfisgata 12

When Ruth Reichl makes it her go-to place to dine in Iceland, you better believe her. Without waxing poetic, we must confess, this is one meal you won't forget in a hurry. With chef Gunnar running Agern in NY (and awarded a Michelin star!), Dill is now helmed by chef Ragnar, who continues to uphold the same exacting standards and thoughtful food that Dill is known for.

Runners Up



### Matur og Drykkur Grandagarður 2

In how many ways can we say, eat here? Is it the whole cod head you should get, or perhaps the double-smoked dried lamb, or the creamy halibut soup? Whatever you get, rest assured it'll have roots in Icelandic culinary history, elevated to fine dining standards. And do not leave without trying the fried-to-order kleinur.



### Bærjarins Beztu By Tryggvagata

Here in Iceland, hot dogs use a unique lamb-pork sausage with smoky, grassy tones. It's classically topped with mustard and ketchup, with onions raw and fried. Get a "pyslu með öllu" if you want to stick to tradition—Bill Clinton and Kim K are amongst the many who've braved the lines by the downtown Bærjarins Beztu stand.

Previous Winners

2016: **Matur og Drykkur**  
2015: **Shrimp pyramid at Jómfrúin**  
2014: **Food section at Kolaportið**  
2013: **Icelandic food at Kaffi Loki**  
2012: **Icel. Home-food, Mamma Steina**

### Best lunch place



### Snaps

Þórsgata 1

That Snaps is popular is undisputable. Little wonder it has consistently been awarded the Best Goddamn Restaurant for years. But what very few know is that they have a killer lunch on offer everyday. A faultless fish of the day, prompt service, and a little bit of quiet to yourself makes it our Best Lunch Place. Psst, if with a co-worker, split the creme brulee, we promise your day will be brighter thereon.

Runners Up



### Ostabúðin Skólavörðustígur 8

This is a veteran lunch spot so no surprises that it is still going strong. If the fish of the day isn't satisfying enough, we suggest asking them for a half portion of the day's soup as well. What's truly admirable, though, is that perch (karfi), cusk (kleifa) and ling (lánga) make regular appearances beside staples like salmon.

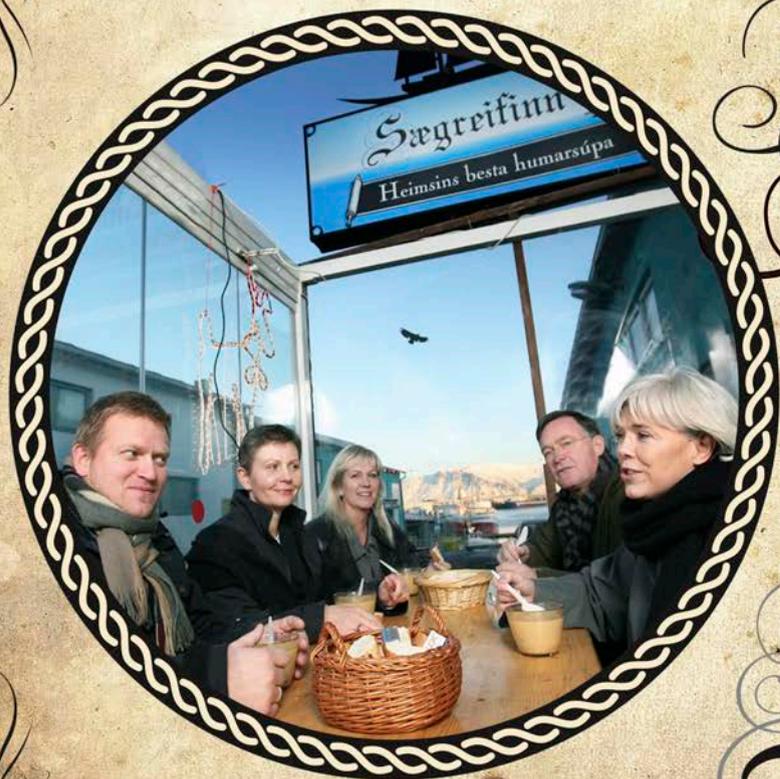


### Apotek Austurstræti 16

Even though lunch service here can mean "waiting over 40 mins for your dish to arrive," the two- and three-course lunch offer is great value for money and perfect for those days when your boss is out and you want to stretch that lunch hour to the hilt.

Previous Winners

2016: **Ostabúðin**  
2015: **Ostabúðin**  
2014: **Bergsson Mathús**  
2013: **Ostabúðin**



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## Best late night bite



### Ali Baba

Veltusund 3b

As one panellist put it, “#6 Shawarma wrap never let me down.” Factions are bitterly divided between this place and their next-door neighbour Mandi, leading to impassioned and detailed arguments on the pros and cons of both sides. But this time, Ali Baba won the day with our panel, having satisfied late-night snack binges, pregnancy cravings and splitting hangovers with equal elan. If you still need a reason, try the lamb kofte wrap: it’s to die for. And that smear of spicy red sauce will waken even the most beer-jaded consciousness.

Runners Up

### Nonnabiti Hafnarstræti 9

This used to be a rite-of-passage affair for every young party animal. Even today, Nonni’s rolls with a generous slathering of his own blend of sauces (with a mayonnaise base, of course— Iceland’s perennial favourite) always hits that late-night craving: greasy and a touch salty, but so, so good.



### Deli Bankastræti 14

Deli is not just a place to grab a slice of pizza. It is one of the main relationship-causing venues in Reykjavik. People have met their future partner there. It usually doesn’t last, but they might get a couple of kids out of the deal.

Previous Winners

**2016: Fish and Chips**  
**2015: Chicken wings at Dirty Burger & Ribs**  
**2014: Nonnabiti**  
**2013: Nonnabiti**

## Best place to go with a group of friends



### Tapas barinn

Vesturgata 3b

Tapas barinn may not be faithful to the Spanish definition of a tapas bar, but what they do capture well—and boisterously at that—is the atmosphere and liveliness of tapas. It’s long been a local tradition to host reunions, bachelor parties and noisy get-togethers at Tapas barinn. The food is served family-style for the whole table, and the selection is huge, spanning local (langoustine, puffin, lamb) as well as more global fare. And it’s delicious. If you’re looking for a place where the food and drinks keep coming and the service never falters, look no further.

Runners Up

### Bryggjan Brugghús Grandagarður 8

Icelanders love their beer, and in recent times we’ve been brewing some pretty damn good stuff, if we do say so ourselves. So when this spacious new microbrewery and eatery opened its doors, it quickly became a go-to for parties large and small. You can let your hair down without trampling the diner in the next seat.



### Matur og Drykkur Grandagarður 2

Hiking glaciers all day and want to swap travel stories with your travel buddies without having to scream over other boisterous diners? Then Matur og Drykkur is your best bet: great food, delicious cocktails and an atmosphere that makes for convivial conversations.

Previous Winners

**2016: Tapas barinn**  
**2015: Tapas barinn**  
**2014: KEX**  
**2013: KEX**  
**2012: Tapas barinn**

## Best newcomer



### Geiri Smart

Hverfisgata 30

Geiri Smart fashions itself on the popular 70s song of the same name (you know the one! Let’s sing it together! A-one and a-two, and... No?), and the musical influence continues through the menu design. But quirkiness aside, they serve up some serious grub that had our panel hankering for more. The Gnalling cheese with prosciutto and savoury French toast was a revelation, and the goose tart with beets had us casting jealous looks at our colleague who declared “these beets were beat out of their muddiness into delicious submission.”

Runners Up

### Burro Veltusund 1

Needless to say, we are excited about Reykjavik’s first South American restaurant! With a vegan tasting menu and a smattering of ceviches (and a tongue-in-cheek bar serving tropical delights upstairs at Pablo Discobar), Burro holds a lot of promise.



### Kumiko Grandagarður 101

Reykjavik’s first Japanese-focussed tea house is a Harajuku-style cafe that offers fine Japanese and Chinese teas, delicious cakes and desserts, and a killer brunch menu. The brunch presentation is an event in itself, with three layers of fruit, breads, dips, savouries, scones and cakes arriving on a three-tiered serving tray. It’s a perfect weekend treat for two.

Previous Winners

**None! New Category**

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## NORTHFOOD

# So What Exactly Is New Nordic Cuisine?



Words **RAGNAR EGILSSON**

Photo **TUUKKA KOSKI**

Depending who you listen to, the New Nordic Cuisine culinary movement might be alive, dead, or both—but one thing's for sure, it's now inextricably woven into the restaurant culture of the Nordic region. The food on offer is characterised by a mix of traditional recipes with a contemporary flourish: expect smoky flavours, high-quality ingredients, plentiful shellfish, astringent wild berries, foraged weeds, rich dairy products, minimalistic design and, by the end of your meal, a drained wallet. So gird both your stomach and your bank account, and try this selection of dishes that we feel best represents New Nordic Cuisine right here in Iceland.

## Plokkfiskur at Messinn

This could be the newest update of the dish that best represents the Nordic region. While not New Nordic in the strictest sense, Messinn does justice to the amazing ingredients that can be sourced within and with-

out Iceland's shores. Not only that, but they spark up local peasant dishes—something you don't see much of in contemporary Icelandic dining. Their variation of the classic Icelandic fish stew (plokkfiskur) should rattle only the most conservative of purists. The basic cod-and-potatoes in bechamel is given a facelift with white wine, celery and lime, giving the creamy, almost puréed texture a much-needed bounce of acidity and sweetness. A big hit with local foodies.

## Double-smoked lamb with butter-milk and nutmeg at Matur og Drykkur

The crate-digging food geeks at Matur og Drykkur have dug up some weird oldies (like their famous cod head sharing plate), but they are just as likely to impress with elegant representations of holiday staples like salted smoked lamb. Traditionally served as a single-smoked cold

cut with the bechamel sauce our grandparents loved so dearly, here it has been both doubled down and lightened up. Much appreciated.

## Shrimp pyramid at Jómfrúin

We've recommended it before and we'll recommend it again, because here at the Grapevine we like our bread the way we like our parliament: with a mountain of pink, beady-eyed bottom-feeders. The shrimps are served on a slick of mayo, ever-popular with elderly conservatives. In all seriousness though, Jómfrúin is lit.

## Almost anything at Dill

Dill represents the New Nordic style with more integrity and focus than anyone else in Iceland, although new, highly competitive restaurants are springing up every day. Founder Gunnar Karl has moved on to helm seasonal Nordic joint Agern in New

York, leaving Dill in the capable hands of new head chef Ragnar Eiriksson. The menu selection is constantly changing and developing, in the spirit of innovation and seasonal cooking, so it's hard to nail down anything specific, but a recent stand-out dish was the complex dried mussel chip. Also notable is Dill's many strange variations on the humble carrot (why is the carrot humble? We don't know. Maybe it's going around acting like it don't know nobody).

*Very Honorable Mention:*

## Seaweed with buttermilk and capelin roe at Slippurinn

This place isn't in Reykjavik, but it's so good we had to mention it. Expect only the finest seafood fare at this excellent Vestmannaeyjar joint, which was founded by the same people who gave us Matur og Drykkur. Their lemon sole with foraged herbs is also to die for.



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### DINING OUTSIDE REYKJAVÍK

## Get Outta Town

Don't settle for a sandwich on your road trip

Words **SHRUTHI BASAPPA, RAGNAR EGILSSON & JOHN ROGERS**

It used to be the case that good restaurants, after leaving the confines of Reykjavik, were pretty slim pickings. These days, fancy restaurants are springing up all over the country. With that in

mind, here's a handy guide to a few eateries that are worth detouring for. Pro tip: The further out you get, the more eccentric the opening hours, and you'll need to book in advance at some of these places.

### South Iceland

#### Fjöruborðið

Eyrarbraut 3a, Stokkseyri

#### Slippurinn

Strandvegur 76, Vestmannaeyjar

Legendary lobster restaurant Fjöruborðið is steeped in tradition. The lobster bisque, buttery langoustine and hulking meringue cake are best dealt with by taking a walk outside and enjoying the stunning scenery between courses. A ferry ride away on the Westman Islands is Slippurinn, run by the same folks as Matur og Drykkur in Reykjavik. There are few places offering such a high standard of simple New Nordic dishes made with the finest in locally foraged ingredients—this place is something special.

*Also try: Hotel Ranga, near Hella; Rauða Húsið, Eyrarbakki*

### East Iceland

#### Norð Austur

Norðurgata 2, Seyðisfjörður

#### Skaftafell

Austurvegur 42, Seyðisfjörður

The White Nordic guide declared Norð Austur the best sushi place in Iceland, and they're not wrong. It's only open during spring and summer, but they transform local seafood into modern Japanese fare, letting the pristine produce speak for itself. If you're there in winter, all is not lost—just up the street is the cosy basement restaurant-bar Skaftafell, where you can sample a memorable blue cheese and reindeer pizza.

*Also try: SALT, Egilsstaðir; Hotel Hildibrand, Neskaupstaður*

### North Iceland

#### Rub23

Kaupvangsstræti 6, Akureyri

Our favourite restaurant in Iceland's second city of Akureyri is Rub23, which has a beautiful dining room, excellent service, a laid-back atmosphere, and a menu that invites you to mix-and-match your choice of fish or meat with a variety of different spice rubs, to customise your meal. They also serve tender steaks and succulent sushi.

### West Iceland

#### Narfeyrarstofa

Aðalgata 3, Stykkishólmur

#### Hotel Húsafell

Stórarjörður, Húsafell

The star of Stykkishólmur is Narfeyrarstofa, with its quaint exterior, an intimate, candlelit atmosphere and, most importantly, a stellar menu that makes the most of the fresh seafood hauled from the adjacent Breiðarfjörður each day. Further inland, Hotel Húsafell is a remote luxury hotel that offers an excellent five-course tasting menu of creatively prepared local ingredients with excellent service, and wine pairings should you so desire.

*Also try: Hotel Búðir, Búðir; Bjargasteinn, Grundarfjörður; Tjörhúsið, Ísafjörður*

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**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2017**

# Drinking

Tipsy or wasted, the choice is yours.

Reykjavík's bar culture is quite vast and diverse, ranging from the smallest three-table hole that serves one beer and where regulars threaten you for taking an extra chair, to huge vast glittering bottle-service rooms lined with leather and mirrors. Unfortunately for our panel of judges, selecting these bars doesn't mean an actual field trip, but it does require a certain—how shall we put it politely—expertise. They range from former bar staff, to performers who find themselves in bars all the time, to writers who sometimes write, and sometimes just drink about it. So here are the results that our ragtag team of (ahem) experts came up with. Now get out there and have a few!

**Best place to start the night**



## KEX Hostel

Skúlagata 28

KEX Hostel is a great place to kick off an evening. It's a hostel bar, but it kind of transcends that description, with an amazing sea view over Faxaflói and Mount Esja, beautiful decor, spacious tables, and a large wraparound bar with stools to perch on. It's especially fun if they've got a live show booked—they're almost always free, with great local and visiting bands. KEX just has a cool atmosphere, with the bonus of great food and a good beer selection.

Runners Up



**Kaffi Vínyl  
Hverfisgata 76**

Off the beaten path from the main Laugavegur drag, this excellent café was once a discount shoe shop that was literally never open. It has a great selection of beers, wines and cocktails, lovely décor that feels like a hip living room, and tasty vegan food. It closes early, but it's adorable.



**Bío Paradís  
Hverfisgata 54**

Bío Paradís is a cinema. But wait—their lobby has a comfortable, decently priced bar, and you can bring your drink into the cinema or just hang out and get nicely lubricated before hitting the town.

Previous Winners

- 2016: KEX Hostel
- 2015: Loft Hostel
- 2014: Kaldi
- 2013: Slippbarinn
- 2012: Kex

**Best place to end the night**



## Paloma

Naustín 1-3

Ending the night in Reykjavík usually means an after party, so where you end up before that tends to be the bottom of the barrel. Paloma's basement is literally at the bottom of town and it's truly the place to cap off an evening. "It's the only place I end up," said one panelist. "It's pretty grimy, and you can go upstairs or downstairs, or over to Húrra—it's really easy to hang there." One usually doesn't have to battle long lines because the place is so big, and you're basically guaranteed a fun messy time.

Runners Up



**Húrra  
Tryggvagata 22**

Last year's winner, Húrra remains a strong contender for a place to top off the night—but the panel decided that it doesn't quite have that last-stop kind of vibe: "It's great," said a panelist, "but I always end up going somewhere else when I party there."



**Prikið  
Bankastræti 12**

With its packed and grinding dance floor and huge social smoking area, this hip-hop spot is another classic night-cap, but tends to skew young and is notoriously difficult to get into. Said the panel: "I end up going when I'm bored and I get really wasted, but there's always such a long line."

Previous Winners

- 2016: Húrra
- 2015: Paloma Basement
- 2014: Paloma
- 2013: Harlem (RIP)

**Best all-around bar**



## Húrra

Tryggvagata 22

Húrra has been a stalwart in the bar scene for quite some time now, and with good cause. It's a great place to go anytime and for almost any reason—early weeknight drinks with work mates, late weekend nights on your own, dancing with your friends, or catching a quality gig in their excellent music and events programme. The drinks are varied and well priced, the staff are cute and friendly, the toilets are clean, and with the recent addition of karaoke downstairs, they truly are the best bar.

Runners Up



**Prikið  
Bankastræti 12**

This was a very close race between Húrra and Prikið—with the former winning out almost exclusively because of space and clean bathrooms—but Prikið is great. A good happy hour, fun DJs playing mainly hip-hop, a fun yet small dance floor, and a generally upbeat atmosphere. If you can beat the line, enjoy.



**Kaffibarinn  
Bergstaðastræti 1**

Kaffibarinn is a classic, hands down, and the panel agreed that it couldn't go without a nod for its consistent quality in the local bar scene. It's a particularly great place to go on weeknights, as the weekends can get extremely packed with long lines, but those parties do get wild. Just don't you dare take a picture in there!

Previous Winners

- 2016: Prikið
- 2015: KEX
- 2014: Boston
- 2013: Dolly (RIP)
- 2012: Faktory (RIP)

## Best bar to go dancing



### Prikid

Bankastræti 12

After three years winning this slot, Kiki has been knocked out by Prikid's hip-hop-centric party cry. With a tightly packed dance floor that you hit as soon as you enter the bar, you immediately get swept into the fun, friendly party. "It's the only place I will go alone," said one panellist, "because you'll hang out and dance with nice random people. You just feel good in there." The dancing tends to spread out all over both tightly packed floors while the bartenders keep the party atmosphere high.

Runners Up



### Húrra Tryggvagata 22

Húrra won best all-around bar for many reasons, and one big one is its very big and impressive dancefloor. Every weekend, gig or no gig, Húrra invariably has a great DJ booked and a ton of space in which to flail about like an idiot or pull cool shapes to impress the cuties. You can even dance on the stage!



### Paloma Naustin 1-3

Paloma has two rather distinct floors with different DJs and atmospheres, and both have lots of room to dance. The upper level tends to be more mainstream dance/EDM and downstairs skews darker and weirder with niche electronic styles. Both make for a great place to cut loose.

Previous Winners

- 2016: Kiki Queer Bar
- 2015: Kiki Queer Bar
- 2014: Kiki Queer Bar
- 2013: Harlem (RIP)
- 2012: Bakkus (RIP)

## Best newcomer bar



### Pablo Discobar

Veltusund 1

This brand new fancy-ass cocktail club is a completely unique and welcome addition to Reykjavik's nightlife and it's causing quite a stir! It's rather upscale and you need to book a table and check your bank account before you go throw down for a lot of their acrobatically mixed drinks, but the experience is entirely worth it. The place has a gorgeous 70s tiki lounge/Boogie Nights décor and the throwback disco music is on point. Bienvenido!

Runners Up



### Veður Klapparstígur 33

This beautifully designed new bar looks really fancy, but it has a laid-back atmosphere, serves a great selection of cocktails and beer, and plays excellent music. The weekend nighttime crowd is a bit American Psycho, but that's not without its charm.



### Bazaar Oddsson Hringbraut 121

This new bar, located just outside of the city centre in the Oddsson hotel, boasts beautiful interior design and a cool-but-very-expensive private karaoke room. The service and food can be patchy, but with some cool shows booked ahead, we have high hopes for it and we're glad it's here.

Previous Winners

- 2016: Bryggjan Brugghús
- 2015: Mikkeller & Friends
- 2014: Húrra
- 2013: Kaldi
- 2012: Slippbarinn, Hótel Marína

## Best place to watch sports over a beer



### Lebowski Bar

Laugavegur 20a

Like the Icelandic football team's unlikely and triumphant rise to near-glory in Euro 2016, Lebowski Bar boldly takes the gold for the first time in this category. This giant diner-like theme bar is smack in the centre of town, and takes the prize for its particularly fantastic coverage of the aforementioned sporting event, as well as the last Olympics. It's got all the beers and drinks you need to celebrate wins or mourn losses, plus tasty burgers and shakes. Goooooal!

Runners Up



### Bjarni Fel Austurstræti 20

Formerly the only sports bar in town, Bjarni Fel used to win this category by default. It's still a perfect place to watch sports games unbothered by any other shenanigans. It has many screens, an up-to-date schedule of events to be screened, and delivers sports singularly to the thirsty fan.



### Rauða Ljónið Eiðistorg 15, 170 Seltjarnarnes

It's out of the way in a weird little mall from a bygone era, but this family-restaurant-by-day, sports-bar-by-night is a place that's worth trekking to for a taste of local culture. It's the official bar of the KR football club, and rumour has it you might spot the president there.

Previous Winners

- 2016: American Bar
- 2015: Bjarni Fel
- 2014: Bjarni Fel
- 2013: Bjarni Fel
- 2012: Úrilla Górrillan (RIP)

## Best beer selection



### Microbar

Vesturgata 2

Microbar is back in the beer throne after being ousted for the last couple of years. Its new cosier location has gained them points for the calm atmosphere and the helpful bar staff. They still boast their classic local beer tastings for the brew connoisseur as well as a huge selection of beers for the casual taster. Their selection is just as wide as runners up Skúli and Mikkeller, but they edged them out by serving larger portions of the same beers for the same price.

Runners Up



### Mikkeller & Friends Hverfisgata 12

Last year's winner holds onto second place thanks to a unique selection of Mikkeller beers and beyond, poured by knowledgeable bartenders amongst antique-chic décor. Located upstairs from Hverfisgata 12, you also get the advantage of good weekend DJs, and fancy bar snacks and pizzas.



### Skúli Craft Bar Aðalstræti 9

A cool environment in a great location, Skúli has a strong presence in this category with its vast selection of brews, although the prices can be steep for the serving size. "It has Cards Against Humanity and there's one bartender who sometimes plays death metal," said the panel.

Previous Winners

- 2016: Mikkeller & Friends
- 2015: Skúli Craft Bar
- 2014: Mírcu Bar
- 2013: Micro Bar
- 2012: Micro Bar

**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2017**

# Drinking

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

## Best place for cocktails



### Apotek

Austurstræti 16

Apótek takes the cocktail crown for its third consecutive year of mixed and shaken glory. Set in the lounge and restaurant of the hotel by the same name, it's a large, bright room with opulent décor—exactly the kind of setting that lends itself to sitting back with a perfected blend of liqueurs and mixers. Their head mixologist recently took home a prize at the Reykjavík Bar Summit, so they are tens across the board. Plus their cocktail-and-dessert happy hour deal is a steal!

Runners Up



### Slippbarinn

**Mýrargata 2**  
This standard go-to bar for cocktails holds its own as far as the mixing game goes, with a unique menu and highly skilled bartenders to shake them up. The bar itself is a beautifully designed space with a gorgeous view, right in the Old Harbour. It closes on the early side, but it's great to start out there.



### Hverfisgata 12

The bar that unites The Pizza Place With No Name and Mikkeller & Friends holds a special place in cocktail-land for our panel. "They have a cocktail of the week offer and good DJs every weekend, plus you can go upstairs to get beer or stay down and have a pizza," said one gushing panelist. Great drinks, great place.

Previous Winners

- 2016: Apotek
- 2015: Apotek
- 2014: Slippbarinn
- 2013: Borg, Hotel Borg
- 2012: Kolabrautin

## Best bar for live music



### Húrra

Tryggvagata 22

For the third year, Húrra lifts the best live venue prize. Although we try to honour different bars in each category, this year Húrra won two unanimously. "Is there any better place? It's the best and only place I like to play, anyway," said one musician on the panel. "The staff is great, the sound is great on stage and in the room, the sound techs are awesome, and the sound system is proper!" Part of us wishes there was another venue to consider, but we love Húrra. It's great!

Runners Up



### Mengi

**Óðinsgata 2**  
Although it's not exactly a bar, the art and performance space MENGI is one of the top places to catch quality concerts by unique, often experimental musicians. Much of their programming is quite niche but they do get some big draws too, and the sound and visuals are impeccable.

### Gaukurinn

**Tryggvagata 22**  
Gaukurinn has long had a reputation as a place for harder-edged metal and punk events, but over the last year it has been ambitious in diversifying its programming, improving its facilities, and creating a friendly and safe space for all. The sound is not that great, but we hope this improves too.

Previous Winners

- 2016: Húrra
- 2015: Húrra
- 2014: Cafe Rosenberg
- 2013: Volta (RIP)

## Best happy hour



### Bravó

Laugavegur 22

Oh, bravo, Bravó, for having the best happy hour in this fair city. In a town with so many happy hours that we had to go ahead and create an entire app for them, Bravó edged out the entire competition with their lengthy happy hours. Namely, from 11am until 8pm. Those are nine very happy hours. If you get lucky and grab a table, or even just a single seat in this small and often very packed place, then it's the happiest place on earth.

Runners Up



### Kaffibarinn

**Bergstaðastræti 1**  
For a classy happy hour, Kaffibarinn has a great selection of Iceland's finer beers on tap at little more than half their regular prices. "I especially like going there for their Wednesday cheese platter evenings," admitted one panelist. It's warm and welcoming, and a great place to go relax.



### Stofan

**Vesturgata 3**  
When the name of the place literally translates to "the living room," it's pretty much expected to be a very cosy place to kick back with some late-afternoon/early-evening drinks. With all their beers and wines on happy hour from 4pm until 8pm, plus their lovely central location and tasty menu, Stofan thoroughly deserves a nod.

Previous Winner:

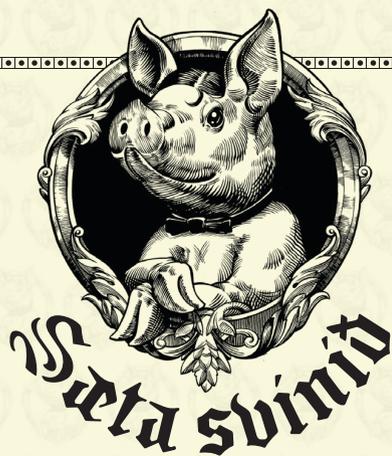
- 2015: Foréttbarinn



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# The Beer Frontier

Words **JOHN ROGERS**

Photo **ART BICNICK**

Just a few years ago, Iceland's beer taps were dominated by a handful of basic, strong, fizzy lagers such as Víking, Gull, Polar Beer, and the odd Danish or Eastern European import. But recent years have seen the rapid emergence of a thriving craft beer scene. Unquestionably the most popular of the new crop is Einstök ("one of a kind," loosely translated)—an American-owned brand, brewed in Akureyri. Today, their beers are omnipresent in Icelandic bars, whether it's the light and citrusy White Ale, the full-bodied and flavoursome Pale Ale, the Arctic Berry Ale, or the recently released "Wee Heavy" Scotch Ale.

Jack Sichterman is one half of the duo behind Einstök, along with CEO David Altshuler. "We've worked together for

twenty-five years," says Jack, "and we started asking: with this amazing water, Viking heritage and beautiful people... how come nobody is exporting or brewing good beer in this country, from a craft beer perspective? One thing led to another, we raised the money and found a great brewmaster. Six years later, we're in twenty-two countries and fifteen US states, and we're the number one craft beer in Iceland. It's been an amazing ride, and here we are."

## Fortune favours the brave

The two started the company in 2010, with fortuitous timing. "We got here at the perfect juncture of craft beer and Iceland taking off," says Jack. "It

was pure luck, and has nothing to do with business sense and creativity. We just arrived at the right time. And it's going great. We're winning awards all over the world and figuring out ways to ship beer around the world."

Despite the international attention, Iceland remains important to Einstök. "It's our most important market from an authenticity standpoint," Jack explains. "But we never thought it would be such an important market from a revenue standpoint. Tourism has a lot to do with that, but we're grateful to have been embraced by Icelanders as well."

The recognition is well-earned. Einstök's recipes are clearly pored over, and it turns out they go through lots of experimentation before going

to production. "That method defines our whole approach to brewing," says Jack. "A lot of craft brewers started in a garage and went from there, saying: 'This one's pretty good, let's sell it.' We've always said, if we're gonna go all the way to Iceland and brew beer, it doesn't make sense unless we try to brew the best beer of every style we choose. The White Ale—that's now our best-seller—went through ten versions before we got what we wanted, and it took us eighteen months to develop the Wee Heavy."

## Smite the world

Einstök's quick progress may have made it look it easy, but Jack says they had to fight their way into the craft beer market. "There was a two-brewery system here that we didn't fit into," he says, "but now when you walk down the street you'll find us practically everywhere. It's surreal, honestly. I'm speechless. It's a dream."

With Einstök's first container shipping to China this year, the potential for growth is still only beginning. "That's scary too," says Jack. "It's like indie band syndrome, where we have awesome fans who are coming to see us in small clubs. But one day maybe we'll be playing a stadium, and they'll be like, 'Fuck them! I remember when I saw them in Húrra!' So we have to stay true to our fans. But it's not like we're going to go pop and start producing shitty lager. We're looking forward to growing—it's going to mean investing in this country, and that's pretty cool."

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# Stay Classy

Where to find Reykjavik's best cocktails



Words **JOHN ROGERS & HANNAH JANE COHEN**  
Photo **ART BICNICK**

Just a few years ago, drinking culture in Reykjavik was a lot more bleak than it is today. Asking for a cocktail in a regular downtown drinking hole would most probably result in a spirit and mixer, with a slice of lime if you were lucky. But today, most bars offer a cocktail or two. Some, of course, are better than others. And that's where we come in. So whether you're looking to start your evening with an espresso martini pick-me-up, or to end your day with a local invention, here are a few of our favourites.

**Bar Ananas**

If you're looking for a good cocktail without a hoity-toity atmosphere, tiki-themed Bar Ananas is your best bet—the crowd is pretty stylish, but it's fine to wear whatever you wore to the Golden Circle that day. It might not be the first place you'd expect a memorable cocktail, but it will prove you wrong. Fruity and tropical is the go-to, so don't order a whiskey sour but instead opt for some tequila. My favourite? The White Widow: tequila, cucumber and dill—a beach holiday in a cup. **HJC**

**Fishmarket/Grillmarket**

These twin high-end restaurants are also a great place for a cocktail. Fishmarket has a first-floor lounge where you can try a mouthwatering wasabi mojito, a jalapeño margarita or a cherry sour. Grillmarket has a basement bar where you can try fruity re-ups of the classics such as a rhubarb mojito, as well as a range of creative recipes using only Icelandic ingredients. **JR**

**Geiri Smart**

My first time here I was served by an enthusiastic bartender named Fannar. He excitedly explained to me that he had dipped the glass in cold absinthe before pouring the cocktail into it. I was fascinated, but after a few more visits to the restaurant concluded that these extraordinary touches are ordinary at Geiri Smart. Every single drink is so perfectly thought-out that you could easily lose yourself for hours just watching the bartenders work their magic. **HJC**

**Hverfisgata 12**

While it's best known for creative-

ly topped pizzas, Hverfisgata 12's ground-floor drinking room offers a nice line in lovingly prepared cocktails. The bartenders take pride in their work, and flamed citrus peel seems to be the house's signature flavour. Their Bloody Mary is made using, and I quote, "pizza juice"—try it out at the same time as their decadent brunch menu. **JR**

**Slippbarinn**

Probably Reykjavik's best-known cocktail bar, Slippbarinn is located in the ground floor of Hotel Marina on the city's old harbour. The ever-changing menu is more like a compilation of experiments, often using locally made ingredients such as birch liquor, Reyka vodka or the traditional go-to slammer, Brennivín. For my money, they serve the best espresso martini in town—an expertly prepared short cocktail that's strong, just sweet enough, and not over-diluted in the making. **JR**

**Snaps**

Snaps is a French-style bistro that manages to feel classy enough for a

fancy meal, but casual enough to walk in whenever. There's a wraparound bar in the main room where you can perch on a stool people-watching, and see your drink being made in front of you, or a tiny atmospheric basement bar with some tucked-away sofas. They offer some pleasant variations on the classics, including a Reyka vodka martini, a signature Snaps Margarita and a well-priced kir royal. **JR**

**Sushi Social**

Along with being one of the best restaurants in Reykjavik, Sushi Social is also without a doubt one of the top cocktail destinations in the city. Their menu is extensive—and I mean extensive—so if you have trouble with choosing between 100 equally appealing items, this might not be the place for you. That said, they've essentially got everything here—fancy martinis, amazing mojitos, caipirinhas, and even the requisite Brennivín item. **HJC**

*This is a just a sample of our favourite cocktail places—also check out Apotek, Pablo Discobar & more.*

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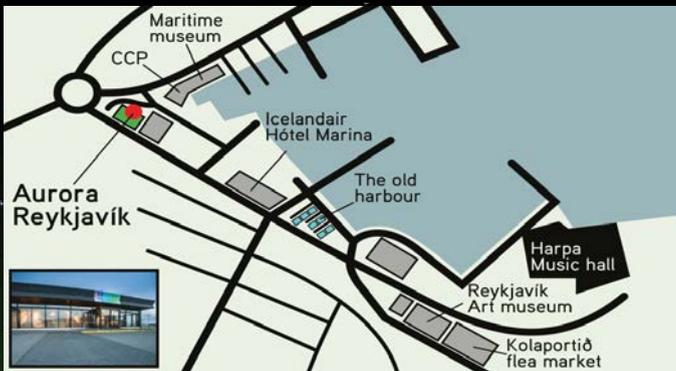
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**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2017**

# Shopping

Gird your wallets...

While high prices mean Reykjavík isn't really thought of as a shopper's paradise, there are still plenty of great local products you can only get here. Whether you're hunting for a piece of Icelandic design, searching for hard-to-find vinyl by an Icelandic artist, stocking the fridge of your Airbnb, or hunting down the perfect hand-knitted lopapeysa, this guide will get you on the right track. Most of the winners are located in downtown Reykjavík, but a few are scattered throughout the Greater Reykjavík area, giving you a good excuse to get out of the city centre hubbub and do some exploring. Happy shopping!

**Best grocery store**



## Krónan

Fiskislóð 1-21, Skarfagarðar 2 & other locations

Whilst the bargainous pig-logoed branches of Bónus might have a firm hold on the hearts, wallets, fridge-freezers and reusable shopping bags of anyone who lives downtown, this year most of our panel preferred rival chain Krónan. Despite there being no downtown location, they praised Krónan's size, and the quality and variety of produce on offer. "It's open the latest, so you don't have to plan your life around it," said one panellist. "And Krónan in Grandi is a party," added another. "I always put on lipstick before I go."

Runners Up



**Melabúðin Hagamelur 39**

This small-but-perfectly-formed neighbourhood grocery store in Vesturbær is a star amongst Reykjavík's food shops, with a stellar selection packed into its tight aisles and a sociable NYC delicatessen feel. "You can get nice cheese—or alligator steaks," said the panel. "It's

where you go if you want to stock up for a nice dinner party."

**Fjarðarkaup Hólshraun 1b, 220 Hafnarfjörður**  
This Hafnarfjörður grocery is a throwback that's charmingly traditional, from the friendly service to the old-style butcher's counter. "There are generations of people working there," said the panel. "Icelandic people who don't live in Hafnarfjörður make it a trip to go there together—like a family thing."

Previous Winner

**2016: Bónus**

**Best shop to pick up local design**



## Kraum

Laugavegur 18b

Downtown Reykjavík has seen a boom in shops offering fancy design products in recent years, perhaps jointly due to a surge in tourism—and the resultant padded billfolds in the pockets of Icelanders. Despite moving into an unflattering location that's also a noodle place and booking office, Kraum was re-selected as the best in show with their exclusively Icelandic range of homewares, decorations, clothing, jewellery and knick-knacks. There's a smaller branch at the Museum of Design & Applied Art, should you find yourself in Garðabær.

Runners Up



**Hrím Laugavegur 25**

Hrím is the go-to for fancy kitchen items, offering a selection of international products with a strong Icelandic presence scattered throughout. "I really love to browse there," said one panellist. "I don't even cook much, but when I go there I just feel like I need everything because it's all so beautiful."



**Rammagerðin Skólavörðustígur 12 & more**

This long-established crafts and design store has been running since 1940, since way before Icelandic design was cool. "I've always had a fascination for Rammagerðin," said one panellist. "It might look like a tourist shop, but it's been there for seventy or eighty years, so even if it is a tourist shop, it must be a good one."

Previous Winners

- 2016: Kraum**
- 2015: Spark Design Space (RIP)**
- 2014: Kraum**
- 2013: Kraum**
- 2012: Kraum**

**Best shop to pick up local fashion**



## KIOSK

Laugavegur 65

Laugavegur fashion boutique KIOSK is something of an institution, and wins the local fashion category for a seventh time. The store is run by Icelandic designers themselves, who take turns working at the counter, so the odds of you buying a piece from the person who designed it are quite a bit higher than in your average boutique. "Each designer here helps out the others," said the panel. "They all promote each other's projects. I'd always choose to invest in a piece in KIOSK over any other store." You never know, your new item from KIOSK could be a future classic.

Runners Up



**Tískubúðin P3 Miðstræti 12**

The praiseworthy menswear selection features beloved local brands like the long-running Skaparinn label, respected young designer Sævar Markús, and designer's designer Stefan Svan. "It's not all Icelandic brands but it's a well chosen group of them," said the panel.



**Geysir Skólavörðustígur 7 & 16**

The presence of the aesthetically immaculate Geysir seems to continually grow in Reykjavík, especially since they launched their own clothing line and accompanying catalogue. "It's expensive, but beautiful and timeless," said the panel. "You always know what you will get there, and it's very nice."

Previous Winners

- 2015: KIOSK**
- 2014: KIOSK**
- 2013: KIOSK**
- 2012: KIOSK**
- 2011: KIOSK**

## Best bookshop



### Mál og Menning

Laugavegur 18

While downtown Reykjavík has quite a few large book shops, in line with the city's standing as a UNESCO City of Literature, Mál og Menning occupies a special place in the hearts of Icelanders. It has three levels with great curated displays of the latest titles, and for visitors, there's an area dedicated to selling recent and classic Icelandic literature in the English language. "They have the most space and the best selection," said the panel. "It has a good atmosphere—there's no question that it's the best in town." The cafe is a haunt of local writers, and it hosts occasional book launches and readings, too.

Runners Up



### IÐA Zimsen Vesturgata 2a

This peaceful spot is equal parts café and bookstore, so you can get a coffee and a snack while you leaf through your purchases. "Everything in there is interesting," said the panel. "I love sitting there and looking at the books and magazines. I feel like I'm in a different country."



### Eymundsson Skólavörðust. 11, Austurstræti 18

This Icelandic book store chain has several branches with a great selection of Icelandic writing and all the latest international titles, often in both Icelandic and English. The cafes at the Skólavörðustígur and Austurstræti locations also make for great people-watching spots.

Previous Winners

- 2016: Eymundsson Austurstræti
- 2015: Sjórnarlind
- 2014: Nexus
- 2013: Eymundsson, Bankastræti
- 2012: Mál og Menning

## Best barber



### Stjúri

At Kormáks & Skjaldar, Laugavegur 59

A good barber knows that their customers like to have a nice experience as well as a sharp haircut. Stjúri—a tucked-away barber located in top men's clothing store Kormákur and Skjöldur—knows this better than most. "He has a loyal following," said one regular on the panel. "Be warned, you have to book three or four months in advance. I'm booked in there for the whole year now. He just does everything so well. You don't just get the haircut, you can go into the back and have a cup of coffee." Pick up a bow tie on the way out, now that you're looking fancy.

Runners Up



### Rakarastofa Ragnars og Harðar Vesturgata 48

This family business is run by a father-and-son duo, giving the place a welcoming family atmosphere. "A lot of my friends go there," said one panellist. "They've got an old school look. Harðar is the dad and Ragnar is the son. It's very cosy. I like the look of it."



### Barber Laugavegur 66

Previous winner Barber still makes the cut in 2017. Well located on Laugavegur, it's known for being a place where you can browse records and have a drink while you get your coiff repaired. "It's social," said the panel. "And why not have a drink while you get your hair cut?"

Previous Winners

- 2016: Barber
- 2015: Barber

## Best secondhand shop



### Spúútnik

Laugavegur 28b and Kringlan

With our previous winner Kólaportið increasingly turning into a market for cheap imported goods, vintage paradise Spúútnik moves into first place. This well-curated clothing emporium is more like a secondhand clothing boutique than a charity shop. "It's expensive," said the panel, "but it's all imported stuff you won't find anywhere else. They're particular with the selection—after sorting through maybe sixty shirts, they'll determine that just one is good enough to go onto the shop floor."

Runners Up



### Red Cross Laugavegur 12b & 116, Skólavörðustígur 12

There are a handful of Red Cross locations in Reykjavík, the most popular of which is a small store on Laugavegur. "When you go secondhand shopping you want something cheap and unique," said the panel, "and the place to go for that is the Red Cross." There's also a second, larger store near Hlemmur.



### Fatamarkaður Laugavegur 118

Further up the street from Spúútnik sits its sister store, Fatamarkaður. It's similar in style but cheaper in price—while the tip-top best items are to be found in Spúútnik, if you're on a tight budget you'll probably be able to find something close in style and quality here.

Previous Winners

- 2016: Kolaportið
- 2015: Hertex
- 2014: Spúútnik
- 2013: Spúútnik
- 2012: Fatamarkaður

## Best record store



### Lucky Records

Rauðarárstrígur 10

Lucky Records is probably the biggest record shop in Iceland, with shelves upon shelves of new and used vinyl and CDs on offer. They have a small stage where local and visiting bands sometimes perform, and expert staff that can always help you find what you're looking for. "They stock classics and limited editions," said the panel. "It's expensive, but it's the only store with a wide selection of obscure releases." The panel also complimented the pure variety of their stock: "You can go in the back room to continue the search. It's endless: dig, dig, dig!"

Runners Up



### 12 Tónar Skólavörðustígur 15

This city-centre record store is something of an institution, offering the unique experience of having the store staff ask about your music taste then sit you down with a coffee, some headphones, and a pile of Icelandic records. It's also a label that puts out many top Icelandic artists. A must-visit Reykjavík store.



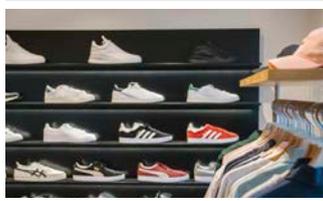
### Smekkleysa Plötubúð Laugavegur 35

Smekkleysa is an independent record label that has put out a lot of classic Icelandic music—the Sugarcubes are still on the board—and their old-school, bright green record shop also stocks a carefully curated selection of new international releases. You'll always find some rarities and surprises there.

Previous Winners

- 2016: Reykjavík Record Shop
- 2015: Reykjavík Record Shop
- 2014: Lucky Records
- 2013: Lucky Records

## Best clothing store



### Húrra Reykjavík

Hverfisgata 50 & 78

Húrra Reykjavík is a white-cube space located on Hverfisgata, a street that's undergone a huge facelift in recent years. The store has become a fast favourite with locals, including all the members of our panel, who collectively called this one immediately. "Húrra has created a buzz and excitement around fashion never before seen in Iceland," they said. "They have also single-handedly created a sneaker culture here. Before Húrra, no one had ever camped out to buy a pair of sneakers in Iceland." The excitement is for people of all ages, they noted: "My boss who is 63 years old just bought shoes at Húrra."

Runners Up



### Herrafataverzlun Kormáks & Skjaldar Laugavegur 59

This upmarket haberdashery sells top quality menswear and accessories. Their suits are cut to various pleasingly retro fits, and made from sturdy Shetland tweed. It's an experience to shop there—the service is old-fashioned, and there's an in-house barber and a tailor for alterations. It's on the pricey side, but you really get what you pay for here.



### Aftur Laugavegur 39

Aftur is a mecca for Iceland's stylish gothic fashionistas. Whilst most of the young Reykjavik crowd is wearing baseball caps and 90s throwback pieces, the older ones are often seen in flowing black caps and dresses. If you want to get this particularly distinctive 101 Reykjavik look, go here.

Previous Winners

**None: it's a new category.**

## Best place to buy a wool sweater



### Handprjónasambandið

Skólavörðustígur 19

The Icelandic wool sweater, or lopapeysa, is a staple of Icelandic clothing. These thick woollen sweaters last a very long time and are warm, breathable and showerproof, being made from the thick, bristly Icelandic wool known as lopa. Their popularity with visitors means that they're sometimes now mass-produced outside of Iceland for tourists, then shipped back in: but one place you know you'll get the real deal is at Handprjónasambandið, Iceland's very own hand-knitting association. "It's an experience to shop there," said the panel. "They have all colours and all fits, from neon green to a Spiderman pattern—whatever you want." Choose wisely!

Runners Up

### Red Cross Laugavegur 12b & 116, Skólavörðustígur 12

Lopapeysur can be pretty pricey, so if you're on a budget, secondhand can be the way to go. The various branches of Red Cross has a fluctuating but often quite wide choice, and you'll know the money goes to a good cause. The panel remarked: "There's a good selection, and they are all 'authentic,' if you will."



### Farmers & Friends Hólmaslóð 2

Of the more high-street-style options, the panel opted for the Farmer's Market outlet, Farmers and Friends. "Their sweaters have a modern look that is very fashionable, and a nice fit," they said. "If you want to wear your sweater with a short skirt and high heels, the Farmer's Market brand is it."

Previous Winners

**2016: Handprjónasambandið**  
**2015: Red Cross**  
**2014: Handprjónasambandið**  
**2013: Handprjónasambandið**

## BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2017

# Shopping

Buy, buy, buy.

## Best goddamn store



### Kjötborg

Ásvallagata 19

Kjötborg is a neighbourhood convenience store that takes people back to the days before supermarkets and chains. A favourite with Vesturbær locals, it's a bastion of continuity in a rapidly changing city. "I used to go there when I was really small and they still know me," said one panelist. "I can write down my name if I forgot my wallet. It's one of those places—a neighborhood store." Another added: "When the food is at its sell-by date, they go around to elderly people and give it to them for free. It's one of the few stores left with such a personal touch. It's one of the last authentic corner shops."

Runners Up



### Góði Hirðirinn Fellsmúli 28

The Icelandic version of the Good Shepherd is an Aladdin's cave of secondhand furniture and jumble. "I love going in there—it's all about the hustle-and-bustle, and unexpectedly finding a piano," said the panel. "Someone just found a fake vagina sex toy there. There was a price tag on it and everything. Amazing."



### Newcomer: Borðið Ægisíða 123

This neighbourhood spot in Vesturbær is a relative newcomer, but has quickly become a favourite with locals. It's a cafe that also serves as a delicatessen, with a cheese and cured meats counter and shelves of fancy pasta and unusual dips and sauces. "It's so cute and Italian-style," remarked the panel.

Previous Winners

**2016: Geysir**  
**2015: Geysir**



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Words **HANNAH JANE COHEN**  
Photo **TIMOTHEÉ LAMBRECQ**

**THRIFT STORES**

# From Junk To Gems: Where To Pick Up A Bargain In Reykjavík

It's no secret that Iceland is expensive, especially for clothing and other knickknacks. Going the thrift store route can be an attractive option for souvenirs and gifts. Not only will you get something that's one-of-a-kind for yourself or your loved ones, but it's also eco-friendly—and aren't we all about that?

## Fashion bargains

The trendiest thrift store in Reykjavík is **Spúútnik**. Whether they seek out items that are already á la mode, or they create new trends via their stock choices, Spúútnik is a tastemaker for the young Reykjavík crowd.

Everything you see in the store will soon be worn on the streets—if it isn't already—so if you're looking to get the “101 rat” look, this is the place to do it. The downside is the pricing. It isn't cheap, especially compared to secondhand prices abroad. That said, the quality is

unparalleled. Currently on the racks? Buffalo platforms, old-school oversized metal t-shirts, and Chinese qipaos.

One cheaper-but-still-cool thrift option is **Fatamarkaður**, which is actually owned by the same people as Spúútnik. The stores have a similar aesthetic, but Fatamarkaður has a larger

stock for a smaller price tag. What you sacrifice is quality—while Fatamarkaður might also have a selection of Buffalo platforms, they will probably be more worn-in than those you'd find at Spúútnik. But c'mon—it's thrift! Isn't saving money the goal?



## Lovely lopapeysur

Reykjavík has a number of options for buying your souvenir Icelandic sweater, or lopapeysa (“lopa” means unspun wool and “peysa” means sweater). You can buy new ones all over town—see the shopping section for the best options—but if you're going the thrift route, head to the **Kolaportið** flea market. While it's only open on weekends, this cavernous hall is chock full of budget sweaters. Afterwards, you could easily spend an hour rummaging through the assorted oddities and bizarre objects, or trying out hardfiskur and fermented shark in the food hall.

**Bonus:** By buying a sweater in a thrift store, you can be relatively sure that it was at one time worn by some cool Icelandic farmer. How's that for a cultural exchange?

## Weird stuff

If you're looking for something a little weirder, look no further than **Góði Hirðirinn** at Fells múla 28. Góði Hirðirinn translates to “The Good Shepherd,” but don't worry, there's nothing religious about this place. The store is associated with **Sorpa**, the recycling company in Iceland. When you first walk in it looks like a cross between a super-cool hoarder's house and a scrap heap. It's a complete mixed bag, so it's best to show up with no expectations and just start digging—there is junk, sure, but you'll always turn up a few hidden gems.

The other two notable thrift stores in Reykjavík are the **Red Cross** and the **Salvation Army**. Both are perhaps less niche than the others listed above but most thrift connoisseurs in Iceland have a story of a stellar find at one of these two—a Moschino scarf or Moncler jacket. If you're looking for such objects, definitely check out their downtown locations because those are usually filled with donations from rich people. Hey, times are tough.

# Welcome

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to seeing you



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## DATE SPOTS

# Get Lovey-Dovey

Words **HANNAH JANE COHEN & JOHN ROGERS**

Photo **ART BICNICK**

Anniversary in Reykjavik? Wedding? Or did you just meet a special someone at Kaffibarinn last night? If you're looking for a place to really wow your crush/spouse/significant other, here are our picks.

### Go to the pool

A jaunt to the pool might sound like a bold idea for a first date but sitting in a steaming hot tub creates a chill environment that inspires conversation and laughter. There's also ample opportunity to change activities: go in one tub, swim a lap, sit in the sauna, go in another tub—the possibilities are, well not endless, but definitely many! Though the Art Deco interior of Sundhöllin is charming, Vesturbæjarlaug has the most spacious hot pots, and that's why it's our choice. You'll also find out some crucial information about your date at the pool. As one friend told me: "I could never date a guy who goes to the slide on a first date." **HJC**

### A cosy meal at Snaps

If you're looking to get dinner and drinks, Snaps is a restaurant that's both classy enough to impress and cosy enough to feel casual. It's one of the few places in Reykjavik with a brunch menu, and also has a selection of amazing cocktails. It can get somewhat loud and raucous on weekend nights, so if you're looking for a quieter atmosphere, go on a weekday. Also, it's a local social local hub, so if you live here, you're guaranteed to see some people you know—and who doesn't want to show off the fact that another human might want to make out with them? **HJC**

### Go for ice cream at Valdís

An ice cream outing is without a doubt the most Icelandic date you can try. Even in the coldest weather, Icelanders have a weird obsession with heading out to one of Reykjavik's many ice cream joints for a frozen treat. One of the nicest is Valdís on Grandi. The store is located on the old harbour, Reykjavik's perfect Insta-spot for its mix of gen-

trification and post-industrial decay. If you're there in the summer, share a spoon and watch the boats; if you're there in the winter—wow, good for you. **HJC**

### Game playing at Freddi

If you're looking for a really chill atmosphere—and are potentially a gamer—Freddi, Iceland's downtown arcade, is your go-to. It's 1000 ISK per controller (we assume you need two, maybe three if you're polyamorous) for the first hour and 500 ISK per hour after that, so it's affordable whatever your financial status. A little competition can be sexy and an arcade outing is casual enough for there to be no expectations or pressure. The rooms, covered in graffiti with comfy leather couches, are ideal for loosening up. Management requests though that you don't get, uh, too comfy. **HJC**

### A fancy restaurant

Whether you wanna go all-out on a first date, or you have an anniversary to celebrate, Reykjavik has some excellent fancy options. Grillið sits atop the

Radisson Blu Saga on the border between downtown and Vesturbær, and has views across the city, flawless service and various tasting menu options. Grillmarket and Fishmarket are up-market joints offering, yes, grilled meat or fish (and excellent cocktails). Kolabrautin is in an airy dining room in the top of the Harpa concert hall. Matur og Drykkur is a cosy choice that has a huge cod head on the menu. And what could be more romantic than that? **JR**

### Take a walk

It's probably not a line you probably want to hear on your date, but you could take a walk. If you're in a car, you could have a rúntur around town, and go up to Gróttta. There's a long black beach, a lighthouse there with a tidal causeway, and a tucked-away miniature hot pot where you can sit and talk and dip your feet. You could also walk around Reykjavik's old harbour taking in the views, people-watching, and ending up in Slippbarinn for a cocktail. **JR**

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**SMALL GALLERIES**

# Be Still, My Beating Art

Words **PARKER YAMASAKI**

Photo **ART BICNICK**

There are plenty of routes to get familiar with a city's cultural scene, but some are easier than others. Easy: talk to locals. Hard: learn Icelandic. Easy: read the Grapevine. Hard: plow your way through the OG fad series, the Icelandic sagas. Easy: visit a gallery. Or two, or ten. Because while there's no nine-million-visitors-a-year "Louvre de Reykjavik," there's a thriving and

and his mother, Edda Jónsdóttir, opened their original space at Ingólfsstræti 8 (hence the name). "It was clear from the start that this was not a gallery that would collect proposals, but would show whatever it wanted," Börkur told the Grapevine back in 2015. Today, i8 represents a group of 22 worldly and renowned artists, including Ólafur Eliasson and Ragnar



resurgent small gallery scene in this city. From international eye-catchers like Ólafur Eliasson to graduate artists fresh out of Listaháskóli, showing everywhere from a window display to grandma's basement, art in Reykjavik spans many weird and wonderful forms in spaces that you couldn't dream up.

**i8 - Tryggvagata 16**

There basically is no "small gallery guide" without i8. This space introduced the idea of independent galleries way back in 1995, when Börkur Arnarsson

Kjartansson: the Björks of Icelandic art, basically.

**BERG Contemporary Klapparstígur 16**

New contender BERG is amongst the best of the new crop. In spring 2016 Ingibjörg Jónsdóttir, the gallery director, opened up the gallery "as a place for museum-quality exhibitions," with a focus on video and multimedia installations. It's movement without chaos—a spacious white cube with black lines spilling off its walls and onto the floors.

**Ekkisens**

**Bergstaðastræti 25b**

While i8 and BERG make up one thread of the small gallery scene, Ekkisens weaves an entirely different yarn. This artist-run gallery and project space offers a platform for recently graduated and emerging Icelandic artists. It's full of personality, located in the base apartment of the gallery director's late grandmother—quite literally at the grassroots.

**Harbinger Project Space**

**Freyjugata 1**

Harbinger is another spot that gets its kicks from the emerging and interactive. To give an example, for their last show of 2016, "Print and Friends," two artists turned the front room of the space into a functioning printmaking studio, where artists and the public were welcomed to make prints of their own design.

**Wind & Weather Window Gallery**

**Hverfisgata 37**

The Wind and Weather Window Gallery is exactly what its title implies—a window. And a gallery. Kathy Clark, the owner and creative force behind the gallery (literally, again—her personal studio is located behind the window gallery), built the small space in 2013 to house local artists and site-specific installations. The window transforms every two months and looks out onto Hverfisgata, so you can see it day and night.

**Gallery Port - Laugavegur 23b**

While the Window Gallery is very easy to see, Gallery Port is equally easy to miss. The corridor that leads you back into Port is practically platform nine-and-three-quarters, sandwiched just barely between bright blue Macland and one of Laugavegur's six hundred clothing shops. But this small space has a generous spirit, hosting artists of all trades—from street art to sculpture—and is equally known for throwing raging opening parties.

**Hverfisgallerí - Hverfisgata 4**

Big sign, small gallery. Hverfisgallerí opened in 2013 and currently represents fifteen established artists whose names all end in "dóttir" and "son," focussing mostly on wall-based work and sculpture. While most artists and gallery owners will deny there is a specifically "Icelandic art," this is a great place to get a taste of what it would be if there was.

**Listastofan - Hringbraut 119**

Listastofan is going to drag you just off the main drag, but it's worth the walk to the border between the 101 and 107 postcodes. This venue is a non-profit space that hosts independent artists in a shared gallery, studio and darkroom. Besides exhibitions, Listastofan also hosts workshops covering anything from theatre to technical camera skills, and a monthly live drawing session.



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## CHECK OUT THE NEW REYKJAVÍK CITY MUSEUM COMPRISING 5 TOP MUSEUMS

*Experience the history of Reykjavík in a lively and engaging way at the Reykjavík City Museum. Comprising five individual sites, the City Museum was founded to uphold and preserve Reykjavík's cultural heritage, which dates back to the arrival of the first settlers in the late 9th century.*

Four of the museums are within walking distance of downtown Reykjavík, while the Árbær Open Air Museum is only a fifteen-minute-drive from the city center. The ferry to Viðey Island leaves from the Old Harbor in downtown Reykjavík.



Árbær Open Air Museum



The Settlement Exhibition



Reykjavík Maritime Museum



Viðey Island



Reykjavík Museum of Photography

**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2017**

# Activities

Get off the internet already!

Everyone who comes to Iceland is pretty keen make the most of their time here, and whether that means a week of carefree holiday meandering or a laser-guided approach to finding the best stuff, a couple of insider tips are always useful. In this fast-changing city, new places spring up from week to week, begging the questions: which pool has the best hot pot for your first morning here? Where's the best Icelandic art at? And what's the best road trip to see some of this amazing nature we've heard so much about?

## Best pool



## Lágafellslaug

Lækjarhlíð 1a, 270 Mosfellsbær

With big crowds at the city-centre pools, our panel chose the tucked-away Lágafellslaug as their current favourite swimming spot. Mosfellsbær's modern swimming palace still has, as our panel noted, "that new pool smell." It has everything you could want for a perfect swimming experience: spacious hotpots, multiple slides and amusements to keep the kids happy, a small but perfectly formed sauna, and a steam room with a view over the mountain of Úlfarsfell. It's a twenty-minute drive from downtown, but it's worth it—and if you're driving the Golden Circle or heading to or from a north-bound road trip, it's right in your path.

Runners Up



### Vesturbæjarlaug Hofsvallagata 107

If you're on foot and staying in the downtown three, our panel decided that the bright and modern Vesturbæjarlaug is the go-to. As well as a mega-hotpot with a large jacuzzi, the panel noted that it's also the best pool to play "indie bingo," spotting Icelandic hipsters, artists and musicians. It's also right across the street from Kaffihús Vesturbær, so you can stop there for lunch or coffee afterwards.

### Kópavogslaug Borgarholtsbraut 17, 200 Kópavogur

Another much-loved pool in the suburban Greater Reykjavík area is the Kópavogur pool, Kópavogslaug. Our panel particularly enjoyed relaxing in the steam bath and the spacious hot pots. In the summer, you can use the outdoor dressing rooms, and for the winter there are indoor outdoor pots and slides. And for the kids, "there's an octopus that spits on you," the panel noted. Cool.

Previous winners

- 2016: Neslaug
- 2015: Vesturbæjarlaug
- 2014: Vesturbæjarlaug
- 2013: Laugardalslaug
- 2012: Laugardalslaug
- 2011: Neslaug

## Best gallery



### i8

Tryggvagata 16

The i8 gallery shows a rich mixture of Icelandic and international artists, focussing largely on work with a conceptual edge. Their strong monthly programme is always on point, showing a constant stream of engaging work that confounds expectations, pushes at boundaries, and surprises with its wit and humour. They win for the third year running, despite a recent resurgence in the downtown Reykjavík gallery scene. Good job, i8!

Runners Up



### Berg Contemporary Klappartígur 16

Of the new crop, Berg Contemporary caught the eye of our panel. This large, beautifully renovated space already has a strong roster of Icelandic artists on constant rotation. It's right in the heart of downtown, too, so it's easy to drop by for a look as you meander through the streets.



### Ekkisens Bergstaðastræti 25b

This energetic space, located in a former downtown basement flat, is resolutely DIY in nature. They show sparky, experimental work via group shows and happenings that present all kinds of work from recent graduates and young artists, including performance, fashion, painting, illustration, installation, sculpture and more.

Previous winners

- 2016: i8
- 2015: i8
- 2014: Kling og Bang
- 2013: National Museum
- 2012: National Museum
- 2011: National Museum

## Best art museum



## The National Gallery

Fríkirkjuvegur 7

Iceland's National Gallery sits on the shore of the town pond, Tjörninn. Our panel praised its "interesting mix of older international exhibitions, often from Nordic and older Icelandic artists, alongside people like Jeff Koons, Louise Bourgeois and fairly out-there contemporary stuff." They also liked the museum's "interesting mix of provocative new work and 20th century Icelandic work that isn't on display at other museums." It's a labyrinthine network of spaces where you could easily spend an afternoon.

Runners Up



### Hafnarhúsið Tryggvagata 17

Hafnarhúsið is a cathedral to contemporary art that shows a constant conveyor belt of interesting international work, from Cory Arcangel to Richard Serra to Yoko Ono. They have several shows to see on any visit, and you can see some classic Icelandic work here, too. There's a great shop and a library and café, making it a great rainy day destination.



### Kjarvalsstaðir Flóagata 24

This beautiful space is located in a park just on the outskirts of downtown, between the city centre and the Krinnglan mall. Our panel said "it's your best chance to see modern and contemporary Icelandic painting. It's got a nice café. And, it's adjacent to a frisbee golf course."

Previous winners

- 2016: Hafnarhúsið
- 2015: Reykjavík Art Museum
- 2014: Reykjavík Art Museum
- 2013: Reykjavík Art Museum
- 2012: Reykjavík Art Museum

**Best museum**



# Árbæjarsafn

Kistuhylur 4

This living museum to Iceland's past wins once again. It offers direct exposure to the way life in Iceland used to be. You can visit a croft house and a farm house, and imagine yourself transported back in time to old Iceland. They often host events related to the display. "It's also great for kids," said the panel. "There's a big place for kids to play with Super Mario—my childhood is in the museum."

Runners Up



**The Settlement Exhibition  
Aðalstræti 16**

The settlement exhibition, located in a hotel basement right in the heart of downtown Reykjavik, charts the lives of the first people to inhabit Iceland. "It pumps in smell," said the panel, "and they play sounds like waves and seabirds—it's a sensory experience."

**The National Museum of Iceland  
Suðurgata 41**

The national museum has a sprawling display of artefacts from Iceland's history, from cloth and metalwork to

religious artefacts. "They have a gallery space that always has something different happening," said the panel, "as well as the excellent permanent collection." It's the best place to connect with Icelandic history.

Previous winners

- 2015: Árbæjarsafnið
- 2014: National Museum of Iceland
- 2013: National Museum of Iceland
- 2012: National Museum of Iceland
- 2011: National Museum of Iceland

**Best place to watch  
the sunset/aurora**



## Gróttta

Seltjarnarnes peninsula

Located on the very end of the Greater Reykjavik peninsula, Gróttta is a beautiful vantage point that's home to a lighthouse with a tidal pedestrian causeway. There are views out over the ocean, and sometimes all the way to Snæfellsnes. There's a tucked-away little hot pot to bathe your feet—if you can find it—and despite being in the city, the area hasn't really been developed. There are swamps, a bird spotting sanctuary, and a windswept black beach. It's a wonderfully preserved part of nature with minimal light pollution, so it's also a great spot for checking out the aurora.

Runners Up



**Laugarnes  
Laugarnestangi**

Reykjavik's old harbour area is perfect for a seaside sunset stroll. You can watch the boats coming in and out, visit the little lighthouses behind Harpa, or follow the painted lines to a bustling district of cafes and restaurants, perhaps finishing with a cocktail at Slippbarinn.

**Seaside footpath  
Öskjuhlíð & Ægisíða**

Reykjavik, Vesturbær and Seltjarnarnes all sit on a long peninsula that has a footpath pretty much around the whole thing. Starting at Öskjuhlíð—the forested hill topped by the Perlan visitor centre—you can walk or cycle past the manmade beach of Nauthólsvík to Ægisíða for an unencumbered sunset or aurora-spotting view.

Previous winners

- 2015: Öskjuhlíð
- 2014: Gróttta
- 2013: Gróttta
- 2012: Gróttta
- 2011: Grasagarðurinn

**Best place to take the kids**



## Laugardalur

Laugardalur

The Laugardalur area is full of fun activities for kids. There's a skate park, playing fields and botanical gardens, but the star of the show is Húsdýragarðurinn, which translates to "farm animal zoo"—a petting zoo with farm animals, foxes, seals and reindeer. A footbridge takes you over to the Fjölskyldugarðurinn ("The Family Garden"), which has fairground rides and a boating lake (during summer). The greenhouse coffee shop, Cafe Flóra, is also only open during summer, but Laugardalslaug compensates—it's the best pool for kids, with plenty of play pools and water slides.

Runners Up



**Whales Of Iceland  
Fiskislóð 23-25**

This one was more of a hit with kids than the parents. Whales Of Iceland is a cavernous, hangar-sized space populated by life-sized plastic whales, with information plaques and flat-screen devices containing information about the different species. "Once you've seen this place, you've seen it," said the panel, "but our kids keep demanding we go back."

**Reykjavik City Library  
Tryggvagata 15**

For some free and wholesome family time, the parents on our panel also enjoyed the Reykjavik City Library. "There's an excellent play area for younger children between one and three," they said, "and—you guessed it—there are books for kids of all ages to look at." Don't miss the photography gallery on the top floor.

Previous winners

- 2015: Húsdýragarðurinn
- 2014: Húsdýragarðurinn
- 2013: Fjölskyldugarðurinn
- 2012: Lynghagarólið Playground

**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2017**

# Activities

It's not ALL about Reykjavík...

## Best people-watching spot



## Kaffihús Vesturbæjar

Melhagi 20

This neighbourhood café is situated in Vesturbær, a neighbouring district of Reykjavík, located over the Tjörnin pond. "It a place to see and be seen," said the panel. "You'll see politicians, poets and pop stars—it's like a who's who of Reykjavík." But be careful if you feel like you faintly recognise someone who's sitting having a vegan burger and drinking fancy tea: "You might realise after you've said hello that you only know them from TV."

Runners Up



### Austurvöllur Austurvöllur

The scene of the now-famous Panama Papers protests, Austurvöllur is the Reykjavík parliament square. Whether you decide to perch on a bench, sit outside at one of the many café-bars lining the square, or have a picnic, you'll see pretty much all of Icelandic society passing by.



### Kringlan Kringlan 4-12

A shopping mall might be the last place you want to visit in Reykjavík, but it made the list with good reason. "Real Icelanders go to Kringlan," said the panel. "It's more representative of life in this country than a 101 bar. These are the people who don't go downtown."

Previous winners

- 2016: Grandi
- 2015: Austurvöllur
- 2014: Second Floor Window Seats, Eymundsson on Austurstræti
- 2013: Booths at Hressó

## Best hike



## Reykjadalur

Reykjadalur

Reykjadalur ("smoky valley," in English) is a valley near the town of Hveragerði, a roughly forty-minute drive south of Reykjavík. It's a hike with a reward at the end: after going up past some bubbling geothermal clay pots and crossing a mountain path with a stunning view, you'll end up at a naturally warm river where it's possible to bathe. In winter, the steep path can be slippery: it's best to go prepared with some ice cleats, or to book a tour and go with a guide who'll lend you some.

Runners Up



### Úlfarsfell

This small mountain is in Mosfellsbær, at the very edge of the Greater Reykjavík area. It has a couple of paths of varying difficulty, and a view over the city at the summit. "It's a little piney," said the panel, "and you can even take the bus there."



### Mount Esja

This is a classic hike up the distinctive mountain that towers over the Faxaflói bay across from Reykjavík. You can get to the start of the track by taking the bus, which makes this hike super convenient. You can either hike up to the base camp level, or continue all the way up the rough path to the top.

Previous winner

2016: Móskaðshnjúkar

## Best place to see a movie



## Bíó Paradís

Hverfisgata 54

The only independent cinema in downtown Reykjavík, Bíó Paradís won this category hands down. "There's simply nothing else like it in Reykjavík," said the panel. "They have the good indie shit. They import beyond Hollywood." It's also the best place to catch up on the last few years of Icelandic films, which are shown daily with English subtitles. Bíó Paradís also hosts various film festivals, and mount "Black Sundays" during the winter—a curated series of cult movies, classic horror, sci-fi, b-movies and film noir. This place will forever hold a special place in the hearts of discerning Icelandic cinephiles.

Runners Up



### Álfabakki VIP Álfabakki 8

If you want to see a blockbuster, this is the place to go. "They have the lazy boy recliners, all the popcorn you can eat and the soda you drink, and reserved seating that's very close to the screen," said the panel. "Rich people build home theatres for this film experience."



### Háskólabíó Hagatorg

If you're on foot and want to see a popcorn movie, the best option is Háskólabíó. Located on the University of Iceland campus but open to all, it's walkable from downtown, and screens both blockbusters and Icelandic films. Not all screenings have subtitles, so it's best to check.

Previous winners

- 2016: Bíó Paradís
- 2015: VIP Theater
- 2014: Bíó Paradís



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# What To Do When It Boom-Booms Down

Having fun in 12 inches of snow

Words **ARTA BALODE** Photo **ANNA DOMINICK**



During the first months of a year, Reykjavik and its surrounding lava fields are covered in snow, creating a winter wonderland that's ripe with opportunities to beat the post-Christmas blues. It's the time to use the short days to get outdoors, warm up your muscles, and have some fun along with other winter enthusiasts. With that in mind, we've summed up some of our favourite seasonal excuses to go out in the snow.

## Snowboarding and skiing

Iceland might not be the finest place for alpine slopes, but a 25-minute drive from Reykjavik, you'll find the skiing areas of Bláfjöll and, heading east, Skálafell. Both offer excellent opportunities for snowboarding and downhill skiing. Plus, it'll probably be your first time racing down volcanic slopes.

Note! Due to changing weather conditions on any given

day, make sure the mountains are open before going.

## Cross-country skiing

When there's proper deep snow cover, both Bláfjöll and Skálafell also have tracks for cross-country skiing. However, up north, Hlíðarfjall in Akureyri has been one of Iceland's prime skiing areas over the last forty years. With tracks for all skill levels and an astounding view over the surrounding fjord of Eyjafjörður, it's a must-visit place for cross-country skiers.

## Ice skating

If the worst has come true and there's no chance of catching a snowflake on your tongue, you could escape from the outdoor greyness in the Skautahöll ice skating rink in Laugardalur. However, if you're lucky enough to feel the frozen wind, check out Tjörnin pond next to the City Hall. If the temperature is

below freezing, the lake transforms into an outdoor ice rink. Even if it goes against your adventurous instincts, remember to be careful and double check before you step on the ice.

## Snowmobiles

Whether it's a glacier-topped volcano or a snow-clad lava field, numerous tourist agencies provide exhilarating snowmobile tours, all over Iceland. Daytime snowmobiling on Langjökull and Mýrdalsjökull are breathtaking by day, and you can chase the Northern Lights at night.

For more information about snowmobiling, check [snowmobile.is](http://snowmobile.is) or a variety of other tour operators.

## Ice climbing

Glacier hiking and ice climbing tours give everyone a chance to safely venture onto volcanoes and glaciers. Some of them

are well known, such as Vatnajökull, the largest glacier in Europe. Closer to Reykjavik are Mýrdalsjökull and Eyjafjallajökull, both located atop active volcanoes, and there are many more besides. The best part is that no previous experience is required, as climbing tours cater to any skill level.

## Winter hiking

If steep slopes and high speeds aren't really your thing, a hike up Mount Esja is a more peaceful alternative. You can either stop at the base camp level, or push yourself for the more demanding ascent to the top. There's a summit book at the peak where you can write down how happy you were to have strapped crampons onto your climbing boots to tackle the snowy, slippery slippery path. The hike down is even more beautiful, with a view towards Reykjavik on the horizon. Be safe, and have fun!

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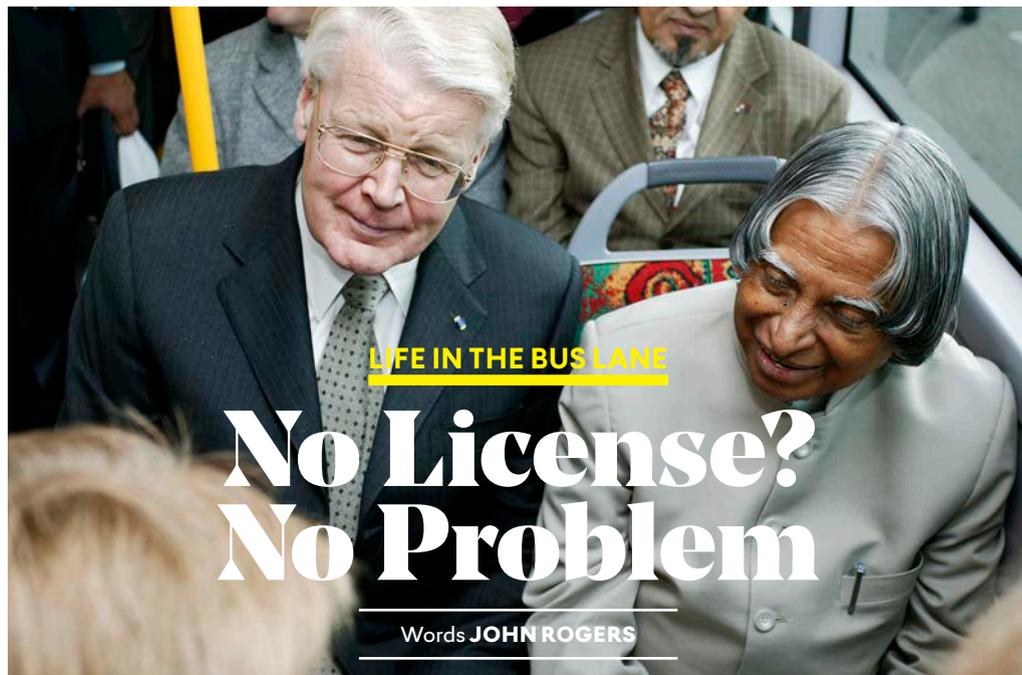
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LIFE IN THE BUS LANE

# No License? No Problem

Words JOHN ROGERS

When you're visiting a foreign city, public transport can be a bit intimidating. Here in Reykjavík, however, getting the hang of it is pretty easy. There are no tube lines to get tangled up in, no metro, no Ubers, and no tram system. Basically, if you're a non-driver who doesn't wanna splurge on a cab—the bus system is it.

As well as tourist-centric hop-on-hop-off buses, there are a grand total of 26 bus lines covering most of Greater Reykjavík (and more that go further afield). In Reykjavík, city buses are known as “Strætó”—a nickname for “strætisvagn,” which translates literally as “street carriage.” Most major routes stop at the bus station, Hlemmur, at the top of the main Laugavegur strip. Many major routes also pass Harpa and the downtown thoroughfare of Lækjargata. So download the Strætó app, connect your credit card, and charge that baby up—for just 420 ISK per journey, your carriage awaits.

#### Take a hike:

##### Úlfarsfell & Mount Esja

Everyone who comes to Iceland wants to get out and see some of that famous beautiful nature. If you're on foot, and on a budget, you can get the bus to the city limits and find two picturesque local hikes. Úlfarsfell is a small mountain with two walking paths to the top, and Esja is the large mountain just across the

bay from Reykjavík. Take snow grips and waterproofs in winter. Seriously. You'll thank us later.

**Route:** Strætó 15 from Hlemmur to Ártún. Change to Strætó 57 at Ártún. Disembark at the Úlfarsá stop for Úlfarsfell, or the Esjurætur stop for the Esja Hiking Centre.

**Pro tip:** The winner of our “Best Pool” category, the Mosfellsbær neighborhood pool Lágafellslaug, is also in the area.

#### The end of the road:

##### Seltjarnarnes & Grótta

This beautiful nature area sits on the very end of the Greater Reykjavík peninsula. There's a lighthouse with a tidal causeway, a bird sanctuary, and a small hidden hotpot that you can bathe your feet in. There's also a Medical & Healthcare Museum on Austurströnd, if you like... medical stuff.

**Route:** Strætó 11 from Hlemmur, Harpa or Lækjargata towards Seltjarnarnes. Disembark at the final stop, then walk to Grótta (approximately twenty minutes).

**Pro tip:** If you get *deja vu*, maybe you've been here before... virtually. The black beach was the location of Björk's “Stonemilker VR” video.

#### Meet the neighbours:

##### Hafnarfjörður

You probably came through this suburb of Reykjavík already, as it's on the Flybus route. While it doesn't look like much from the

bus, it's a great place to spend a day. Pallett is a popular coffee house, occupying the same building as the well-regarded Von Mathús restaurant. The old town has a variety of good local shops, bakeries and museums, a tucked-away park with crags of lava and an elf-themed shop and café, and there's a viewpoint overlooking the seaside.

**Route:** Strætó 1, straight from Hlemmur to the final stop of Hafnarfjörður.

**Pro tip:** Hafnarfjörður has a quiet retro-style pool, Sundhöll Hafnarfjarðar, built in 1949; it's located at Herjólfgata 10, 220 Hafnarfjörður.

#### West side/best side:

##### Vesturbær

If the weather is truly shitty, or you just don't feel like walking, you can take a Strætó to the nearby suburb of Vesturbær. Vesturbærjarlaug is one of the best pools in town, and less packed with tourists than Sundhöllin or Laugardalslaug. Nearby Ægisíða is a picturesque seaside stretch with a path along the beach—a twenty-minute walk will get you to the man-made beach of Nauthólsvík, which has a hot pot and café.

**Route:** Strætó number 11 (final stop: Seltjarnarnes) from Hlemmur, Harpa or Lækjargata. Disembark at the stop named Hofsvallagata/Ægisíða.

**Pro tip:** Kaffihús Vesturbæjar and Borðið are great spots for coffee or lunch.



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			10:00	10:00	10:00			
13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00	13:00
			14:00	14:00	14:00			
		17:00	17:00	17:00	17:00	17:00		
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# Why On Earth Do Icelanders Love An Al-Fresco Winter Cone?



Words **RAGNAR EGILSSON**

Photo **JULIA STAPLES**

Visitors to Iceland often remark on how, throughout Iceland's frozen winter season, they'll see clusters of locals standing in the street outside ice cream parlours in their parkas, hats and gloves, slurping down a cone or diving into a dish. "Why," they ask, from the heated safety of the car, "are Icelanders so obsessed with ice cream?"

**Well, Firstly:** it's comfort food. The need for a sweet treat doesn't exactly decrease during these dark and windy winter months. Then when there's some semblance of sun, that's a perfect excuse for an ice cream. The end result? Every day is an ice cream day, all year round.

**Secondly:** our reliance on dairy cows and our obsession with dairy products goes back to the earliest settlers. Whether it's skyr cakes, cream cheese on pizza, blue-cheese burgers, whey-pickled ram's testicles, baked colostrum, or the mandatory chocolate milk with our butt-sized cinnamon buns: we Icelanders just love cow juice.

**Thirdly:** there's a ceremonial aspect to getting an ice cream, for families. Going out for an ice cream is a way to herd the whole family together, and get them off the sofa and away from their iPhones. It's no small task in the time of ready-meals, takeaways, and everyone eating in separate rooms. It's an affordable food journey where everyone gets to customise their pick. It's a way to indulge our finicky inner foodie without splurging on a thimble of langoustine in buttermilk crust at the latest hip eatery.

**Also:** people in the Middle East love warm mint tea, and coffee was invented in the genital-liquefying heat of Ethiopia. So despite the climate, maybe it isn't really that weird that Icelanders love ice cream. And speaking of coffee, your average Icelander has always been quite comfortable displaying their snobbery when it comes to coffee and ice cream. Even in my childhood, in the dark ages before Icelanders realised food was not just a necessary evil on par with renewing your driver's license, you'd get

people recommending an out-of-the-way ice cream store up in Akureyri or singing the praises of the gelato they tasted during their Rimini vacation.

The problem was that, despite the consumer awareness and hunger for quality ice cream, there really just weren't many places putting their own touch on this classic dessert. Still to this day, the majority of ice cream in Iceland comes either from Emmess, the ice cream division of dairy monopoly MS (the name is the phonetic spelling of the letters M and S because they're clearly not the most imaginative bunch), or Kjörís, a nearly century-old ice cream company from the town of Hveragerði.

But that changed over the last five years. There's been an ex-

plosion in artisanal ice cream (a metaphorical explosion, not a literal one—although that would be cool). In Reykjavik, we now get to choose between Valdís, Paradís, Hafís, and various branches of Ísbúð Vesturbæjar, amongst others.

Whichever location you end up at, you'll have to try the be-

**There's been an explosion of artisanal ice cream (a metaphorical explosion, not a literal one—although that would be cool).**

loved Bragðarefur (also known in some places as Peytingur). It's basically a McFlurry, but with a vastly expanded selection of candies, fruits, nuts, and sauces. You pick your soft-serve ice cream flavor and your three to five mix-ins, and they grind the whole mess together into an ob-

scene-big cup of waistline-obliterating dairy goop. It's awesome.

Eat it, then get out before anyone sees you.

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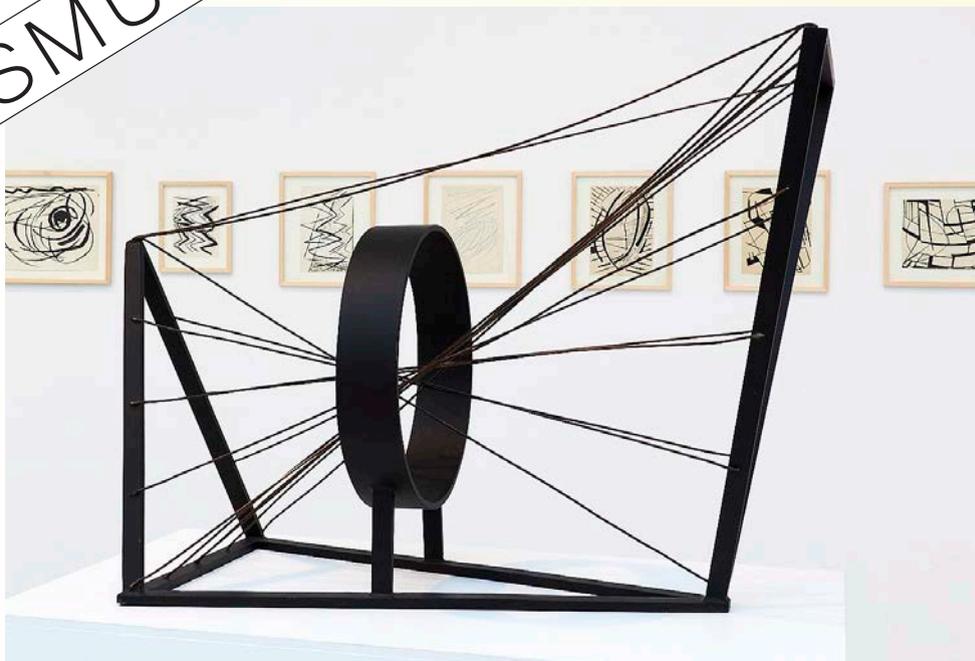
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