



# The REYKJAVÍK GRAPEVINE



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September 28 - October 10

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Editorial | Anna Andersen

# ICELANDISTAN 5.0

Anna's 32nd Editorial



Five years ago, The Grapevine published its first post-collapse issue. The cover featured the image of a single króna coin, its fish reduced to a mere skeleton. "Welcome to Icelandistan!" read the cover tag.

Nobody could know exactly what was in store for Iceland in early October 2008, but the future certainly looked grim. "HOLY FUCK!" wrote then-editor of the Grapevine, Sveinn Birgir Björnsson, in his editorial that issue. "The last few weeks

have wreaked more havoc on this country than anything that's not directly caused by a natural disaster. Our economy has been reduced to the standards of Eastern Europe at end of the Cold War. As a nation, we are more or less bankrupt."

Almost overnight, our tiny island nation in the middle of the North Atlantic became the poster-child for the global economic crisis—a shiny example of how to do everything wrong. Enraged Icelanders took to the streets and banged on their pots and pans until the government that presided over the crash toppled over.

In came Iceland's first purely left-wing government, and before we knew it we had become the poster child for miraculous economic recovery—an equally shiny example of how to do everything right. In particular, the fact that "Iceland let the banks fail" became a catchphrase appearing in almost every post-crash article written about Ice-

land in the foreign media.

So much emphasis has been put on this (only possible) course of action that Icelanders themselves have perhaps forgotten what else the new government has done to stem the rippling effects of the crash, not to mention all of the events that led up to it. This would at least explain why Icelanders recently returned to power the very same parties that presided over the country as it geared up for meltdown.

Or perhaps the fact that we're not living in Icelandistan simply isn't good enough and Icelanders now dream of returning to pre-crash Iceland. After all, we're going to have to find some way to use those new 10,000 ISK bills—roughly equivalent to the 100 Dollar bill—that are about to go into circulation.

## WHAT A DIFFERENCE FIVE YEARS MAKE

By Haukur S. Magnússon

Five years have apparently passed since the dreaded economic collapse of October 2008 shook the Icelandic nation to its core. We at Grapevine think this makes for an excellent opportunity to look back on just what happened and attempt to discern what, if anything, we have learned since.

A lot of people theorized (and hoped) that the collapse would mark a sea change in the nation's politics and attitudes towards its economy, lifestyle and mode of discourse. That the media would and supervisory authorities would turn vigilant, that we would never get fooled again.

Has such a sea change occurred? It's hard to tell when you're right in the thick of things, but there are certainly mixed opinions out there. In our attempts to understand and analyse the events that have been unfolding over the past five years, we turned to two noted pundits on the opposite ends of the political spectrum, Sigrún Davíðsdóttir and Hannes Hólmsteinn Gissurarson (fun game: guess which end each inhabits!). We also asked former PM Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir and

her collaborator, former Minister of Everything Steingrímur J. Sigfússon (who manned the government decks for most of the past four years) to share their thoughts on the situation, along with the guys currently in charge, PM Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson and his collaborator, Minister of Finance Bjarni Benediktsson. While the latter two did not respond to our repeated attempts for comment (which is unfortunate, and might be telling for their style of governance), Steingrímur shared some good thoughts and Jóhanna surprised us by turning in a sharp, condemning article that we later learned is her first public commentary since this spring's election.

Finally, the diligent journalist Sam Knight meticulously poured over the WikiLeaks diplomatic cables (from #CABLEGATE) concerning Iceland. The results are a revealing account of Iceland's economic collapse, as seen through the eyes of US diplomats stationed in Iceland at the time. There is a lot of juicy and revealing behind-the-scenes stuff in there, and the article itself grants important insight into what happened, placing some of the events in a new context. Thank you, Chelsea.

There's a lesson in there somewhere, one we need to take to heart and remember. Let this be the first of many collapsesary celebrations. Skál.

### TRACK OF THE ISSUE

**Grísalappalísa: "Skrítin Birta"**

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Years of quiet krúttitude being the norm around town have resulted in a youthful revolt of twisting and shouting, with no other band doing it as loudly as newcomers Grísalappalísa. These dudes are cynical and jaded and they sure as hell want you to know it! Sort out your inner turmoil with the help of this furious punk tune that proves that being angst ridden and existentially confused lingers on well past adolescence, and that is a-fucking-okay!



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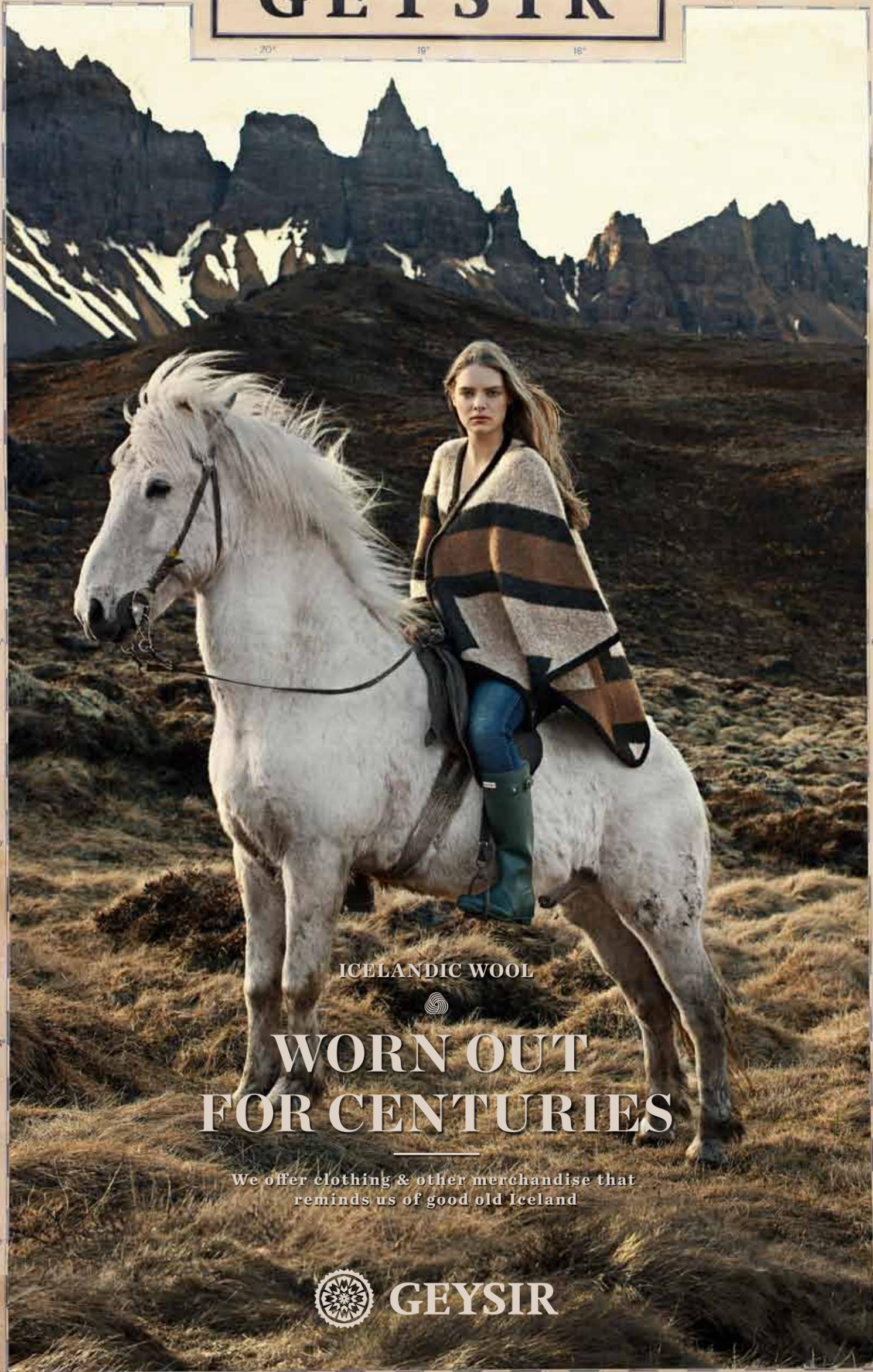
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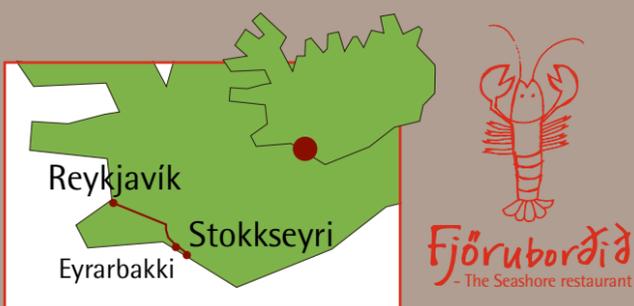


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# Sour grapes & stuff

## MOST AWESOME LETTER

Dear Iceland,

You are so ace as is your music, but please please stop the troubadours, come on 'wish you were here' at full blast when trying to have a lovely booze with your mates though a PA. booooo  
They always seem to clear the bar too!  
All the very best

Sid Barrett

Dear Sid Barrett,

First of all, congratulations on your amazing name. After a straight read of your letter, we dimmed the lights, lit some incense, and read it backwards while watching the Wizard of Oz. It changed our lives, man.

Your name also explains why you are so sick of hearing our vast sea of troubadours singing one of the most beautiful

and poignant Pink Floyd songs there are. If we were named after a classic song (or its singer!), we sure wouldn't want to hear it butchered up left, right and centre too! Wait a minute... those troubadours CONSTANTLY demolish 'Heard It Through The Grapevine'! FUCK!!!

Truth is that it seems the troubadours are a total love-hate thing here. Some of them clear the room, but some of them get the whole bar to sing along. They find that one person who isn't getting off and they MAKE them get off, to paraphrase Almost Famous. And for every person that eventually gives in and sings along, there are a dozen who would never go to a bar again before going to one with a troubadour.

What's to be done? Who knows. Nothing probably. This hasn't been a pressing concern over the past five post-crash years. But perhaps a prize will soothe your pain.

Love,  
The Grapevine

Hi Grapevine,

In your issue # 13 - 2013 Page # 10 under news in brief: The former Mayor of Reykjavik Mr. Magnússon is saying is an insult to Iceland's history.  
He is right, I have been around the world 3 times and found you can not trust all Muslims.  
There idea is to take over the world. The Islamic influence IS!!!! out of hand, not only in Iceland but in all Christian Countries. The current Mayor Mr. Vigisson DOES NOT LIVE WITH IT.  
Iceland needs to get a backbone like Australia. "If you want to live here you must conform to our way of life!" OR LEAVE!. Do not think the Muslims will go away or want to live in peace with Christians.

Look at the problems in France, UK, USA, and other countries. History may repeat itself.  
Vestmannaeyjar Island  
Year 1627 Algerian pirates attacked the island, killing 40 & capturing about 250 people to be sold in slavery.

Anonymous.

P.S.  
Iceland Beware....

Hey Anonymous,

Go fuck yourself, you fucking idiot!

Bye

(Translated from Icelandic)  
Hello,

I came across the letter in issue 12 about the spoons from the 1930s. I am interested in acquiring these spoons. How can I get in touch with Rick and Sally?

Best,  
Jón Ingiberg

Hi Jón,

Thanks for getting in touch. It's always fun to see that 1, people do read the letters, and 2, old-fashioned correspondence still connects third parties through mutual interest.

Now we aren't entirely sure if Rick and Sally we're looking for a buyer for these spoons, as they seemed to simply want more information about them, but as they say – everyone has their price! We will put you in touch with the fine American couple. Then you can haggle around to find out how sentimentally attached they are to these items, or if you can get them for bargain basement cheap.

Good luck!  
The Grapevine

## MOST AWESOME LETTER TWO FREE PAIRS OF WOOLLEN SOCKS!

Yes, this lovely prize will keep your feet warm and cosy throughout your stay in Iceland and in any subsequent places you might go that sometimes get cold. And these aren't just any old woollen socks either, these are the colourful, wonderful, extra-long kind from Geysir.

Congratulations to this issue's MOST AWESOME LETTER. Drop us a line at [letters@grapevine.is](mailto:letters@grapevine.is) to find out how to collect those free socks! And if you're in the market for some socks come next issue, why not write us a wonderful reader letter to that same address. Like Axl Rose said: "It's so easy!"



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# The Collapse And Beyond



**Sigrún Davíðsdóttir** is a London-based journalist and writer working for the Icelandic State Broadcaster.



Olafur G. Þorsteinsson

Five years after the collapse, economists all over the world carefully study Iceland's recovery—some even call it a “miracle.” Icelanders themselves are, however, less in awe of this miracle. Although the country has moved from recession to growth and unemployment has been reduced, household debt is still a big topic and the coalition government seems painfully at a loss as to how they can fulfil promises of debt relief and unshackle the country from capital controls. The small group of businessmen and bankers, who many think caused the crash, have lost jets and yachts, but are otherwise mostly doing remarkably well. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the Icelandic lesson from the collapse and the ‘kreppa’ is that loan agreements can always be changed, and nothing is ever final.

“You Icelanders have done the right thing in letting the banks fail instead of bailing them out. And now Iceland is back to growth and unemployment is falling,” an Irish banker said recently, when discussing the status of the Icelandic economy. “The capital controls? No problem, they don't touch ordinary people.” Right, but the capital controls do touch the economy. One economist calls the controls a “slow death.”

Iceland will not have escaped the collapse of its banks in early October 2008 until the capital controls restricting outflow of foreign currency are abolished. The new coalition government between the Progressive Party and Independence Party, led by the former, seems to be split on how to go about it. As has so often been the case in Iceland's history, this split is partly about how to engage with the outer world. Foreign investors are being courted and yet some politicians dream of squeezing money out of the last lot of foreign investors, not only to abolish the control, but also to create the opportunity for the much criticised debt relief promise that brought the Progressive Party to power.

## The very short story of the Icelandic boom and bust

Iceland is not the only country to have experienced a spectacular boom in the years leading up to 2008, followed by a no less spectacular bust, forcing it to seek outside help. Ireland, Greece, Portugal, Cyprus and Spain have, to varying degrees, been bailed out by the troika—the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Not being a member of the EU, Iceland took the classic route to the IMF, which lent the country 2.1 billion USD in order to save it from a total collapse as its banks failed.

But Iceland is the only debt-ridden nation that has had an answer to the question: why did the banks fail? This impertinent question was answered quite thoroughly in a 2,600 page report published in April 2010 by the Special Investigative Commission (SIC) set up by Alþingi, the Icelandic Parliament.

In clear, jargon-free language, the SIC report tells the story of failed economic policy in the decade or so before the collapse in 2008. The varying governments, which always included the Independence Party (in most governments since 1944), celebrated the growth of the banking sector which, like the UK banking sector, sucked talent from other sectors by offering salaries only banks could offer. In addition, the government added fuel to the booming economy with public spending.

With low interest rates in international markets, the Icelandic banks behaved like

drunkards at a free bar. The three largest banks concentrated their lending on the banks' largest shareholders and their business partners, in many cases lending them, their employees and other clients money beyond the legal limits to buy shares in the banks, thereby artificially inflating their value.

## Banking the Icelandic way

All of these practices have been seen elsewhere, such as in the Irish banks, but as far as can be ascertained, it was practiced nowhere else to the extent that it seemed to have been in Iceland. The question of why this way of banking was so prevalent is an intriguing one.

There is probably no single answer, but it is worth keeping in mind that in spite of the banks being fully privatised by 2003, the new owners did not bring with them new managers. The management, and to some extent board members, remained the same.

There is anecdotal evidence that Icelandic banks have engaged in two-tier lending for a long time: the majority of clients were made standard offers for loans that had to be repaid; a chosen minority could borrow large sums against weak or no collateral. When these practices were based only on lending Icelandic deposits, the danger was somewhat contained. When the lending was based on foreign loans, in endless supply on international lending-happy markets, the banks grew to ten times the size of the economy and created an enormous risk which proud and somewhat clueless politicians and regulators ignored.

Weak collateral is also one reason why so many of those who borrowed the most have more or less escaped the effects of the crash. Large holding companies of well-known shareholders collapsed under their burden of debt when the banks were no longer there to keep on lending, extend loans or to refrain from recovering loans. With only a couple of exceptions, the largest shareholders in the banks—the owners of these holding companies—were left unscathed.

## The centrifuge of debt and assets

One of the reasons why the boom billionaires, the so-called ‘útrásarvíkingar’ (“Outvasion Vikings”), have not been bankrupted is a mechanism that could be called a centrifuge. All of these billionaires owned galaxies of off and on-shore companies, i.e. groups of companies that stretched from Iceland to other countries, such as well-known secrecy havens like the British Virgin Islands, the Isle of Man

and Guernsey.

A loan goes into one company and assets are bought. Over time, assets and debt are split, for instance by paying dividends and/or via sales and acquisitions between companies within the group, or to related parties. When bad things happen, the company that holds the debt goes bankrupt and little of value is found there for the creditors.

This is no Icelandic invention. Highly specialised and well-paid lawyers and accountants in London and elsewhere construct these galaxies each and every day. The Icelandic boom billionaires have practised this with great skill and great help from the banks, meaning that almost none of them have gone bankrupt.

In fact, some famous Icelandic billionaires still own companies in Iceland, such as Björgólfur Thor Björgólfsson of Landsbanki fame, Jón Ásgeir Jóhannesson of Baugur Group and Glitnir bank fame, and Ólafur Ólafsson, the second largest shareholder of Kaupþing bank.

## Prosecuting the past

Shortly after the Icelandic collapse, the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP)—now a permanent serious fraud prosecutor—was founded in Iceland. None of the big cases have yet been resolved in the Icelandic Supreme Court, but recent rulings on white-collar crime cases indicate that the Supreme Court is far from lenient on punishment.

Top-level managers in all the banks as well as a few major shareholders have been charged. Two of those charged are Jón Ásgeir Jóhannesson and Ólafur Ólafsson, but their cases have not been ruled on yet. By next year, the OSP plans to have filed charges on all collapse-related cases.

Compared to Ireland, where there is great anger over the fact the management of the collapsed banks have not been investigated for alleged fraud, it seems safe to conclude that prosecuting the bankers and shareholders, seen to be partly responsible for the crash, changes the public mood. Nonetheless, many Icelanders complain that investigations are taking too long. Compared to complicated fraud cases in other countries, the Icelandic cases follow a familiar pattern and the extensive galaxies of companies partly explain the time it takes to get to the bottom of what went on and how things were done.

In addition, the administrators of the collapsed banks are suing managers, board members and accountants of the banks, in order to recover assets. The outcomes of these cases, especially against the accountants, are interesting in an international context since it is widely believed that the role of accountants in failed

banks has not been scrutinised enough.

## Legacies and lessons

The SIC report was written partly to explain what had happened and partly to provide lessons. Many public institutions spent some time studying and discussing it, but it is difficult to say if the report helped provide the necessary lessons.

Compared to other debt-ridden European countries, another unique phenomenon in Iceland following the collapse was debt relief. People whose mortgage repayments spiked, either because of the fall of the króna or because loans were indexed, have been offered various measures to make their debt sustainable.

The fact that the Progressive Party was voted into power by making promises of further debt relief shows that some voters

**“Iceland will not have escaped the collapse of its banks in early October 2008 until the capital controls are abolished.”**

believed that not enough had been done. The expectations are still high, although research shows that households in arrears are now fewer than before. In addition, the debt problem seems to be much more contained than certain politicians and popular opinion indicate.

The fact that some currency basket loans have been ruled as illegal has also changed the financial status of many households. Normally, a loan agreement is utterly unchangeable. Now, with many loan agreements either being torn up or changed, there is anecdotal evidence that Icelanders might be learning that legal agreements need not be adhered to, and some fear this might not be a good lesson for the future in a country that has had chronically high household debt.

Did the crash change anything more fundamental in Iceland than many people (mainly women) taking up knitting? Time will tell, but there are doubts. Some bankers whisper that they still dream of 2007 happening again and salaries in the banking sector are rising. The return of 2007 might be good for a few bankers and some chosen clients but, as tried and tested, it would be decidedly bad for the Icelandic economy.

## The battle for the soul of Icelanders

Iceland is certainly not the only country

that finds it easier to blame foreigners for its misfortunes than their own countrymen. In Greece, Cyprus and Ireland there is wide-felt anger towards the troika, as if it had caused the deadly debt in these countries rather than their own countries' actions or inactions.

The same is felt in Iceland. Until the SIC report clearly spelled out what had happened, many Icelanders felt that the British had caused the collapse of the banks. Now it is the foreign creditors of Glitnir and Kaupþing who get to bear the blame for the capital controls. And EU membership, seen as a salvation in an uncertain world just after the collapse, no longer has the majority support of Icelanders. Yet, a majority of voters would like to see the negotiations for membership concluded and the agreement sent to a referendum.

Compared to the other debt-ridden European countries, the Icelandic economy bounced back quickly and well. But Iceland does not “graduate” from the “kreppa” until the capital controls are abolished.

Five years ago, when resolving the big issues around the collapse, the attitude was “fuck the foreigners,” meaning that Iceland would, understandably, first and foremost pay attention to its own interests. At the time, the action taken enjoyed a certain understanding abroad since Iceland clearly was in dire straits in October 2008.

Again, Iceland needs to resolve a problem, the capital controls, where foreigners are one part of the equation. There now seems to be a tension within the coalition government as to how the foreign creditors should be treated. Some think it is still legitimate to say, “fuck the foreigners” while others fear the possible consequences. These diverging attitudes seem to hinder the first steps towards abolishing the capital controls, which will no doubt be done in steps over the course of several years.

The story of Argentina since its default in 2001 is the story of a country that seeks to write its own rules, ignoring the international community. Iceland did not default in 2008 and the collapsed banks are now private companies. But after changing Iceland's currency laws this past spring, the minister of finance has to agree to measures regarding the estates of the banks, meaning the government is involved. This also exposes the government to the risk of being sued by foreign creditors.

Most countries have their Faust stories but the Icelandic Faust, Sæmundur the wise, is the only one to have defeated the devil. Maybe that partly explains the daredevil attitude Icelanders often take when resolving their national problems.

# Ólafur Arnalds and The Four Seasons

The Iceland Symphony Orchestra at Iceland Airwaves

THU 31 OCT 2013 » 19:00

At Harpa Concert Hall

**Max Richter** *The Four Seasons*

**Ólafur Arnalds** *For Now I am Winter*

**Iceland Symphony Orchestra**

**André de Ridder** conductor

**Elfa Rún Kristinsdóttir** soloist

**Ólafur Arnalds**

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# So What Are These Sandstorms I Keep Hearing About?

Words: Kári Tulinius | Illustration: Inga María Brynjarsdóttir

People tend to forget that Iceland is about 25% desert, or more, depending on what you consider the line to be between desert and semi-desert. However, what no one who has spent more than three seconds in Iceland will ever forget is that Iceland is 8000% windy. As the Icelandic idiom has it, Iceland is a "rokrass-gat," an asshole of wind.



As another idiom says, if you don't like the weather, wait five minutes.

But if you do like the weather, wait five minutes more. The harshness of Icelandic nature was experienced in full by a number of tourists recently, with many rental cars suffering damage. Most dramatically a French couple had to flee their rental car after flying pebbles broke their side windows, leaving them exposed to the full force of windassholery. In pictures, their car looks like it has been sanded down. When you put a desert in an asshole of wind you end up with a sandstorm in the face.

Damn tourists, always getting themselves into dangerous situations.

While that does sometimes happen, in this case the tourist couple seems not to have been at fault. Ármann Guðmundsson, who is part of the search and rescue squad Kári, which shares a name with the north wind, criticised the lack of signs with information about the weather conditions: "It just said 'óþært' on the signs, which I doubt tourists understand."

Yeah, that's not so understandable for the 99.99995% of the human race who don't speak your crazy language.

Tales of the rescue of the stranded couple are pretty dramatic. After

the windows broke, they stopped the car, got out and lay prone by the side of the road, holding onto fence posts, because they were afraid that the car would roll over in the wind. According to Ármann the couple did not notice they were being saved until one of the rescuers touched them on the shoulder. In an interview that Fréttablaðið newspaper did with the couple, Marie Storm said...

**Hold everything! Marie Storm?! A search and rescue squad named after the north wind?! You're just making all this stuff up, aren't you?**

No, all these people are real. Marie Storm said: "We thought we were going to die." After getting caught in the sandstorm, they stopped the car because there was no visibility. Then a flying pebble broke their side window and their ordeal began: "The window exploded over us." They called the emergency hotline and crawled to the side of the road. They got cuts on their hands and their eyes were still sore days later. But they were saved when the search and rescue team came in their armoured car with bulletproof windows.

**Armoured car with bulletproof windows? Isn't that a bit much for search and rescue?**

Not when the weather forecast includes flying rocks. That is not even the worst that Icelandic search and rescue has had to deal with. This is an island stuffed

full of volcanoes, after all. In fact, given Icelandic nature's hostility to all living things, it would not be entirely surprising if search and rescue teams had to deal with an unexpected Godzilla attack. An armoured car is the bare minimum required.

**So what is Icelandic nature's deal? Why is it such an asshole?**

To be fair to Icelandic nature, it was just chilling by itself, letting it all hang loose, when humans arrived eleven centuries ago and messed everything up. Historical records and ecological research tell us that the island was largely covered in forest up until humans arrived with axes and seedling-eating livestock. Trees, even shrubs, are tall enough to survive when sand gets blown in from the highlands. They can even survive volcanic ash-fall. Smaller plants suffocate.

**That's all well and good, but a shrub isn't going to live through the kind of sandstorm which requires travelling in armoured cars.**

That is true, but before humans arrived with their apocalypse of sheep, the highland was not the desert it is today. Grazing sheep were too much for the ecosystem and wind blowing loose sand around did the rest. And humans chopped down trees to burn, which did not help the ecosystem one bit.

**Okay, I would be an asshole too if people threw sheep and axes at me for eleven centuries, but no need to take it out on tourists, they didn't do anything.**

They are just collateral damage, unfortunately. But tourism officials will be happy to note that not-made-up person Marie Storm told Fréttablaðið: "The vacation has been good, except for this." This, of course, being the whole huddling by the side of the road fearing for your life. She could be the spokesperson for the a new Icelandic tourism slogan: Visit Iceland, it's pretty good except for the sandstorm in the face.

by Parker Yamasaki



The world is a crazy place. Turbulence in the Middle East has led Iceland to offer asylum to about a dozen refugees from Iran and Afghanistan. Live on CNBC, Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð blamed the 2008 economic crash on "European regulations." And Árni Björn Guðjónsson is selling paintings of former Prime Minister and current Morgunblaðið editor Davíð Oddsson.

MEANWHILE, all the media seems to care about is sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. Well, can you blame us? Earlier this month, police were called to rescue a distressed man who reported that somebody had been ringing his doorbell repeatedly for about half an hour, and was too scared to investigate himself. The police arrived to greet a couple making love in the worried man's entryway, right up against the wall. Come on, they were asking for the attention.



Besides, sex can get political too. For instance, former Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir's partner, Jónína Leósdóttir, is finally coming out... with a book! The book is titled "With Jóhanna," and chronicles her relationship with the former Prime Minister. Sure, maybe that's more about sexuality than sex, but apparently the slim discrepancy is enough to disturb Icelandic musician Gylfi Ægisson.

Continues over



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# Being Best In The World Ain't Good Enough

## Iceland's gender-based wage gap increases with the economic recovery

— Tómas Gabríel Benjamin

Iceland is often hailed as a beacon of equality in an otherwise patriarchal world. We have elected several women into positions of power, including Vigdís Finnbogadóttir as the first female president and Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir as the first openly lesbian prime minister, and in the 2013 elections just under 40% of MPs were female. Not only that, but The World Economic Forum's 2012 Global Gender Gap Report has repeatedly ranked Iceland as the most egalitarian country, citing women's good health, education and political empowerment.



RAX - Ragnar Axelsson

However, Chair of the Centre for Gender Equality Kristín Ásgeirsdóttir says this ranking gives us a skewed picture of reality, as women's economic participation is lagging behind with a prevalent gender-based wage gap. "The wage gap is what lowers our otherwise good rating with the [aforementioned] report, but it is comparable to other countries," Kristín said. "According to reports from the EU, there is generally a 16% wage difference in Europe. To address this, each ministry, institution, company and municipality needs to go through its finances with a fine comb."

It seems most institutions have yet to do so, as a recent study commissioned by the Association of Academics (BHM) showed that men have on average 8.4% higher salaries than women in jobs that require a university degree. Head of BHM Guðlaug Kristjánsdóttir said in an interview with RÚV that this wage gap cannot be attributed to anything other than the employee's gender as all other factors had been accounted for, including working hours, education, age, and responsibilities.

### The problem is systemic

A gender studies assistant professor at the University of Iceland, Gyða Margrét Pétursdóttir, said she believes the wage

gap exists for a number of reasons, chief of which are society's ideas about gender roles.

"In my qualitative research, I've examined the ideas that men and women have regarding wages and job expectations," Gyða said. "A large part of the male identity seemed to revolve around getting a high salary and basing one's self-worth on its numerical value. Women, on the other hand, seemed to be more willing to justify lower wages with other factors, such as job satisfaction."

Although a 2003 survey commissioned by the Centre for Women's and Gender Research (RIKK) revealed that men and women request raises or promotions as often, Gyða said that similar research has shown that women tend to ask for lower raises than men. "When third party negotiators are involved, they generally ask for higher salaries for men than they do for women. I feel this is the root of this problem, that women's work is evaluated as being worth less than men's work," she explained.

"Surveys have shown that the group with the highest wages are often married men who have children," Gyða said. "Men get these wages because they are supposed to be earning for their whole families," she said. "Women don't get the same status, wages or career mobility because society expects them to also

run the household."

Following the economic collapse, men and women's wages became more in line with each other, but only because men's wages had gone down, Gyða explained, noting that the gap is increasing again as Iceland recovers from the recession. "The problem is systemic," she said, "and it affects both men and women; women are not given the same opportunities as men in the workplace, and it is rarely socially acceptable for men to take as active a part in their children's upbringing."

### Shifting responsibility

Gyða agreed with Kristín that employers need to lead from the front, ensuring equal opportunities and working conditions for their employees, but they often lack awareness of their social prejudices. "I don't want to suggest that any supervisor means to discriminate between men and women, but there are several ways in which people are unconsciously biased in favour of men, overlooking women's contributions," she said. "There are harmful ideas prevalent in our culture that we do not see without donning 'gender glasses' and analysing our assumptions."

Wearing these gender glasses requires individuals to keep their eyes

open for privilege, whether it is based on class, gender, sex, or race. "By being aware of it, people can at least get a chance to react to the privilege," Gyða said. Despite employment law, which prohibits companies from discriminating against applicants or employees because of gender, women have run into the obstacle of not knowing what their male co-workers are earning.

Gyða pointed out that the new equality laws of 2008 offer a solution, as they permit employees to disclose their salaries to a third member. "It is the privileged party's responsibility to inform the disadvantaged of the state of play, and I entreat all men to do so," Gyða said. "The struggle for gender equality has often taken on the form of blaming the victim, as if it is women's fault for not having the same opportunities as men. If society tells you that you and your actions are worth less than a man's, how can you be expected to fight for equality? We need to shift the responsibility onto the privileged, to do their part in making a fairer society."

Continued...



Gylfi is charging the organisers of Reykjavík's renowned Gay Pride festival for being too openly sexual for an all-ages crowd. Gylfi cited Article 93 of the Child Protection Law, which states that festivals of a sexual nature must prohibit children under the age of 18 from being present. Apparently Jón Gnarr's donning of the women's national costume was just too risqué for Iceland's innocents. It must have been the cloak.



But by now it is no secret that Iceland is a pretty gay place. In fact, it is among the top ten gayest places in the world! The 2013 World Happiness Report, published by the United Nations, posits Iceland as the ninth happiest place in the world, amongst a Nordic-heavy top-ten.



Maybe it's because we are such a welcoming place: the number of foreign citizens living in Iceland has risen to 7%. We are religiously tolerant: after a thirteen-year-long application process, the mosque in Sogamýri has just received approval for construction! And we're all for equality: gays from Iran and Afghanistan comprise about half of the aforementioned refugees seeking asylum in Iceland. OR, maybe everybody here is just high.

Continues over

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# Below The Promotional Realm

## Inspired by Iceland and the entrance to Hell



**Snorri Páll Jóhannsson Úlfhildarson** is a word-craftsman, occupied with socially useless production

Now, in the midst of the repercussions of Edward Snowden's exposé of mass-surveillance directed against individuals and institutions worldwide, it's far beyond funny—in all its Orwellian irony—to see the moguls of Iceland's tourism-industrial complex launch a campaign fuelled by the imperative slogan: “Share Your Secret!”



Capitalising on John F. Kennedy's remark that “the very word secrecy is repugnant in a free and open society,” Inspired by Iceland—a branch of the government-owned Promote Iceland initiative—is encouraging people to reveal “what lies just beyond the realm of the known in Iceland,” although they may have good reason for hiding it.

Chair of the Icelandic Tourist Industry Association Árni Gunnarsson explained at the campaign's kick-starting ceremony that the current objective is to lure more wintertime tourists whose numbers (and therefore spending) pale in comparison to their summertime comrades. Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson echoed this at a speech for the Iceland Investment Forum in London a week later, exhibiting a state-of-the-art example of transparency: “Hope to see you—and your money—in Iceland.”

Born in the wake of the 2008 economic collapse and the subsequent Eyjafjallajökull volcanic eruption less than two years later, the idea of selling entrance to the country as an all-season theme-park and human zoo has finally been taken to the executive level. En masse tourism—with all its fuel-intensive transportation, intrusive consumerism and the commodification of culture and nature—has been promoted as a healthier, green and humane way to increase economic growth rather than, say, heavy industry and banking.

At the very core of this immense production of illusions and the non-satirical performance of promoting Iceland as Magicland, Amazingland and Pureland is the use of gratuitous human labour. Just like prior campaigns, this one stands and falls with the population's voluntary, uncritical participation, which in turn morphs humans into hybrids of exhibits and servants. No, I'm not joking, and if there's an ounce of extremism here, it's simply the result of what author Þorgeir Þorgeirson often referred to as the extremes of the subject-matter: the very act of unilaterally promoting Iceland as a unique earthly paradise is inherently extreme.

The residents of the village Honcun—originally built as the filming location of block-buster *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*—have described themselves as mere props within the Chinese tourism industry. Employing slightly less objectified language, Promote Iceland asserts that regardless of the time of one's visit, one can be “assured of the warmth of the Iceland-

ers' welcome and their desire to share their culture and make every effort to ensure that your stay is a pleasant one.”

Take also, for example, Austrian filmmaker Ulrich Seidl's *Paradies: Liebe*—the first film in his recent *Paradies* trilogy—which confronts sex-tourism in Kenya and the complicated relationship between the native beach boys and their neo-colonial sugar-mamas. With a troubled identity, robbed of their dignity by becoming fully dependent on the profusion of foreign money holders, as Seidl noted in a 2009 interview with *ZOO Magazine*, the boys are stuck in a vicious cycle of self-humilia-

“Hope to see you—and your money—in Iceland.”

tion. And they are not alone.

While the film's focus is surely on the aspect of prostitution—visually the most obvious physical form of exploitation—a number of shorter scenes juxtapose it with other roles within tourism-based economies, portraying tourism as yet another tool for exploitation. Remember the happy and hyperactive fairies jumping and dancing in line with Emiliana Torrini's jungle-drumming heart? Locate them and their corporeal counterparts beside the smiling bartenders, the swimming-pool entertainers and the zebra-dressed musicians of *Paradies: Liebe*. Then ask: What's the difference?

In a quest for an answer, I would rather put my bet on finding Waldo somewhere in the “The Stars and Stripes Forever” march. That said, there certainly is a secret worth sharing and celebrating, properly kept below the realm of the visible. As first documented in *Liber Miraculorum* by the 12th century Cistercian chaplain Herbert Von Clairvaux, Iceland can boast of being a tourist attraction unlike any other. Namely, the very entrance to Hell, disguised as the volcano Hekla. Although allegedly debunked as mere superstition by a pair of ecologists in 1750, there is something extraordinarily stimulating about this theory. And seeing the emancipating nature of history's first freethinker—Hell's host, Satan himself—the flaming basement of Hekla might be our only glimpse of hope in these worst of all possible times.

Continued...



**Former Supreme Court justice Jón Steinar Gunnlaugsson told radio show Harmageddon that it's time for Iceland to consider a new approach to drug enforcement—called legalisation.** “We're not improving the situation by creating an underworld,” he said. The current drug laws in place are not working he contends, and the emphasis should be placed on rehabilitation of addiction.



By the same token, a recent poll by Maskína for the Directorate of Health shows that **the public attitude toward the legalisation of marijuana has been steadily changing over the last decade.** While Iceland is far from a majority in favour, the number has risen from about 9.3% in support of legalisation to about 11.3%. Meanwhile, about 36% of respondents confirmed having tried marijuana or other cannabis products, but only 6.5% consider themselves “regular users.” Jón may just be right; the drugs aren't going anywhere, regardless of their status with the law.

And, as promised, we've got some rock 'n' roll for you too. We've also got some acoustic, some electronic, some hip-hop, experimental, shoe-gaze, trance, dance, and every scene in between on our Grapevine Iceland Airwaves website! Go check it out: [airwaves.grapevine.is](http://airwaves.grapevine.is) for your recommended daily dose of righteousness.

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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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# A Look In The Rearview Mirror



**Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir** is the former prime minister of Iceland

The Social Democratic Alliance and the Left Green Party formed a government for the first time on February 1, 2009, as Iceland was struggling with the hardest economic conditions that have occurred in the republic's history. The circumstances were without precedent. The nation faced bankruptcy.

What happened was: a banking collapse, a debt crisis, a crisis of state finance and an international crisis. This was followed by societal dissolution; bonfires were lit and full social revolt seemed inevitable—in the aftermath of the collapse, our community burned with conflict and rage.

## Corruption, greed and mismanagement

Iceland's economic collapse was not least the result of the crony-capitalistic privatisation of the nation's banking system and the bubble economy, both of which occurred during the reign of the Independence and Progressive parties; a period that was characterised by continuous economic mismanagement, corruption, greed and a growing income gap. Low-interest loans from abroad were used to inflate worthless stock in the banking system, which had in the end, at the time of the collapse, blown up to being ten times the size of Iceland's GNP. The entire banking system was slowly transformed to a structure fuelled entirely by greed, for instance through the use of incentives for big business and corporations under the auspices of the newly privatised banks—which were used to inflate the profits of corporate executives, which in turn led to a gross increase in the nation's income gap and general social inequality. Every single word of warning and urge of caution from foreign specialists was ceremoniously ignored, and the nation's regulatory agencies and supervisory authorities slept at their guard posts. Supervision over the financial system was therefore very weak.

In the end, all of this came together in a perfect storm that led to a massive collapse in the króna's exchange rate, a slump in the real estate market and the nation's stock market collapsing like the house of cards it turned out to be. Everything changed. Nine-tenths of the stock market dried up, inflation rose to nearly 19%. Short-term interest rates skyrocketed to 18% at the beginning of 2009, the króna's value plunged by 50%. Special-

ists projected a 10-15% downturn in the economy, which pushed unemployment numbers above 10%, with an accompanying drop in public spending power and nearly 20,000 people losing their jobs. It is furthermore apparent that the collapse also brought the downfall of the neoliberal ideology, as it among other things exposed the unprecedented purchase of political influence by banks and business elites by way of enormous grants to the ruling Independence Party.

There is reason to add to this the contents of a statement Carsten Valgreen, former Chief Economist of Danske Bank, made in Fréttablaðið on January 10, 2009, in which he claims that the government's appointing a former Prime Minister as Head of the Central Bank of Iceland's Executive Board had disastrous consequences—that it had resulted in the bank being managed in an astoundingly poor manner. Indeed, one of the first acts of the new post-collapse government, in February of 2009, was to instate a new executive board—at that time it was clear that the state treasury's cost of the Central Bank's impending bankruptcy would be one of the bigger expenditures of the collapse. In the end, the Central Bank's bankruptcy cost the state close to 270 billion krónur.

## First post-collapse government results

The emergency procedures and recourses that the first post-collapse government was forced to resort to were manifold and cannot be recounted in full in this venue. Hopes of staving off national bankruptcy and loss of financial independence were dependent on the trust other nations placed on us. The Social Democratic Alliance and Left Green coalition accomplished restoring the economy, deflating the inflation from 19% to 3.5%, lowering interest rates from 18% to 6% and cutting unemployment numbers in half. Icelanders' spending powers had at the end of last year increased by nearly 8% from the low-point of the depression—and even more as they related to the lowest income brackets and lowest paid pensioners.

During the last two years of the government's term, we managed to instigate greater economic growth than what most of the nations we compare ourselves to experienced over the same period of time. Household and business debt decreased to the count of two times the GNP in three years, which is a great turnaround by any standard. Since the collapse, the debts of households and businesses have gone down almost 50% compared to the GNP. Out of the 120 largest businesses, 80% underwent restructuring measures during the last term, along with 500 small

and average sized businesses. Over 200 billion krónur have been written off or discounted from household loans, and mortgage debts now amount to the same percentage of GNP as they did at the start of the real estate bubble in 2004.

State interest subsidies to households were also more than doubled. Throughout the four year term, the government diverted more than 100 billion krónur towards household interest relief and child benefits, which is more than any other government has done.

What's most important is that the inequality in our society's income distribution has been completely turned around. Iceland is now one of the European nations that can boast of the greatest equality. Furthermore, international surveys reveal that Iceland was the world's most gender equal nation four years in a row.

We certainly set off with great ambitions, but our plan of action was always intended to be a realistic and reasonable one. We did, however, fail to anticipate the weight and fury with which certain interest groups organized themselves in active opposition to our government and its goals of restoration, equality and transparency. The Constitutional Committee was stifled and road blocked by Iceland's Supreme Court amongst others. Fishery owners and fishing quota magnates fought fishing fees and changes in the quota system tooth and nail. Capital controls and a ruined króna created a growing problem that has now started running companies out of the country. A few members of the government caved under the immense weight of the relentless propaganda, which caused us further problems. We were accused of neglecting the problem of household debt, despite the decisive actions recounted above. Household debt amounted to 135% of Iceland's GNP when it was highest in 2009, but at the end of the last term this spring it was down to 108%—the same as it was fifteen months prior to the banking collapse.

The numbers are there, and they speak for themselves.

Danish analyst Lars Christiansen was one of the few experts who predicted the economic collapse of 2008. During a visit to Iceland in late 2012, he remarked that Icelanders' greatest accomplishment was having tackled the consequences of the collapse while keeping at bay the mass riots, strikes and strife that plagued other, similarly troubled nations. I should also note that Iceland's credit default swap greatly improved over the last term, as did the state's credit rating with foreign analysts.

Again: the above facts and numbers speak for themselves, and bear witness to the great results accomplished by Ice-

land's first purely leftist government.

## The wheels of greed are spinning

I recently met an old Progressive Party MP and asked what he thought might happen if his party failed to meet its campaign promises to instate the largest debt correction in the world for Iceland's households. "Then, we'll be dead," the former MP replied. These bloated campaign promises made by the Progressive Party are the main explanation for the former governing parties—especially the Social Democratic Alliance—poor results in this spring's parliamentary elections. There was no way to trump these unreal promises, save for directly and intentionally deceiving voters. Furthermore, the social rift caused by the application to join the EU, disappointment with the state of the constitution and many households' seemingly insurmountable debts eventually came together in a great wave of dissatisfaction. The growing flames of discontent were fanned enthusiastically and non-objectively by those who stood to lose their privilege and power as Iceland slowly became a more just and egalitarian society.

## Iceland's economic collapse was not least the result of the crony-capitalistic privatisation of the nation's banking system and the bubble economy...

Now that the new coalition government of the Independence and Progressive parties has been in power for five months, it is apparent that those in power are both perplexed and overwhelmed by the tasks at hand. The main emphasis seems to be relieving 20 billion krónur worth of taxes from fishery owners and the wealthiest of our community. The current government's priorities could not be more different from the ones honoured by the last one. Inequality is once again rearing its ugly head, and the sharp knife of austerity has been turned towards the welfare system—all to benefit society's wealthiest and best-off.

Once more, the wheels of greed are spinning.

# It Cannot Be Forgotten...



**Steingrímur J. Sigfússon** is the former minister of finance

The banking and economic collapse of October 2008 is perhaps not the first thing one would think to reminisce about, not a particular cause for anniversary celebrations. Especially in the sense that of course we all wish that The Collapse's consequences and its lingering effects on our lives and work would vanish as soon as possible. "If only we could forget it all, if only it never happened," some are surely thinking. Unfortunately, The Collapse was a very real occurrence, and its consequences will not evaporate—it has already put its mark on so much of Icelandic life, and it will remain a determining factor for the nation for a long time to come.

The short version boils down to this: a terrible mistake was made. Iceland experienced an almost unprecedented economic collapse, with wide-ranging and impossibly expensive consequences for us as a society. The Collapse and its repercussions will continue to haunt our existence for the foreseeable future, and beyond. The Collapse has resulted in hardships for thousands upon thousands of families and households, an injured economy that will take time and patience to repair, and a heavily indebted state treasury, to name only the key effects. This is something we simply cannot forget in the hopes of things returning to normal. The state treasury's debts will not take it upon themselves to vanish and be forgotten so we don't have to be constantly reminded of The Collapse. Rather, they come with crippling interest payments, serious money that we cannot set aside for other purposes. And these debts need to be repaid as soon as possible (for that, we need a responsible government), and the krónur that need to go towards this need to come from somewhere.

Another five-year anniversary is drawing closer, one that we should also commemorate. In April of 2015, it will have been five years since Alþingi's Special Investigative Commission issued its report and this, also, cannot be forgotten. On the contrary, the report should be and remain an annual required read for many.



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The Collapse | Anniversary Special

What Happened In 2008 And Why? How Did We Handle The Problem And What Is The Situation Today?



**Bjarni Benediktsson** is the current minister of finance and the chair of the Independence Party.



**Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson** is the current prime minister and the chair of the Progressive Party.

Despite several attempts to elicit a response from them, Bjarni and Sigmundur either did not find the time or see a reason to engage in discourse with Grapevine's readers (we sent identical letters to Bjarni, Sigmundur, Jóhanna and Steingrímur). Admittedly, being a minister is probably a pretty busy job. Our pages remain open to you guys if you ever want to get anything across.

# Five Years On: What Happened? What Did We Learn?



**Hannes H. Gissurarson** is a professor of political science at the University of Iceland

The 2008 collapse of the Icelandic banks has already generated some myths. One is that the Icelandic banking sector was overgrown. There is no such thing as an overgrown banking sector. It all depends on the area that the sector is serving and the institutional support it can expect to receive. Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom had banking sectors that were roughly as big proportionally as that of Iceland, and these sectors did not collapse.

Another myth is that the Icelandic bankers were more reckless than their colleagues elsewhere. But if they were, how did they then find customers, not only depositors, but also renowned financial institutions like Deutsche Bank? And when we read about HSBC being fined for money laundering and Barclays for libor rate-fixing, and about the excesses of the RBS management, the Icelandic bankers begin to appear, not exactly as choirboys, but rather as normal bankers.

The third myth is that the collapse of the Icelandic banks was caused by "neo-liberalism." It is left unexplained what exactly would be the causal connection, but the crucial point surely is that the Icelandic banking sector operated under precisely the same legal and regulatory framework as banking sectors in other member-states of the European Economic Area, EEA. Therefore, this is a myth, not a plausible explanation.

What did then cause all the Icelandic banks to collapse, while most other banks survived? The Special Investigative Commission (SIC) of the Icelandic Parliament correctly identified a systemic risk in the Icelandic situation: "Of all the business blocks, which had borrowed liberally in the Icelandic banking system, the most conspicuous one was business associated with Baugur Group. In all three banks, as well as in Straumur-Burdaras, this group had become too large an exposure. The SIC considers that this has constituted a significant systemic risk, as collapse of one enterprise could affect not only one systematically important bank, but all the three systematically important banks." The financial stability, therefore, would be significantly threatened by, for instance, Baugur Group, which had, as indicated in the report, substantial liquidation problems in the latter half of 2008.

What happened in Iceland was that in 2004, the

leader of Baugur Group, businessman and adventurer Jón Ásgeir Jóhannesson, became the most powerful man in Iceland, after his critic, Davíð Oddsson, stepped down as Prime Minister. The market capitalism of 1991–2004 was transformed into the crony capitalism of 2004–2008. Not only did Jón Ásgeir and his cronies control two-thirds of the retail business, they also owned almost all the private media and one of the three banks, while having good access to the other two banks. It did not seem to make any difference to opinion-makers that Jón Ásgeir was investigated, indicted and convicted for breaking the law on business practices, being given a three months suspended prison sentence.

The other systemic risk in the Icelandic situation was that the area the banking sector served—the whole of EEA—was much larger than the area where it could depend on institutional support. This created a mismatch, or a system error. The problem was not that the banks were too big; it was that Iceland was too small. But it did not occur to anyone at the time that Iceland would, unlike all other European countries, be left totally to its own devices. The death knell of the Icelandic banking sector really sounded on September 24, 2008 when the US Federal Reserve System announced that it had made currency swap arrangements—essentially a license to print dollars—with the central banks of Sweden, Norway and Denmark. It became obvious to the financial markets that Iceland was not included, although it remained a secret for a while that Iceland's Central Bank had indeed asked to participate, but that it had been refused.

Without these currency swap deals, these banks would probably have folded. In other words: the Icelandic banks collapsed because they did not receive the same support as banks in larger countries. They were not blameless—one of them being controlled

by Jón Ásgeir, and the other two betting heavily, and inexplicably, on him—but they were not to blame for an old ally, and the mightiest state in the world, abandoning Iceland. I am not saying, either, that the banks should have been bailed out—the refusal to help Iceland was probably a blessing in disguise—but only that almost all banks in other European countries obviously needed support to survive.

The British Labour government made things worse when it closed down the two banks in England owned by Icelanders on October 8, the same day it bailed out almost all other banks in the country, including banks being investigated for rate-fixing and other questionable practices. Simultaneously, the Labour government took the drastic step of invoking the British anti-terrorism law against one of the Icelandic banks, with the almost instantaneous effect that all money transfers to and from Iceland stopped. For a while, Iceland's Central Bank and the Treasury were also on the list of terrorist organisations, alongside Al Qaida, the Taliban and the governments of North Korea and the Sudan.

For the Icelanders, accustomed to peace and prosperity, the collapse of the banking sector was a huge shock. They did not realise until later—or even not at all—that in fact seven European countries were hurt worse than Iceland by the financial crisis. The political repercussions were serious. In

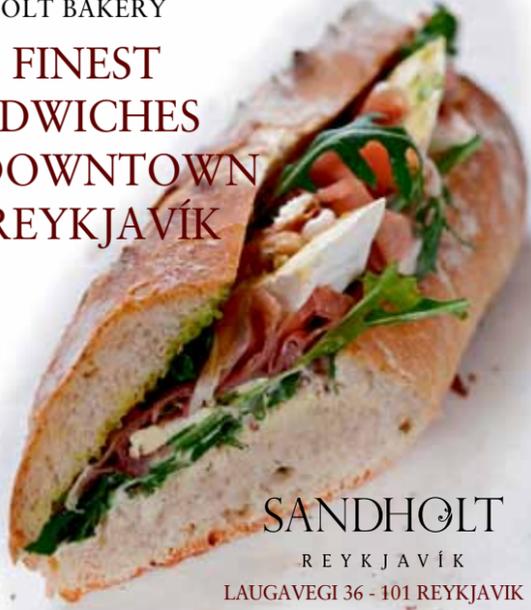
**“The problem was not that the banks were too big; it was that Iceland was too small.”**

came a government of petty, vengeful left-wingers. Central Bank Governor Davíð Oddsson, the former Prime Minister and the only Icelandic person of authority who had consistently warned against the financial adventures of Jón Ásgeir and his cronies, was driven from his post, and Geir Haarde, the Prime Minister at the time of the collapse, was indicted (whereas the Social Democratic ministers were not). Later, Geir was acquitted on all but one count, that he had not held enough ministerial meetings before and during the crisis.

So, what did we learn? That we should both reject the crony capitalism of 2004–2008 and the petty, vengeful socialism of 2009–2013, and try to return to the healthy market capitalism of 1991–2004 where the major objective is to create opportunities for individuals to better their condition by their own effort.

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# THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE COLLAPSE

## HOW U.S. DIPLOMATS SAW IT UNFOLD

BY SAM KNIGHT

The world has changed significantly since 2008, and it owes a great deal to Iceland for this shift, but not for reasons claimed by Facebook Revolutionaries who praise the country for “setting an example.” The Kitchenware Revolution’s real gift to a world bustling with discontent is its contribution to/part in WikiLeaks’ Cablegate disclosures. With Julian Assange and his colleagues lauded in Iceland for publishing Kaupþing bank’s dodgy loan book in 2009, Chelsea Manning took heed of the country’s plight. Explaining that she took interest in Iceland due to discussions about Icesave in a Wikileaks chatroom, Manning told a U.S. military court that she found a cable describing “bullying” and decided to act.

“Iceland was out of viable options and was coming to the US for assistance. Despite the quiet request for assistance, it did not appear that we were going to do anything,” she said. “I felt that I would be able to right a wrong by having [WikiLeaks] publish this document.” It was published as a test in February 2010. A deluge of cables followed in November. The revelations in those documents acted as a lightning rod for the 2011 ousting of autocratic President Zine El Abedine Ben Ali in Tunisia, which in turn gave hope to activists from Tahrir Square in Cairo to Zuccotti Park in New York City.

And the drama is still ongoing. After its security was compromised in August 2011, WikiLeaks decided to dump the entire cache, unredacted, with many of the 251,287 cables still lacking the attention they deserve. Five years after the event that fundamentally shaped their publication, it’s worth taking a look at

what Cablegate itself has to say about Iceland’s meltdown. The sometimes typo-laden dispatches from Reykjavík not only give a behind the scenes look at intelligence gleaned from meetings, parties, luncheons, phone calls, and lobbyist visits, they also reveal glaring ineptitude and callous cynicism before, during, and after the collapse.

### Too proud to beg

As doom drew near, high-ranking American and Icelandic officials ignored the impending danger the global financial system faced. In a bilateral meeting with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and some of her staff in June 2008, Geir Haarde said that “Iceland is through the worst and that things will continue to stabilize.” U.S. Under Secretary of State Reuben Jeffrey III said the United States was “near the end of the downturn” and agreed “that the fundamental elements of the Icelandic economy appeared sound.” In September, Lehman Brothers’ bankruptcy was felt far beyond U.S. shores. The Emperor’s Clothes were repossessed.

The flailing was far from over in Iceland after the Lehman bankruptcy. A cable sent by U.S. Ambassador Carol van Voorst on October 3 described Geir as “maintain[ing] that the economic situation will get better.” She implied that the government should have been “securing outside guarantees or added cash reserves to back up the krona” (foreign exchange is determined by demand for a currency and supply of foreign currency in domestic banks

and that doing so “would do much to calm anxieties here.” A few days later, Landsbanki went under, and in the cable describing the demise, van Voorst noted that an IMF official said the organization “had been watching Iceland for some time and had visited earlier this summer.” One can assume that the world’s debt collection agency wasn’t there for the pylsur. Yet the government still had no comprehensive plan.

The inaction was noticed in Washington, as revealed in an October 8 cable. Central Bank of Iceland (CBI) Director for International Affairs and Markets Sturla Pálsson told the Embassy that the CBI had spoken with Tim Geithner, then head of the New York Federal Reserve, and other unnamed Federal Reserve officials in Washington. But, Deputy Chief of Mission Neil Klopfenstein suggested the appeals lacked urgency:

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**Pálsson confirmed that the Central Bank had not spoken with anyone at the U.S. Treasury Department. The Ministry of Finance’s Director General of the Economic Department, Thorsteinn Thorgeirsson, said that aside from an October 6 conversation between Treasury Dept Under Secretary Dave McCormack and the Finance Minister, the only other official contact the ministry had with the US Government was with Treasury’s Iceland Desk Officer Lawrence Norton.**  
 -----

**“These assertions were repeated in a cable sent a month later, when Voorst wrote that the ‘Grand Old Man of the Independence Party’ was responsible ‘for Iceland’s stunning loss of credibility in the financial world’**

Klopfenstein also noted that “the Central Bank’s Governors were talking to their Nordic colleagues, but the Bank has not taken advantage of the swap lines in place.” Projecting nonchalance amid a slow motion car wreck, Pálsson said he wanted the U.S. to get in touch with him, and insisted that a loan from the Central Bank of Russia, which never actually materialized, was “95 percent certain.” In another cable sent on the same day, Klopfenstein was baffled by claims that the U.S. refused aid. “[T]he Embassy does not believe the Icelanders have adequately checked out all possibilities of cooperation with U.S. entities,” he said, telling Washington that envoys “urged Iceland reps to reach out to U.S. authorities

### Embassy Cables 101

#### The United States’s aboveboard intelligence gathering

On its website, Wikileaks describes the cache of cables as “orders sent out from the Department of State, embassy reporting about the local governments and details of US government activities in each country.” In many ways, diplomats are like aboveboard intelligence officers—collecting and dispensing information; sometimes state secrets, in a bid to both formulate and carry out foreign policy.

Sometimes, this can be done at stuffy meetings—long tables, each country’s miniature flag in the middle, with coffee, folders, and stern expressions.

Sometimes, this can be done in less formal settings. As one U.S. diplomat described in 2005, this sometimes includes a drink or two. Bemoaning his trouble peddling the State Department’s “cultural programs,” which he described as “too simplistic and propagandistic for Icelanders,” then Deputy Chief of Mission and Charge D’affaires Philip Kosnett described one way of getting Icelanders to switch off:

-----  
**What we tend to end up doing most often is, in effect, to stretch our budget by providing duty-free alcohol for receptions at exhibit openings and art festivals. Because alcohol is highly taxed in Iceland, our gifts of wine for receptions strike Icelanders as far more generous than they actually are. In return for these**  
 -----

**gifts, we get thanked on invitations and publicity materials prepared by the event sponsors, and we get invitations for our staff to attend events along with high society. Then we use the events to hobnob, make connections, and talk up U.S. policy.**

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 Source: [https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05REYKJAVIK526\\_a.html](https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05REYKJAVIK526_a.html)

immediately” so that the American response—even if no—would come after “the right questions” Klopfenstein also noted that the aforementioned contact with Geithner had occurred the previous week—before Landsbanki’s demise. Kaupping, meanwhile, was on life support.

“We are at a loss to explain why the Icelanders have not picked up the phone to discuss what they need and what we might be able to help them with,” Klopfenstein wrote. The very next day Kaupping fell. And even though Finance Minister Árni Mathiesen said he would be heading to Washington for meetings with World Bank officials in response, he still had to be prodded to avail himself of all possible support. “Post persuaded the Minister to agree to meet with senior Treasury officials while in the U.S.,” Klopfenstein said on October 9. On October 20, Ambassador van Voorst said that Árni wouldn’t have bothered arranging the meeting with Treasury officials “without pressure from this embassy.”

### The government falls

Finally, Geir Haarde’s government chose a path out of the crisis on October 24 when it and the International Monetary Fund revealed a preliminary agreement on a \$2 billion emergency loan, as van Voorst wrote in an October 27 cable, to “help open other lines of credit to meet the immediate goal of 6 billion USD.”

The deal would open a new can of worms in the context of Icesave—the failed offshore Landsbanki savings scheme became a major bone of contention between Iceland, and Britain and Holland (more on that later). But the government had more immediate problems at home, described by Ambassador van Voorst after an Embassy party in November:

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**A poll at the end of October showed 60 percent support for early elections, and the Chairman of the Left-Greens [Steingrímur J. Sigfússon] showed up at the Embassy’s Election Night event gleefully working the room with that encouraging datum. Demonstrations calling for -- among other things -- a new government continue to grow, with the latest protest on November 8 drawing over 3000 participants.**  
 -----

After a lull in political activity over the winter holidays while Iceland drank itself into a stupor, Alþingi reconvened and thousands of protestors surrounded the parliament building, demanding resignations at the highest levels—and the sentiment wasn’t confined to the streets, according to a January 21 cable authored by Ambassador van Voorst:

-----  
**IP dissatisfaction with PM Haarde is also growing, a week ahead of that party’s national congress. Emboffs have heard from two IP insiders in the last day that many fear the PM is “not doing anything” and that the situation will only get worse absent some dramatic action.**  
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But it was difficult for the libertarian Independence Party to break this inertia, as “not doing anything” worked for them during the boom years. A cable sent on January 23 explained:

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**[Mats] Josefsson [, charged with creating a framework for restructuring the banking sector,] remarked that the government had let the banks handle everything over the last ten**  
 -----

**years and there was not the infrastructure in place to deal with the crisis. This led to inaction, and in hindsight, more could have been done more quickly in October.**  
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Systemic deference to the private sector also hindered outside help, even after the government reached out to foreigners. According to the same cable:

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**When the U.S. Department of Treasury Deputy Assistant Secretary visited Reykjavik December 8 - 9, 2008, there was a visible lack of an “Economic Czar.” It took two full days of meetings to obtain a coherent picture of the economic situation. In December, the Advisor at the Prime Minister’s Office Bjorn Runar Gudmundsson... conceded there was a lot of misunderstanding and difficulty in getting “everyone to talk the same language.”**  
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The same day, Geir finally called it quits. Citing an oesophageal cancer diagnosis he had received two days earlier, the Prime Minister said he wouldn’t seek re-election and that the Independence Party would request Parliamentary elections in May. His colleagues wishfully thought aloud, in the presence of American diplomats, that their problems could be over:

-----  
**Independence Party stalwarts tell us that they are relieved to have some explanation for what one called Haarde’s “strange” behavior in recent weeks, and are hopeful that the IP will now have a chance to set a clear course and regain the nation’s support.**  
 -----

But the coalition fell apart. After Geir’s resignation, the Social Democrat Alliance (SDA) tendered a list of demands. A political advisor to Árni Mathiesen told the U.S. embassy that “his boss went into today’s meeting willing to yield on the other requests,” according to a January 26, 2009 cable, “but that the IP would rather walk than surrender the Prime Minister’s seat to its junior partner,” the Social Democrats. About a week after that, a Social Democrat-Left Green interim minority coalition was formed with SDA veteran Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir at the helm. Steingrímur J. Sigfússon, head of the Left-Green party, would become minister of finance. Then SDA head Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, in less than good health herself, would step down, and Jóhanna would go on to lead the Social Democrats to victory in the spring.

### Davíð, the Goliath, Felled

Personifying the Independence Party’s fall from grace was former long-time Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and then current Central Bank Governor Davíð Oddsson. Seemingly concerned more with politics than working toward a viable solution, Davíð schemed while Iceland twisted in the wind. After Glitnir’s collapse, he publicly floated the idea of a unity government—dismissed by Geir’s political advisor, in a conversation with an embassy official, as the machinations of an Independence Party faction that, as van Voorst put it, “wants to sow discord and possibly [sic] rid themselves of their Social Democratic Alliance coalition partners...[to] re-form an alliance with the Progressive Party.”

As the world waited to see what Iceland would do to shore up its failing currency, Van Voorst told the State Department on Oct 10. that insiders said

Oddsson was “fighting any move to come to terms with the IMF,” even though a consensus was building around “the reluctant conclusion that Iceland will have to bite this bullet.” These assertions were repeated in a cable sent a month later, when Voorst wrote that the “Grand Old Man of the Independence Party” was responsible “for Iceland’s stunning loss of credibility in the financial world”:

-----  
**[David] made a number of ill-considered statements to the media early in the crisis, and many suspect it was at least partially due to his wounded pride that Iceland did not immediately seek IMF assistance.... Even among IP stalwarts, Oddsson’s standing has never been lower, with the party’s younger, more business-oriented members asserting to Emboffs and journalists that it was time for Oddsson...to finally exit the stage.**  
 -----

Even some in the inner circle of the famously loyal Geir Haarde couldn’t refrain from complaining to van Voorst. In a February 25, 2009 cable, she noted that “Those close to former PM and departing IP Chair Geir Haarde have marveled at Oddsson’s stubborn determination and his disregard for the damage his continued tenure is causing the IP.”

The Davíðian unwillingness to reach out to allies didn’t seem to amount to an awareness of the IMF’s history of harmful structural adjustment, either. As Kaupping was clinging to life, on Oct. 8, van Voorst speculated that the “Grand Old Man” was the main reason Iceland wouldn’t launch extensive talks with the U.S., too:

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**We are at a loss to explain why the Icelanders have not picked up the phone to discuss what they need and what we might be able to help them with, though the stature of Central Bank director Davíð Oddsson may have something to do with a reluctance to open other lines of communication.**  
 -----

His disdain for cleaning up the mess he helped make was reflected by the enthusiasm of one appeal to then New York Fed chair Tim Geithner for an additional \$1 billion in financing needed to complete the IMF deal. His attitude, perhaps, is best encapsulated by his address of Geithner—“Dear Tim”—in a letter described as “unusual” by the Toronto based newspaper Globe and Mail. As noted in an October 29 cable, Davíð didn’t even bother carbon copying relevant authorities in Iceland, fuelling van Voorst’s impression that the CBI Governor had gone rogue:

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**Although aware of existence of the letter, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had not received a copy as of this morning and was uncertain as to its contents...The Central Bank...is guarding its perceived prerogatives closely--and, judging from the events of the last few weeks, unwisely.**  
 -----

Fuelling the perception of Oddsson’s recklessness—he was said to be the one driving the ill-fated controversial loan talks with Russia, according to a November 3 cable that mused about the possible origins for the deal:

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**...the MFA [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] had no knowledge of any bilateral loan discussions before the Cen-**  
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**tral Bank announcement. A senior MFA source blamed the whole business on Central Bank shenanigans, asserting that the Prime Minister did not know of the contacts between the central banks until very recently.**  
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**“If the Central Bank announcement was an attempt by this former Prime Minister and champion wheeler-dealer to pressure lagging friends - particularly the U.S. - into quickly offering their own loans the game has not been successful.”**

In the same cable, Ambassador van Voorst remarked that “[o]f all the government representatives who have discussed the [Russian] loan in public, Central Bank Governor Davíð Oddsson has been the most obviously enthusiastic.” She was unimpressed:

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**If the Central Bank announcement was an attempt by this former Prime Minister and champion wheeler-dealer to pressure lagging friends - particularly the U.S. - into quickly offering their own loans the game has not been successful.**  
 -----

Whatever sparked it, by the time Oddsson left, the loan deal (rated “95 percent” certain by Sturla Pálsson in October) fell apart. In an April meeting with Ambassador van Voorst, new Minister of Finance Steingrímur J. Sigfússon said it “would probably not happen because the Russians have not shown much real interest and are seeking additional information from Iceland.”

### Reluctant to help

Having leaders more eager to seek help might not have made much of a difference, if the almighty U.S. government’s confounding reaction is any indication. Despite American envoys consistently wondering why Geir Haarde’s government didn’t ask for assistance, a cable from April 7, 2009 showed that the U.S. government seemed reluctant to lend it. Newly appointed Finance Minister Steingrímur J. Sigfússon said he was considering trying to obtain bilateral loans from the U.S.(and Canada), adding he was “never a proponent of an IMF loan.” Van Voorst brushed off the appeal and “explained why he should not look to the U.S.”:

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**The Ambassador clarified the lack of a mechanism or legislative authority in the U.S. for such loans to advanced nations.**  
 -----

The Federal Reserve is able to lend independent of “legislative authority.” An audit found the Fed lent up to \$16 trillion to banks in the U.S. and around the world after the financial crisis.

So indifferent were the American diplomats that on April 8, van Voorst suggested to Jóhanna that she could fight her way out of the financial mess—quite literally:

### WTF Is An EMBOFF?

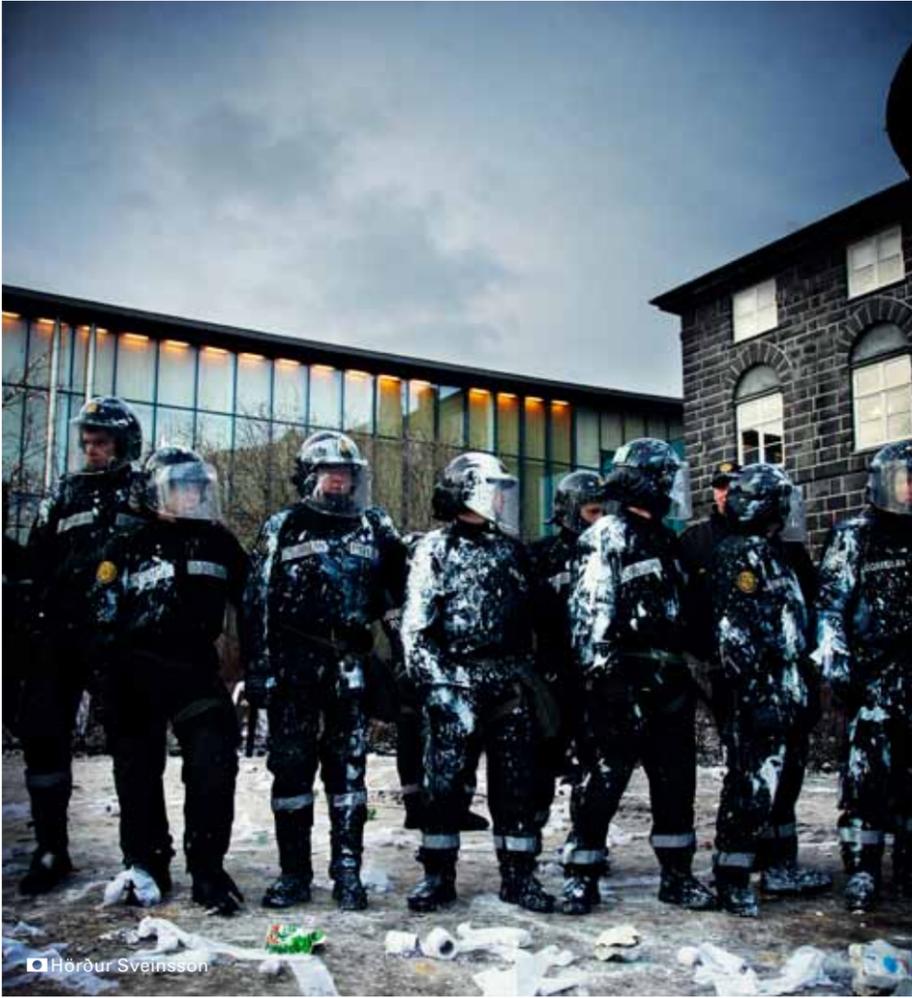
A key of commonly used abbreviations compiled with help from our friends at the United States Department of State

- GOI** — Government of Iceland
- POST** — Any diplomatic or consular establishment maintained by the United States abroad.
- ECONOFF** — Economic Section Overseas
- POLOFF** — Political Section Overseas
- MFA** — Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- EMBOFF** — Embassy Official
- CDA** — Charge D’Affaires – “French, literally

‘in charge of affairs.’ The designation of the officer—normally the Deputy Chief of Mission—who is temporarily in charge of an Embassy when the Ambassador is out of the country.”  
**DCM** – “Deputy Chief of Mission. The second ranking officer at post, often functioning as the chief operating officer or chief of staff to the ambassador. Acts for the ambassador when he is away from post and as chargé d’affaires when the ambassador is out of the country of assignment. Responsible for managing the reporting program.”

**Source:**<http://www.state.gov/docu->





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[Icelandic] officials took the opportunity to reaffirm Iceland's commitment to Afghanistan, but made no new pledges of support.... Ambassador made the case that Iceland's international reputation has taken a beating due to the country's economic difficulties. In these times, being seen as an active contributor to international reconstruction and stabilization efforts may be one of the most effective means to help displace "economic collapse" as the first association foreign observers have when thinking about Iceland. The Prime Minister sidestepped a direct commitment but made it clear that Ambassador's points were taken on board.

### Aluminium roil

Left-wingers might have been horrified by the suggestion that Iceland could shake off its crash blues by committing more resources to the War in Afghanistan—had they known about it. But Iceland's first left wing government didn't exactly put forth a progressive vision of recovery of their own. All that the IMF-supporting, Icesave acquiescing, budget-slashing leftist coalition seemed capable of was stopping Iceland from being dragged kicking and screaming further to the right—and sometimes unsuccessfully. When a draft budget bullet point combining progressive taxation and energy conservation was opposed by the U.S. Ambassador and corporate interests in November 2009, the Left-Greens quickly made major concessions.

As Charge D'Affairs (CDA) Sam Watson noted:

Executives from the two American-owned aluminum smelters, Alcoa and Century Aluminum, expressed concern to CDA that such action could violate their existing investment agreements and significantly reduce the companies' profitability. They estimate the tax at one ISK per kWh would create an additional expense of 13.2 billion ISK (\$106 million) per year.

[...]

Equally troubling, said aluminum representatives, is that they first learned about the proposed tax in the newspaper. Communication with the government, they complained, has been virtually non-existent since the

new government...took control earlier this year.

Watson noted, however, that "over the past few weeks," he had reached out to reps of the new government and that it had "in fact, walked back the proposed energy tax and is engaging industry leaders in the process":

GOI officials across the board, including the Minister of Environment Svandís Svavarsdóttir, have told CDA that they do not want the aluminum companies to leave Iceland...Minister of Finance, Steingrímur Sigfusson, also acknowledged that it would be healthy for some aluminum projects to go forward as they would create additional jobs and revenue for the state.

**"But while the government was willing to foist "cold showers" on every man, woman, and child in 2010, a year already expected to be beset by economic woes, it folded like a cheap suit in the face of Big Aluminum's histrionics."**

Minister of Industry Katrín Júlíusdóttir assured Watson that the proposal "had merely been an example." On November 9, the government revised its proposal down by a factor of almost nine: to 12 aurar per kWh (0.09-0.12 ISK). As Watson pointed out, this was, more or less, due entirely to aluminum lobby efforts, massaged by the U.S. State Department:

...aluminum representatives, who earlier approached the Embassy in frustration after being kept out of the discussions, recently thanked the Embassy for getting them a seat at the table and nudging the government away from the initial tax proposal. The reduction...resulted from consultative talks between the GOI and the Association of Icelandic Employers, of which the aluminum companies are the largest members.

Finally, two days before Christmas, Watson noted that the bill passed with the 12 aurar/kWh rate increase. Meanwhile, Watson also noted, everyone else could expect to collectively pay \$343.2 million more in taxes in 2010. And this was on top of sin tax hikes the government implemented unilaterally in May 2009, practically in the dead of night to mitigate anticipatory panic buying. As van Voorst noted in June, Steingrímur lamented the excise, calling it "the first of many cold showers." But while the government was willing to foist "cold showers" on every man, woman, and child in 2010, a year already expected to be beset by economic woes, it folded like a cheap suit in the face of Big Aluminum's histrionics.

### A thinly veiled death threat

There were a million fires to put out at the time. And the battle most Icelanders were clamouring for the government to fight was IceSave.

Most Icelanders saw Britain and Holland's demands that Icelandic taxpayers cover Landsbanki's mistakes during a painful recession as a real slap in the face. That Britain invoked anti-terrorist laws to seize Icelandic assets when Kaupping was hanging on by a thread rubbed salt in the wounds. And with Britain and Holland rumoured to be using clout in Brussels and at the IMF to refuse to litigate Icesave despite legal ambiguity on the issue, Icelanders were downright furious.

And leaked diplomatic cables showed that many people's rage was justified. In October 2008, Foreign Affairs Trade Chief Martin Eyjólfsson complained to U.S. officials about Britain's initial negotiating team containing only Finance Ministry and Bank of England functionaries – the dearth of diplomats gave the Icesave "deal" a Versailles Treaty feeling. He told American envoys that the British wanted Iceland to pay an interest rate of 13.5 percent on a bond with a ten-year term (he described interest payments as a fifth of Icelandic household income). In a January 23, 2009 cable, he said that the British only wanted 6.7 percent interest, but still noted the "for every one percent in interest on the loan, there will need to be a corresponding 1.5 percent decrease in the state budget."

Even when the change of government—and change in outlook—came, the British remained stiff. In a June 5, 2009 meeting with U.S. diplomats, Steingrímur J. Sigfússon said that the taxpayers needn't cover the debt—that "the assets of the banks would be liquidated over the next several years (Sigfússon said it could take up to seven years) and the returns from the assets would be turned over to the UK and Dutch governments to pay back Iceland's debt... these assets could cover up to 75% of the Iceland government's debt." But the British ambassador told U.S. envoys that "the Icelanders have not been serious...offering up naive 'hair-brained' [SIC] schemes of little substance to pay back the British loans."

A few days later, with Steingrímur having previously noted the Dutch were open to his idea, a deal was reached that seemed to reward his "hair-brained" scheme." Iceland, granted a seven-year grace period, would repay the minimum deposit guarantee, borrowing \$5.44 billion from the Brits and the Dutch at 5.5 percent interest. Financing Iceland's repayment would be money recovered from the valuable wreckage of Landsbanki, with the government of Iceland acting as a guarantor.

But that was the end of the beginning, not the beginning of the end. DCM Klopfenstein said that British Ambassador Ian Whiting was "visibly relieved... though he did note some concern over the public hammering the GOI is now taking over the agreement." The deal was contingent on Parliamentary approval. Many Icelanders fumed over the public guarantees, with past humiliations still fresh.

American diplomats noted on July 29 that the government was able to enforce partisan discipline because the Prime Minister negotiated with suicide bomber tactics:

[Foreign Minister Ossur] Skarphedinnsson told the UK Ambassador that Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir is losing patience...and has told members of the Left Green Movement... to support the agreement by next Thursday or she will resign, causing the government to disband. This is a sizeable threat that could hit home with several sitting members of the LGM who would be unlikely to be reelected...

The party discipline and Iceland's amendments still couldn't guarantee Parliamentary approval. Össur

told American diplomats on September 21 that "the British and Dutch had not accepted all of Iceland's amendments and he was unsure what that meant for the future of the agreement." As the amended agreement wound its way through Parliament in December, CDA Watson told Washington that the debate was more acidic and frightening than what aired out in public:

One member of parliament confided to Emboff that she regularly receives hate mail regarding the Icesave issue," he wrote, "including one email that she considered to be a thinly veiled death threat if she voted in favor of the bill.

After an agreement containing guarantees was eventually passed, the entire process was rendered moot. President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson vetoed the bill, citing a petition signed by about a quarter of the electorate (it's noteworthy that he ignored a similar petition about fishing fees, signed by almost as many people, this past July).

### The cable describing "bullying"

The move sent diplomats scrambling, and revealed how the British and Dutch did try to use Icesave to get the IMF to withhold aid.

In October 2008, when the initial deal with the IMF was announced, Icelandic officials claimed that "Iceland views the dispute with the UK government and the IMF package as two separate issues," in the words of one cable. The IMF itself said that an Icesave agreement was not a prerequisite to Iceland receiving IMF aid.

But a few weeks later, according to a November 18 cable, leaders of both parties claimed they would be cowed into acquiescing to Britain and the Netherlands' Icesave demands—guaranteeing reimbursements equal to the minimum required by the EU directive on deposit guarantees:

Prime Minister Geir Haarde said that Iceland had been told in no uncertain terms "that nobody will take part in lending" to Iceland until the Icesave dispute was resolved. Minister for Foreign Affairs Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir echoed that the government had received clear messages not only from the UK and Holland, but also from the EU member states and the Nordics.

And one diplomatic cable before the veto, from December 2009, shows that the IMF itself misled the public:

When asked about the future of the IMF program if parliament were to reject the Icesave bill, [leader of the IMF team in Iceland Mark] Flanagan stated that, in theory, the IMF could adjust the program, but that it would require significant reworking.

In the same cable, however, Flanagan said that "a deal to recapitalize Landsbanki" was "an IMF requirement." Old Landsbanki's assets—tied to bonds sold to New Landsbanki, financed by the elder's deposits—were crucial to covering the debt.

So after Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson vetoed the deal, Flanagan continued his logical gymnastics, about the Icesave bill's effect on the IMF deal, telling U.S. diplomats that "although an agreement on the Icesave issue was not a precondition for the IMF program, it was important that the IMF program be fully funded."

Meanwhile, cables from London and The Hague further contradicted claims that Icesave had no bearing on the IMF. On January 6, 2010 Her Majesty's Treasury officials were recorded saying "it would be difficult for the UK to support the next IMF review for Iceland if the decision on repayment were still unresolved." And, in the Hague on January 10, "Age Bakker, the Dutch Executive Director at the IMF, said that there would be 'firm discussions' with Iceland."

On January 12, Steingrímur J. Sigfússon lobbied American officials to ask the IMF to advance Iceland's IMF review. DCM Watson "expressed support for Iceland's IMF program and reiterated the USG's position of neutrality and desire for a speedy resolution regarding the Icesave issue." But in a plea for help the very next day, two Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, Permanent Secretary Einar Gunnarsson and Political Advisor Kristján Guy Burgess, said that the U.S. position of neutrality on Icesave "was tantamount to watching the bullying take place," and "could set Iceland back 30 years" by cutting off "access to financial markets," and cause "Iceland to default in 2011 when a number of loans become due."

But the cables don't go much past that meeting, in terms of chronology, because the above dispatch was the one Chelsea Manning leaked to prove herself to WikiLeaks. We do know how the story plays out (or has played out thus far), with a European Free Trade Association court having ruled in January that Iceland needn't guarantee the Icesave payments, and with the IMF aid program ending in August 2011. But that narrative is incomplete due to a dearth of unfiltered official opinion.

### Mr. Benediktsson Tries to Go to Washington

One more cable does tell us something about the Icesave deal and the IMF that's still very relevant, however, because it sheds light on the current Finance Minister's approach to politics—a cable sent November 16, 2009 called "INDEPENDENCE PARTY LEADER SEEKS MEETING WITH WHITE HOUSE TO DISCUSS IMF"

The start of the document suggests there were aspects of the meeting motivated by what Bjarni Benediktsson believed to be the best interests of Iceland—even if the Independence Party leader's proposals were ambitious. He suggested a U.S. Supreme Court Justice could mediate the Icesave Dispute. He also pushed for an audience at the White House to lobby the U.S. to support Icesave mediation.

But he himself didn't seem to think it was in Iceland's best economic interests to reject the legislative solution:

He also admitted that, were he to have his way and the bill fail in parliament, it could further stall Iceland's recovery efforts. It would certainly mean no further loans from the IMF and, without that cash inflow, the government would be unable to lift its capital control restrictions and would likely have to issue Euro bonds to raise the necessary capital. He also said he was not anxious to assume leadership of the government, but preferred to remain in opposition until after the May 2010 municipal elections to benefit candidates from his party.

He then suggested that, because the Icelandic government was on a shoestring austerity budget, the U.S. could finance an Icelandic delegation's trip to Washington to promote "bilateral cooperation"—even if that bilateral summit contained an Icelandic delegation of one:

Benediktsson was somewhat vague with suggestions on how to accomplish this but suggested that the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee visit the United States. He then asked whether, considering Iceland's current financial problems, there might be some U.S. financing available to facilitate such a trip. (Note: Benediktsson later sent CDA a follow up email expressing continued interest in meeting with an official from the White House even if he came alone. End note.)

CDA Watson commented that Bjarni's "request may be a political ploy designed to embarrass his opponents in the government and make waves in the media...Given his proposed solution on Icesave...his angle appears more likely political than economic."

But we only know this about the current second banana thanks to Chelsea Manning and WikiLeaks. One can only hope there will be massive leaks to tell us about the behind-the-scenes history of future catastrophes—Icelandic or otherwise—sometime after the news about them crashes.



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Art | Inspired by a glacier

## The Nature Of The Experiment

### Two artists, clever ideas and a lot of adventure



Matthias Fuchs

#### Words

Jónas Kellermeier

Imagine if you had to hike across the Alps with a heavily stuffed backpack. Now imagine you had to climb steep cliffs along the way, still carrying your equipment. Finally, imagine taking a large red boat weighing approximately 200 kilograms with you.

Sound crazy? Yes, of course it does! But this is precisely what the German artists Thomas Huber and Wolfgang Aichner did for their exhibition “passage2011,” which includes the boat itself, a short film and several photos shot during the performance, and is currently on display at the National Gallery of Iceland.

When it comes to viewing art, we are often looking for meaning, and like most artworks, “passage2011” offers a lot of room for interpretation. With the continued melting of glaciers due to climate change, one might be inclined to see the boat as a metaphor for the huge meltdown, for the heavy burden we all have to carry, but that is of course just one possible interpretation. “We know people are always trying to read between the lines,” Wolfgang Aichner says, “and it can be seen as some kind of protest for environmental matters, but this is not how we thought about it at first.”

#### Born on a windy glacier in Iceland

Actually, the origins of their project can be traced back to Iceland, twenty-five years ago when the two German friends were hiking Vatnajökull for the first time. On one hand, the trip ended in a total catastrophe: they found themselves trapped on the windy glacier. On the other hand, it was a success: this was the moment that their art connected to glaciers was born. “It was quite an intense experience,” Thomas Huber said. “This is why our artworks are intensive experiences as well.”

The experimental performance “passage2011” was structured like a drama and this is also how it is displayed: the short film is made up of three different acts—the prelude, the climax and the denouement, which can either materialise in a catastrophe or in an apotheosis, the glorification of the protagonists.

“The whole project builds up to the last act,” says Christian Schoen, the

curator of “passage2011,” “and for us, there was no doubt that it had to come down to a fatal ending.” Failing is not forbidden, as it is part of human existence. And that is the basis of the project.

#### Was Sisyphus actually happy?

The boat itself plays a number of roles in the project: it is an artwork as well as an instrument with a purpose. It also reminds exhibition visitors of the Sisyphian challenge Wolfgang and Thomas faced.

As the story goes, Sisyphus was eternally doomed to carry a stone up a mountain, just to repeat the task as soon as he was finished. Although this sounds horrible, the famous concluding line of Albert Camus’s “The Myth of Sisyphus”—“One has to imagine Sisyphus happy”—suggests otherwise. Displayed in the opening scene of the short film component of the exhibition, the quote suggests that Wolfgang and Thomas must, like Sisyphus, have achieved some peace of mind when he was able to stop thinking about his fate and focus on the task at hand.

However, this was not entirely the case. “Of course the artists started reflecting at a certain point,” Christian says. “This is why human existence is destined to a catastrophe rather than an apotheosis.” This statement has a very personal touch, as soon as you start looking for the origin of Wolfgang’s and Thomas’ action-arts, namely the incident on Vatnajökull.

#### Return to Vatnajökull

The incident 25 years ago, which inspired “passage2011” in the Swiss Alps, continues to drive the artists who have returned to Iceland to work on a new project called “Powerwalk. Going for a charge.”

This time they plan to hike Vatnajökull again, using the wind—once

their fatal enemy—to generate electricity. They’ll do this by wearing small, self-made wind turbines on their backs to collect the produced energy in special batteries, which in turn will be used for powering two washing machines after their homecoming.

Once again Wolfgang and Thomas will combine art, adventure and creative innovation, seeing themselves as action-artists experimenting with the loss of contact to reality due to an extreme glorification of one’s own deeds. It is about achieving something that at first seems to be impossible.

#### In the end, it’s about the dialectic

When it comes to their new project “Powerwalk. Going for a charge,” the artists say they are a bit more politically motivated. “We were driven by the rather cynical idea that we could take energy from Iceland to power the rest of the continent,” they explain.

They are referring to the real plans of importing green energy from the North Atlantic island to the UK, which they believe to be a dangerous move due to a lack of consciousness of environmental matters in continental Europe.

Nonetheless, Wolfgang and Thomas do not see themselves as protesters and the core ideas that lead to the “Powerwalk” are the reprocessing of the incident 25 years ago in combination with creative power, innovation and the lust for adventure.

So, it is not about moralising and pointing fingers at other people, but about making them reflect on these issues themselves. Art has always been dialectic and this is the purpose of “passage2011” and “Powerwalk. Going for a charge.”

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## Powerwalk

"Passage2011" involved the artists pulling a red boat across the Schlegeis Glacier in the Alps. A resulting exhibition, which contains a short film and photographs shot during the crossing, as well as the boat itself, is displayed at the National Gallery of Iceland until October 27.

For their new project, "Powerwalk. Going for a charge," the two friends are hiking up Vatnajökull with small, self-made wind turbines on their backs. The energy that is produced this way is going to be stored in special batteries used for powering two washing machines after they return.

You can follow their new project, "Powerwalk- Going for a charge" at [www.powerwalk2013.org/](http://www.powerwalk2013.org/).

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## RIFF Is Back For The Tenth Time!

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#### Words

Mark Asch

The tenth annual festival, which opened on September 26 and continues through to October 6, is comprised of 75 features as well as a number of Icelandic shorts and special events. In fulfilment of RIFF's mission of bringing this culture to Iceland, as festival Chair Hrönn Marinósdóttir put it to the Grapevine last year, Icelandic audiences will have a chance to see films fresh off appearances at Cannes, Venice, Toronto, and other high-profile festivals; and directors, from the world-renowned to the up-and-coming, will be appearing alongside their work. As a survey of the world-cinema buffet RIFF offers up, we sent out questionnaires to filmmakers who'll be in town to present their work; a selection of their responses is below, and more responses can be found at [grapevine.is](http://grapevine.is).



**'Coldwater,'** a competition title and the feature directorial debut of California-based Vincent Grashaw, concerns a troubled teenager who is sent off to a wilderness boot-camp reform facility.

#### How did this film come into existence, and why?

I started writing the script when I was fairly young, about 18 years old. I knew I wanted to make movies and had known a kid who was abducted in the middle of the night and sent to a camp for juvenile delinquents. I didn't know how bad in reality these issues were until I began researching. I brought on my writing partner after several failed attempts at trying to get the movie made. So it wasn't like I researched for 13 years and made the product which is the movie... it just evolved over the years, as I matured as a filmmaker. It wouldn't be the same movie if I had made it back then, so I'm grateful for the years of struggling to do it the right way.

#### What discussions did you have about the visual style of the film? When you're making a film like this (fact-based, violent stakes), is there a conventional look that you're conscious of?

My cinematographer and I spoke a lot about how we felt the film should look. I did feel that because the beautiful landscape in the wilderness environment is a heavy contrast to the violence and experiences of the characters in the film, that it would definitely stand out visually. I wanted it to feel like a theatrical motion picture—not a stripped-down, down and dirty independent film. I feel like technically the film holds up with any movie in a cineplex. Regardless of the dark subject matter, it's a fictional story and I wanted it to be a thrilling moviegoing experience which stands on its own.



**'Expedition to the End of the World'** documents the voyage of a schooner with a crew of artists and scientists that sailed through the melting ice of northern Greenland. Danish director Daniel Dencik was aboard:

#### How did this film come into existence, and why?

A ship was going to sail to an unexplored land; a producer heard about it and asked me if I wanted to film it.

#### What did you learn in making the film?

That it is megalomaniac of us to think that we can destroy Earth.

#### What's the most interesting response (rewarding, critical, thought-provoking or bizarre) you've thus far received from someone who's seen the film?

In a theatre in Switzerland, a person fainted and an ambulance had to come. Apparently it was a case of Stendhal Syndrome: something is so beautiful that it paralyses you and eventually leads you into a state of psychosis.

#### Is there any element of the film that you're especially interested in sharing with an Icelandic audience?

There is one shot of Iceland in the film, disguised as a shot on Greenland. Try to figure out which one...

#### How is 'Expedition to the End of the World' different from 'Encounters at the End of the World,' aside from the fact that they take place at literally opposite ends of the world?

I think Herzog is great. Maybe his film is more like a Western than mine, and my film is more like an opera than his.



In **'Vanishing Point,'** documentary filmmakers Stephen Smith and Julia Szucs explore the lives of Inuit communities in Canada and Greenland, particularly looking at how they are coping with social and environmental change.

#### What's the most interesting response (rewarding, critical, thought-provoking or bizarre) you've thus far received from someone who's seen the film?

Interestingly, we have found that even vegetarians and those who do not directly relate to hunting culture have been supportive of the film. We wondered whether we might get a negative response from those opposed to hunting, but it seems that instead there is a response of respectful understanding of the necessity for Northern peoples to a live a lifestyle that includes hunting and an animal flesh diet. Perhaps this follows on the heels of a growing awareness of the problems of industrialised agriculture. So we're finding what is for us a surprising interest from audiences to understand what it means, culturally, to increase one's self-reliance and security when it comes to food harvesting.

#### Is there any element of the film that you're especially interested in sharing with an Icelandic audience?

We are confident that Icelanders, who also live close to nature and have a strong sense of independence and self-reliance, will relate to the marine hunting culture that is the focus of the film. For those living close to the sea, there is a dependence on an intact and sustainable approach to managing and harvesting from the marine ecosystem. We hope that Icelanders will enjoy immersing themselves in the lives of those who—partially due to geographic isolation—must look to their immediate environment for food security and cultural integrity.



In **'Naked Opera,'** director Angela Christlieb follows Marc Rollinger, a terminally ill Luxembourgian civil servant who travels around Europe attending productions of Mozart's "Don Giovanni," staying in high-end hotels and treating himself to rent boys.

**What did you learn in making the film?**

In a technical sense, I learned how to shoot a documentary like a fiction film, but without a script and without knowing what will happen the next day. This put me in some really delicate situations because Marc is not an actor, he is a real personality, and he tried to control the movie. So I learned to improvise in very critical moments—as long as there was enough champagne and boys, things were OK. In a human sense, I learned about how people behave when they suffer from a critical illness.

**What's the most interesting response (rewarding, critical, thought-provoking or bizarre) you've thus far received from someone who's seen the film?**

In Tel Aviv someone in the audience said: I can't believe a woman made this film.



**"The Moo Man"** is a profile of Steve Hook, an independent English dairy farmer, who has a very close emotional bond with the cows that produce his raw milk. Andy Heathcote and Heike Bacheler are co-directors:

**What did you learn in making the film?**

We learned a lot about cows, what nice creatures they are, full of individual character. We learned even more about raw milk, but also about how impossible it is for farmers who are interested in animal welfare and in producing good quality food to survive in a world dominated by supermarkets. So ultimately we learned a lot about the mechanisms that destroy small family farms worldwide.

**What's the most interesting response (rewarding, critical, thought-provoking or bizarre) you've thus far received from someone who's seen the film?**

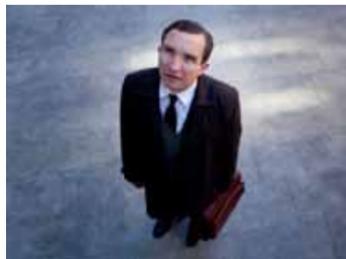
The most challenging response so far was from the ex-deputy agricultural minister in the UK who came to one of our screenings. He claimed we portray a very idyllic way of farming and if all farms were like this in the UK we couldn't feed the country. To hear this argument from someone who should be at the forefront of protecting small farms was shocking. Plus, it is not true anyway.



**"Spaghetti Story,"** a competition title, concerns a quartet of aimless young people and a Chinese prostitute in modern-day Rome. Ciro De Caro is the writer and director:

**There have been films about aimless young adults trying to discover what they want out of life since at least 'I Vitelloni,' though the specifics vary greatly from generation to generation. Do you think of your film more in terms of what it has in common with other stories in this tradition, or in terms of what makes it new?**

I really tried to learn something from the masters of the classic Italian comedy, a kind of sad comedy, permeated by this particular Italian "skill" of laughing about problems and taking life with irony. What I tried to do was to put our real life, our everyday little tragedies, in an ironic movie, because that's the Italian way (I think) of telling stories. I'm far from putting myself at the same level of the big masters of Italian cinema, but I think that, in this particular moment, as a young Italian director, I have to treasure this legacy we have. Because we Italians have no money to make a Hollywood movie right now, and even if we could find such money, I think the result would be something "wannabe Americano." We should remember that we have this particular ability to make great things from simple stories in a simple way. That's why the title of my movie is 'Spaghetti Story': it's made like a spaghetti dish, which is simple, genuine, economical and Italian.



The Italian-born, English-based producer Uberto Pasolini's newest effort as a director is **'Still Life,'** starring Eddie Marsan as a self-contained government employee whose job is to locate the next of kin of local residents who have died at home alone. He winds up growing close to Joanne Froggatt as one such relative.

**What did you learn in making the film?**

Before writing the screenplay I spent a year researching various aspects of the story, and I became increasingly aware of the growing isolation that touches so many people in our western cities where the breakdown of the family unit and of old neighbourhoods condemn vast numbers, both old and young, to lives without true human contact. So I have certainly become more sensitive to the need of involving oneself in the lives of others and letting others come into your own life—things that appear obvious but are often hard to make real.



**'Days of Gray'** is a post-apocalyptic fable set in a world without language. The dialogue-free film shot in Iceland features a score by the Icelandic band Hjaltalín. It is the first feature by the NYC-based director Ani Simon-Kennedy

**How did this film come into existence, and why?**

Cailin Yatsko, my cinematographer, and Hrafn Jónsson, my writing partner, went to see Hjaltalín perform in Prague when we were all living there while in film school. Their music completely took my breath away and we immediately began to build a story around their music. After sharing the concept with the band, they decided to create an original score for the film. So the music gave life to the movie which gave life to the music.

**Is there any element of the film that you're especially interested in sharing with an Icelandic audience?**

I can't wait to be able to present the film at RIFF since it's been a little over a year since we shot in Iceland with an all-Icelandic cast. I had never been to Iceland when I first started writing 'Days of Gray,' but from everything I had researched and from what Hrafn had told me, it seemed like the perfect setting. 'Days of Gray' really couldn't have been filmed anywhere else but in Iceland, and being able to work with and befriend so many Icelandic people, I really believe that between their solidarity and resourcefulness, it's the one place on Earth where you could survive the apocalypse.



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Film | RIFF

# Documenting The Downfall

## Simon Klose on his film 'TPB AFK: The Pirate Bay—Away from Keyboard'



Still from 'TPB AFK'

In making 'TPB AFK: The Pirate Bay—Away from Keyboard,' Simon Klose spent several years following Peter Sunde, Fredrik Neij, Gottfrid Svartholm—founders of torrent site The Pirate Bay—when they were being put on trial in Sweden at the behest of the entertainment industry for “promoting other people's infringements of copyright laws.” Simon tells us more...

**Words**  
Mark Asch

**What's your own filmmaking background? How did that affect your approach to the material, both in terms of technical storytelling and in terms of attitude?**

I never studied filmmaking—I went to law school. I was more interested in culture in general. I've always collected films and music; I grew up copying cassette tapes and VHS tapes, and when the internet came, I copied files. My interest in the topic comes from being brought up in the '80s and '90s—and also from being interested in power relations in society. So my filmmaking background is sorta DIY-ish, I learned by failing—a lot.

**What did you learn in making the film?**

Five years ago, I didn't own a smartphone, didn't have Facebook or Twitter, didn't know about crowdfunding. So, in making a film about changes in the digital landscape, I've learned a lot. The internet can be an amazing place to connect with your audiences. I've also learned that big corporations will crucify young innovators to keep old business models in place.

**A New Model**

**The film had an "internet premiere" and has more than 2.1 million views on YouTube, but you've also been bringing it to festivals all summer. What would you say is still important and irreplaceable about entering the film into public spaces in this way? From this can we draw any larger conclusions about the private/online mode of arts consumership?**

I never think that watching a downloaded .mpeg4 is a substitute for going to a cinema with a friend and experiencing the big sound and huge image with a room full of strangers. My film was certainly made for the big screen in terms of sound mastering and colour grading. And it's important to travel around the world and talk about your film. Even though we knew that, because of putting the film on YouTube under a Creative Commons license, a lot of festivals, and definitely

theatrical distributors, wouldn't touch us, we still thought it was symbolically important, to talk about the positives of file-sharing. I want to be a positive example for file-sharing. The film has been sold to six TV channels; it's been seen by four million people. It's a platform I wouldn't have had if not for presenting the film for free.

**And speaking of access. The film's website allows viewers to download a torrent of the film, to buy a digital copy for \$10 or pre-order a DVD, with additional footage for \$23. This is not dissimilar to Peter Sunde's Flattr, which allows people on the internet to make voluntary donations to artists they'd like to support. And of course your film was initially funded through Kickstarter. So, will a decentralised funding model ever fully replace the corporate/institutional model of the arts? Should it?**

I don't think it will replace that model. I think they'll merge and become something new. We shouldn't look for one solution for film funding. With my own film, for instance, Kickstarter financing was less than ten percent of the budget. But then again other films can be made with totally decentralised means, depending on the budget. Every film needs its own strategy. Now is a good time to experiment with funding and with audience relationships. The discussion should be about how we can create new tools that actually help filmmakers. So I used Kickstarter, I used Flattr, and I sell the film for download through VHX, which gives me a larger cut.

**Not Neutral**

**The film focuses a lot on the drama of the trial and the lives of the three Pirate Bay founders. Obviously we hear what they think about the ethics of file-sharing and copyright, but we also hear from prosecutors... To what extent do you see the film as making a sustained argument for file-sharing and copyright? Or to what extent is it neutral? Do you find that the film is changing people's minds?**

I hate films that pretend to be neutral. A lot of people have perceived this film as objective and neutral, but I don't think it's neutral at all. I tried to make it as subjective as possible by showing how their lives are ruined, economically ruined.

**In what ways would you say you differ, politically, from the Pirate Bay founders? You said in another interview that you didn't yourself vote for the Pirate Party in the last election...**

The three of them are very politically different, almost opposites—Peter's on the Left, Fredrik's on the Right, and Gottfrid's somewhere in the middle... I tried to vote for a party that's a little bit broader in its platform, even though I think they're doing a great thing in bringing up all these issues. In Sweden a few of the other parties have copied the Pirate Party's positions.

**Is there any element of the film that you're especially interested in sharing with an Icelandic audience?**

Very much indeed. Iceland is the first nation on Earth that has a Pirate Party in parliament; I'm a big fan of Birgitta Jónsdóttir and her work. The role that Iceland had in inviting WikiLeaks was very exciting. I'm obviously still following the Icelandic experiment in digital freedom, so it's going to be very interesting.

**What are you working on now?**

I'm working on this startup, linklib, which is a way for filmmakers to annotate their films and send it to audiences, on their phone. They can add comments, add links—they look like tweets—so you don't have to open up another window to start Googling all the references. I haven't decided on my next film yet; I'm still developing a couple ideas for my next documentary.

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## Critic's Picks

Five of RIFF's best titles, reviewed

By Mark Asch



Still from "Future my love"

### Future My Love

(Dir. Maja Borg)

Anglo-Swedish experimental filmmaker Borg is first seen hitchhiking with a sign that says, 'VENUS.' Her destination is the Florida redoubt of utopian futurist Jacques Fresco, a spry nonagenarian who preaches sustainable design, an end to the "monetary system," and a new society of technological abundance. Over a truly perplexing grab-bag of wonky interviews, obscure archival footage, images of industrial waste and urban alienation, and black-and-white 8mm footage of her muse Nadya Cazan, Borg's voiceover muses on society at the conceptual level and recounts a possibly real-life love affair. Like all utopians, Fresco believes in social engineering; in this loopy, lovely film, Borg muses on the rational future, and our irrational attachments to the past.

### The Missing Picture

(Dir. Rithy Panh)

The Paris-based Panh has made several documentaries about his native Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, whose regime Panh, unlike the rest of his family, survived. That backstory becomes the explicit focus of Panh's newest nonfiction film, even as his memories remain, by design, elusive. Superimposed over flickering archival footage or arranged in meticulous tableaux, hand-carved clay miniatures—hundreds of them—stand in for his family, Khmer Rouge soldiers, and fellow labour-camp internees in black-inked uniforms, the marks of the carving tool ever more defined in their ribcages. This account of a genocide takes on a daring beauty, giving Panh's lost family, and millions of others, a dignity in their victimhood.

### Mistaken For Strangers

(Dir. Tom Berninger)

Matt Berninger, lead singer for The National, writes moody, elliptical songs about the minor disappointments that add up to a life. Failure is also the subject of his younger brother Tom's documentary—though here failure is abject, visceral slapstick. Matt invites Tom to join the band's tour in support of 2010 com-

mercial breakthrough "High Violet," as a roadie-slash-fly-on-the-wall-documentarian. After he's fired for incompetence on both counts (actual interview question posed to drummer Bryan Devendorf: 'Have you—how many, like—how many, like, what kind of—if you've done drugs, how many drugs, what kind of drugs and how many drugs have you done?'), the film becomes a document of its, and Tom's, salvaging.

### Tom At The Farm

(Dir. Xavier Dolan)

For his fourth(!) feature, 24-year-old French-Canadian auteur Dolan adapted Michel Marc Bouchard's play. He also edited the film, and stars as city-mouse Tom, who travels to the dairy farm that was the childhood home of his closeted lover, Guy, dead at 25 for reasons never explicitly given. The atmosphere is damp and autumnal, a fog that never quite lifts, even as considerations of urban and rural life, and repressed and expressed sexuality, play out in Tom's just barely sexless dominant-submissive relationship with Guy's butch, homophobic brother. Motivations weaken as the third act goes psychodrama, but Dolan's direction is stylish, his little flourishes of virtuosity complicating but not compromising the tone of implication.

### Two Lovers

(2008, Dir. James Gray)

Gray and his new film 'The Immigrant' are honoured at RIFF, an excuse to screen his previous effort: a contemporary melodrama inspired by Dostoyevsky's 'White Nights,' starring Joaquin Phoenix, a miracle of innocent volatility as a man torn between his parents' hand-picked choice and the troubled goddess across the way (Gwyneth Paltrow). Gray's films are explicit in the manner of classic drama yet still multi-layered, and so richly shot—genre heirlooms rooted in three-dimensionally evoked, deeply unglamorous white-ethnic Brooklyn. Here, the Russian-Jewish community of Brighton Beach, with its gray, wet winds coming in off the ocean, and warm, smothering interiors, is a lifelike, ironic setting for drama that's never quite dreamy.

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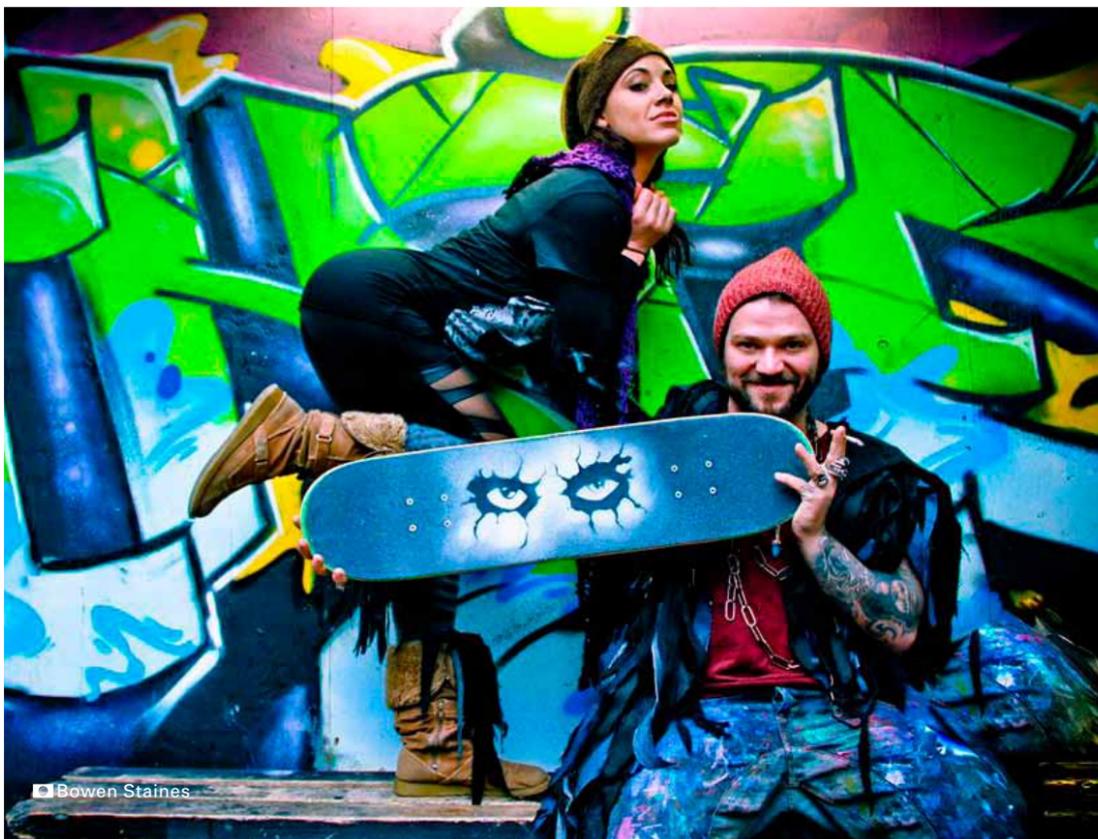


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Music | Festival

## Bam's 'Random Hero' Festival

Jackass star Bam Margera speaks about his upcoming wedding and all-new music festival to raise money for a quality skatepark in Reykjavík



### Random Hero Music Festival

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#### Words

Bowen Staines

Professional skateboarder, stuntman and star of MTV's Jackass, Bam Margera has had a very busy year, and it's not slowing down as he brings his trademarked brand of mischief and mayhem to Iceland in the form of a new music festival, to complement his marriage to long-time girlfriend Nikki Boyd on October 5.

Fresh off of touring Europe and the UK this summer with his band Fuckface Unstoppable (or FU, for short), Bam has spent the last month here in Reykjavík planning a fundraising concert in memory of his best friend and former Jackass co-star, Ryan Dunn a.k.a. 'Random Hero,' who sadly passed away in a motor vehicle accident in June 2011.

"After Ryan passed, I spent three years not really knowing what to do with myself. I started FU, and we've been touring loads, but I still think about that day like it was yesterday," Bam tells me over a coffee at Prikíð. "We were on tour in Europe last month, and only had Helsinki, Stockholm, and Oslo left to go, and I wanted to cancel the whole thing. Basically, I had a dream where I was slapped awake by Ryan, and he told me 'Get off your fat fucking ass, and do something.' It felt so real. When you're constantly in front of thousands of people, or surrounded by your entourage, sometimes there isn't a lot of time to think about where you're going."

After a moment, Bam recalls, "Then, it just hit me: I'm going to start a 'Random Hero' festival here in Iceland in Ryan's honour, every October 5th, and make it bigger and bigger as the years go on. This year, we've got Yelowolf playing, and all the proceeds from the festival will go to building a skatepark here in Reykjavík, since there isn't a proper outdoor park here and because it looks like they're ploughing this one down over here," Bam gestures out

the window towards the small, grass-roots, do-it-yourself skatepark on the now-off-limits property known as Hjartagarðurinn, or Heart Garden. Over the last year, artists, local

**"I just bought a place here... AND a car! I figured it was cheaper, since I practically had to buy the last car we rented here."**

musicians, and skateboarders have been locked in a perpetual battle with the City and Reginn, the largest private real estate firm in the country, in hopes of saving the square from destruction in order to make room for a new hotel. As of publishing, bulldozers and construction equipment have occupied the square, and have begun demolition.

"There's so much amazing art and culture at Heart Garden, and you'll never get that back. A lot of people don't seem to realise that," says Bam's fiancé, Nikki Boyd, who has joined us at the table. "Yeah, there's nothing more annoying than going to skate a ledge in front of a building, and getting in two tries before security comes out, then waiting for them to go back inside, just so you can get maybe one more try," Bam adds. "Just give them a skatepark! One that will last."

Bam is no stranger to skateboarding in Iceland. Downtown skate spots such as Ingólfstorg have appeared in

several of his films and video parts over the years, namely 'CKY2K' and 'Elementality.' Reflecting his personal brand of skating, the skatepark he plans to build will be far from run-of-the-mill. "I want a lot of weird-looking transitions, waves and bumps, and crazy art-sculpture obstacles. But I also want to keep it easy to skate," he says. "I don't want to go too overboard with the size. There's nothing worse than having some gnarly 18-foot transitions, when the park, as a whole, would be way better if they were only 8-feet. That's how it is at FDR Park in Philadelphia, my home park. Whenever people get cement to build things there, all the old-school hessians and gnardogs come out of the woodwork, wanting these insane 20-foot bowls. I don't understand that—the most that's ever gonna happen is that somebody's going to fakie-rock it, and then they're gonna call it a day!"

As we finish up, I ask if Icelanders can expect to see more of him and Nikki around town in the months to come. "Well," he says, "I just bought a place here... AND a car! I figured it was cheaper, since I practically had to buy the last car we rented here. I got arrested at the airport, and Hertz charged me \$7,000 dollars for damages because they thought I did it on purpose, when in reality, the car actually got sideswiped. No matter what I do, I'm doomed."



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## Album Reviews

### Nolo

Human  
2013  
<http://itsnolo.bandcamp.com>

A short but sweet LP of lo-fi earworms



### Words

John Rogers

**+** Prolific synth-pop duo Nolo have been quietly amassing a catalogue of self-recorded singles, EPs and albums since their formation in 2009. Their artist page on Gogoyoko shows no less than 21 releases, many of which are demos. Confronted with such a variety of stuff, it's hard to know where to start; but you could do worse than to choose 'Human,' their third LP. Released quietly on the band's Bandcamp earlier this year, these eight tracks clock in at a lean 25 minutes, including a remixed version of "Passion."

For anyone who's seen Nolo's current excellent live show, many of the songs will be familiar—the track list is something of a 'greatest hits,' packed with memorable tunes and no filler whatsoever. Opening with the Gary Numan-reminiscent "Burning Sand," 'Human' marks an '80s-inflected but decidedly contemporary alt-pop sound,

the soft keyboard washes propelled by unhurried drum-machine rhythms and topped with skittering lead guitar. They inhabit an interesting space somewhere between the pure '80s vocoder-and-effects schtick of retro bands like Chromeo, and the hazy, reverb-heavy acid-pop of Ariel Pink collaborator John Maus. But Nolo's songs have a mellow, languid, hook-laden quality all of its own.

There's no shortage of singles here: "Romeo" is an earworm that'll have you whistling along by the end of the first chorus. "Stuck On a Mind" is an effervescent standout, and "Steel" is an arch, atmospheric ballad. "Delicious" comes across like a forgotten lo-fi gem from a lost John Hughes movie soundtrack.

There's little doubt that Nolo will continue to pump out new material, and with songs as catchy as these, there'll be few complaints.

## Young Boys And The Movies

By Óli Dóri and Davíð Roach

Sin Fang's 'Flowers' is one of our favourite albums of the year and now one of its stand-out tracks, "Young Boys," has been remixed by none other than Jónsi from Sigur Rós. Of course Jónsi is quite familiar with the material since 'Flowers' was recorded at his own house and produced by his partner Alex Somers. He slows the song down and skips the chorus, piles on loads of echo on the tambourines and adds a hazy synth arpeggio that builds slowly throughout the song. It's a wonderful treatment, full of sonic details that tickle your eardrums.

Speaking of young boys, you should keep your ear open for underground beat-making from Tómas Davíð, a 19-year-old from Reykjavík who just released his first EP called '1,' under the name of Tonmo. The album consists of eight songs of fantastic chillwave-influenced hip-hop that Tonmo wrote and produced while living in Huntington Beach, California earlier this year. You can buy the album on Bandcamp for 4 USD and you can see him live on the decks with Lord Pu\$\$whip at Iceland Airwaves in November.

Before that though, you should catch the band Bleached from Los Angeles, who are touring Europe and will stop in Iceland, performing at Harlem on Thursday, October 17. Sisters Jennifer and Jessie Clavin blend vintage punk with sunny and melodic

Southern Californian rock on their enjoyable debut album, 'Ride Your Heart,' which came out earlier this year. Bleached will be supported by Icelandic hardcore outfit Muck and tickets are available at [www.midi.is](http://www.midi.is) and in Brim clothing stores.

Now, although we mainly think and write about music, we also like to go to the movies. Last week we attended a screening in Bió Paradís of 'Shut Up And Play The Hits,' a documentary about LCD Sound-system's infamous last show in Madison Square Garden. The concert footage alone was worth the entry, and although there won't be another screening we strongly recommend people get a hold of it, by any means necessary.

There are also some interesting music documentaries showing at the Reykjavík International Film Festival, which opened on September 26. We're excited to see 'Mistaken For Strangers' about indie band The National's world tour. It was made by the lead singer's brother who went with them as a roadie but instead spent most of his time filming his and the band's escapades. Reviews say that it's really funny and highly personal.



Straum.is has been active since last summer, with writers Óli Dóri and Davíð Roach documenting the local music scene and helping people discover the best new music. It is associated with the radio show Straumur on X977, which airs every Monday evening at 23:00.



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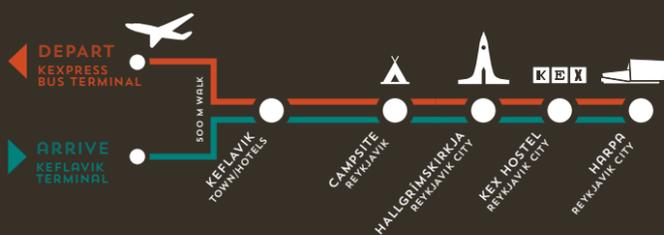
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Opinion | The Peace Tower

## No Yoko, No Yoko...

### An open letter to Yoko Ono



**Haukur Hilmarsson**  
works part time for the  
social service in Reykjavík



Dear Yoko, as my hometown hosts your artwork 'Imagine Peace Tower' and the 'Lennon-Ono Peace Awards' ceremony, I feel compelled to offer some constructive criticism.

I never liked militarism. At one point, when I was about 14, I was fascinated with the way you and John campaigned against it. Not anymore. You made a few good points, but I fear that many of your actions have critically skewed and ridiculed the subject and that they will continue to do so until you seriously rethink your entire approach.

Your official theories on the nature of conflict, which are wrong, have rendered your rhetoric uninformative and politically spineless. Ignoring Iceland's history, its local dissidents and peace-movement, you have given a number of heavily corrupted industrialists and officials a chance to clean up their image at the same time as you've reinforced and promoted some deplorable misconceptions regarding Icelandic society.

#### Peace and love

There are two kinds of peace: tranquillity and the absence of violence. Contrary to popular belief, they aren't necessarily connected. Their only common denominator is anti-militarism. Nothing else, not even a wish for world-peace.

Some are driven by their spiritual beliefs. There's nothing wrong with that, but for the sake of informed discourse, political directness and solidarity, one should refrain from making a personal belief system the focus-point of activism. In the documentary 'Imagine Peace' by Ari Alexander Ergis Magnússon, you describe today's major conflicts as a race between those who try to destroy the world and the others who try to cover the earth with love. This suggestion is useless, unfounded and oversimplified.

The physical reality of war can be independent of the participants' feelings. One may kill without anger or hate and spare lives without love or forgiveness. The one thing that's imperative to every conflict resolution is not love, but mercy—even when it's cold, tactical or reluctant.

All-out mercy is a political decision. To materialise (rather than imagine) that decision is the common goal of this movement, not unified spirituality. Imagine no religion—don't mystify the cause.

#### Upside down

An influential peace-activist should analyse the work of their collaborators before inviting them to pose as 'dreamers' in public ceremonies. In a 2010 interview with 'Inspired By Iceland' you explained that you found it logical to build the Peace Tower in Iceland. Besides and beyond the old 'green energy' hogwash, your reasoning was more profound.

"At the map," you explained, "Iceland is on the top, on the north. North is wisdom and power and the power of wisdom goes all the way down, it spreads [...]. [The

tower] communicates awareness to the whole world that peace and love is what connects all life on earth."

You concluded: "Thank you Iceland and Icelanders for being what you are—a family of wisdom."

I lack the words to share the way I felt when I heard this so I will instead try and deconstruct the idea that Iceland should be connected to environmentalism and peace.

Far from being renewable, Icelandic geothermal- and hydropower is being over-harvested for heavy industry throughout the highlands with a negative impact on their ecosystems and landscapes. Reykjavík Energy, which provides the Peace Tower with electricity, is at the forefront of this exploitation, selling power to international aluminium corporations, which in turn sell metal for arms manufacturing, which inevitably leads to ecocides, economic hits and murders.

As for the Icelandic state, it is a member of NATO and regularly hosts its extensive military exercises. It has no army, but was occupied in 1940 and has since resisted demilitarization. It deploys 'peace keepers' in Afghanistan who have claimed the lives of at least two unarmed citizens and supported the US invasion into Iraq.

#### No country

During October 5-9, 2007, the parliament hosted the annual meeting of the NATO congress with around 730 representatives attending. It was the biggest meeting it had ever hosted. On the 8th, a tiny group of protesters flashed a banner reading 'Check this Yoko' in hopes of bringing attention to the abstraction of inviting the hosts of conspiring warlords to sing 'Give Peace a Chance' in memory of your pacifist husband on the Peace Tower's grand opening the following night.

Your ceremony completely overshadowed the war-conference that preceded it and put Reykjavík on the map as an assemblage point for pacifism. It bugs me to witness this absurdity and be unable to do anything about it.

Others feel differently. During the 2009 InDefence campaign (of nationalists outraged by British use of anti-terrorist legislations during Iceland's financial meltdown), several photos of the tower were sent to British Prime Minister Gordon Brown to demonstrate the non-terrorist nature of the Icelandic people.

In early 2008, the Office of the Prime Minister published an extensive report on

the image of Iceland, suggesting ways to shape and promote a suitable image to attract tourists, encourage investment and maintain respect in international politics. Its main finding was that the words "peace," "strength" and "freedom" were to be the pillars of Iceland's image. To promote this idea internationally, government-funded campaigns like Promote Iceland's Inspired By Iceland were started.

Thus, the Peace Tower reflects Icelandic nationalism the way it is understood, practiced and sold today. Lacking all record of resistance, unity or achievements, this ideology seeks to portray the nation as cute rather than mighty and capitalises on values like peace despite its voluntary affiliation with some of the deadliest campaigns and unions of modern history.

#### Give peace a chance

It's a lot to ask. To show mercy regardless of a situation must take a most painful self-restraint. I wouldn't expect it of war-torn people. I wouldn't expect it of you.

Yes, John was shot down like a victim of war and I cannot imagine the pain. The pain people must face to give peace a chance. I sympathise with any resentment for Mark David Chapman. But I also know that based on what he saw as God's will, he ignored his defence lawyers, refused to defend himself and read a passage from 'The Catcher in the Rye' during his court case. He is insane and 32 years later, he's still in prison; a pit of demoralisation and physical violence, hell-bent on destroying its subjects. Seven times he's been denied parole, partly because of your objections.

Peace is mercy materialised and here lies your most challenging opportunity to confront violence, not for a moral high-ground but for a less brutal conclusion of a war that is real in matter as in spirit. For Mark, and the world, it would set an example far more relevant than claiming that your love is limitless and unconditional. I respectfully suggest that you call for his release or transfer to a mental facility.

I also urge you to publicly deconstruct the myths that surround Iceland's image that you've helped to spread. At last I ask you, not out of contempt, but concern, to turn off the Peace Tower. To rid Iceland of this false testament to its moral superiority that is built on folly and error in memory of a man who will never be forgotten.

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# Delicious Feet

Get your toes sucked on at Fish Spa

□ Magnús Andersen

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Some people find it disgusting to be licked by animals. I am not one of them. I am a disgusting person who loves it when cute animals give me big wet kisses. Like most folks around town, I had never heard of a fish pedicure (or any other piscine spa treatment) before noticing Fish Spa Iceland on the corner of Hverfisgata and Barónsstígur earlier this summer. Fish Spa's owner, Hallgrímur Andri Ingvarsson, was first exposed to the treatment back in 2012, when he got a fish pedicure while on vacation, and it sparked an idea for enterprise.

#### Words

Rebecca Louder

"I've always been passionate about natural, healthy living," says the 28-year-old business school graduate, who has previously worked in the dietary supplement and fitness fields. "Having these fish eat the skin off your feet is the most natural way possible to get a pedicure." These would be Garra Rufa fish, also known as doctor fish, a very small breed of carp that originate from river basins in the Northern and Central Middle East. Garra Rufa are toothless but have incredible suction power to slough the algae off of rocks for sustenance.

#### A License To Nibble

As it turns out, dead skin cells are also tasty food for these cute little whiskered fish, something that river-bathers in the Garra rufa's native region discovered around the late 19th Century. Those locals have enjoyed natural skin-smoothing treatments thanks to the fish since then. It was more recently discovered that as the fish give their little nibbly kisses, they leave an enzyme on the skin called Dithranol, which helps skin cell regeneration. The result is super smooth tootsies for days.

Since the first fish spas opened in the mid-naughties in Japan and Croatia, Turkey has enacted laws protecting Garra rufa from commercial exploitation, but spas and breeders continue to spring up all over Europe. (Fish Spa Iceland imported its own 1,000-fish school from the Netherlands.)

However, fish spas have been outright banned in many states and provinces across North America due to hygiene concerns. "Sanitation and hygiene is always important in every spa, and we take it very seriously," Hallgrímur says, refuting claims that the practice is all-around unsanitary. He adds that the spa took two years to open its doors because the Public Health Board and the Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority had to carve out new categories for quality assurance of their operation. "This was completely new to them, so it took a while

for them to figure out how to fit us into their regulations," he says.

#### Like vibrating pillows

It's all turned out well though. The spa now proudly offers four pedicure tanks to sink your feet into. Each one contains 100 litres of water and approximately 200 Garra Rufa. The spa also plans to offer manicures soon enough, as many of Hallgrímur's cross-fit training friends have corns all over the palms of their hands. The water is continuously sterilised by UV ray filtering and the tanks are separated to avoid any cross-contamination. What's more, you can't just hop in there fresh out of the sock.

As Hallgrímur led me into the main pedicure area of the spa—a beautiful calm space with high ceilings and flooded with natural light—the spa's technician Gabriel followed carrying a pair of pristine white plastic slippers. He placed them next to a foot-rinsing station, where he directed me to scrub both my feet under clear water, then spray them with a sterilising gel, and then rinse my feet off again. I then stepped into the white slippers and shuffled over to the tank, climbed a little step, took a seat and dunked in my legs.

After the initial fifteen seconds that the extremely ticklish probably could not handle, the feeling settled into a soft vibration similar to having your foot right up against a hot tub jet. Looking away for a few minutes or closing my eyes, it was easy to forget that those were fish down there, foraging the skin between my toes, but one look down and I was awash with giddiness.

Twenty minutes later my feet were the smoothest they've felt in months and every step felt like I was walking on a vibrating pillow. I would go back in a heartbeat because hey, I'm a sucker for cute animals. Especially when the cute animals are toe suckers.



© Magnus Andersen

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LINE.

# Three Years Ago



Hooray! We turned ten this year. For a humble street rag like Grapevine, turning ten is a pretty big deal—we barely expected to make it to ten issues (and, indeed, all of our contemporaries from the Reykjavík's street rag market have long since bid farewell... miss u, Undirtónar!).

To celebrate our decade of existence, we thought we'd get a little introspective and reprint some choice articles from the past that are for some reason significant, accompanied by commentary and even updates. Call it a "blast from the past" or "a look into the dark cauldron of time" if you want to—we call it fun.

Thus, for ten issues, expect a page dedicated to a year of Grapevine's existence, starting one issue ago, with a look back into magical 2003.

This issue is a look at 2010, Haukur S. Magnússon's second year as editor. Read on from some reflections from the man!



## Remembering 2010

— By Haukur S. Magnússon

land's Post-Crash Sale – 30% OFF!" the article is a thorough investigation of how the economic collapse had affected the cost of living on the island that collects and contextualizes widely available information that local journals had refrained from reporting on. Anna's first feature article appeared in issue sixteen, when she had graduated to the post of full time journalist." The Watchdog That Didn't Bark" lambastes the Icelandic media for its ignorance and complacency leading up to the collapse, and remains an excellent read.

Issue four of 2010 makes for an interesting read for several reasons. Many of its articles are sprinkled with references to "a tourist eruption," as—at the time of publication—a small volcanic eruption had started happening by some glacier called Eyjafjallajökull. Volcanologist James Ashworth contributed an article that basically explained that we had no idea what was going on, while A. Rawling's review of Peaches concert at NASA was loaded with volcano references (fun fact: the volcano started erupting the night of that concert). It seemed harmless and exciting at the time, a small, nicely contained volcanic eruption that would hopefully serve to lure a few tourists to the country. Little did we know.

That issue also marked the publication of one of Grapevine's most widely read articles, a gargantuan interview with musicians Nico Muhly and Jónsi of Sigur Rós, who had just collaborated on the latter's first solo album. Conducted in Reykjavík's now sadly defunct secret gay leather bar with the help of two bottles of champagne, to a soundtrack of deep-house and gay porn moaning, Jónsi and Nico's conversation is delightful to read, and contains many golden quotes ("Nico and Jónsi GO ALL IN!"—Issue 4, 2010).

By issue five, the Eyjafjallajökull eruption had transformed to a giant clusterfuck that severely disrupted air travel all over the world and had drunk Scotsmen proclaiming loudly on global news networks that they hated Iceland. Still,

human lives were never really in danger, and in an attempt to cheer people up and draw attention to the good things that were happening with a cover that announced: "SUNNY SIDE UP!"(MAYBE USE COVER OF ISSUE 5 HERE).

Our main eruption article, again by volcanologist James Ashworth, gleefully asked: "WHO'S LAUGHING NOW, EUROPE?" We had some nice eruption pictures spread through the issue, but the most important story of the month as far as we were concerned was the publication of the SIC report, where the reasons for the economic collapse were outlined and examined. The report was a gargantuan one, and we did our best to report its findings and Icelanders' feelings about them, even asking philosopher Vilhjálmur Árnason (who oversaw the report's chapter on ethics) whether Icelanders were an "inherently immoral nation" (the answer: mayyyyybe?). The SIC report was an impressive feat, and it bears remembering. English speakers interested in the reports findings are advised to read over our feature about it for a hint or two.

It was a pretty eventful time, all in all. Issue six saw two courses of events start to unfold that would eventually turn into some of 2010's most pertinent news-stories. The first appeared in the form of a short note from singer Björk Guðmundsdóttir, where she challenged "the government of Iceland to do everything in its power to revoke the contracts with Magma Energy that entitle the Canadian firm complete ownership of HS Orka." This marked the beginning of Björk's very public war against the selling off of Iceland's nature, which we reported in detail. The rest of 2010 saw Björk—among other things—engage in a spirited exchange of words with Magma CEO Ross Beaty through Grapevine's website, organizing a karaoke marathon at the Nordic House in support of the cause and talking about her passion for nature preservation among other things in an exclusive feature interview with Grapevine (see for instance issue 10, "Björk Speaks Up

On Magma Again," issue 11, "Postcards From The Edge," "Grand Old Aunt Björk" and issue 12, "An Army Of Us")

The other story is that of how comedian Jón Gnarr managed to become the mayor of Iceland's only proper city through a campaign that was initially written off as a poorly thought out joke. It could be argued that Grapevine's feature interview with Jón in issue six ("What Are You Voting For, Reykjavík?") was the media's first attempt to go beyond the joke and take Jón's campaign seriously—indeed, it was considered so revelatory at the time that someone even went to the trouble of translating it to Icelandic for further dissemination among non-English speakers. In the interview, Jón explains where he's coming from, expresses his disdain for most if not all of Iceland's institutions ("They are all dead.") and calls for cultural revolution. We interviewed Jón again after he had won (issue 7, "He Really Did It") and a few issues later we debuted the mayor's "WELCOME TO REYKJAVÍK" address to tourists, which made its way around the world a few times over as word started spreading about Iceland's comedian mayor.

Three years after his joke campaign, Jón Gnarr remains mayor, and his Best Party is currently the highest polling party in Reykjavík. Time will tell if Jón will run again for mayor in the coming municipal elections, and whether his bid will be successful, but in the meantime it's safe to say the comedian pulled off one hell of a joke while appearing more sensible than most career politicians can ever hope to be.

Stuff kept happening through the year, most notably a continuation of the horrid Icesave dispute and the Constitutional Assembly election, which we reported on at length. It's all there, on-line, if you're interested.

What you are reading is an instalment to a series of articles celebrating each of Grapevine's ten years of existence. As the magazine's tribute to itself inches closer to present day, it might seem absurd to spend precious time and pages reminiscing about something that happened only three years ago. However, as this spring's parliamentary elections revealed, Icelanders have maybe never been very good at remembering their immediate past or taking particular lessons from it (this also becomes evident reading through this issue's 'FIVE YEAR COLLAPSE ANNIVERSARY' articles).

Reading through the eighteen Grapevines published in 2010, one can learn a whole lot about some of the issues we faced at the time, many of which remain unresolved and continue to haunt us. In

2010, the collapse was still a fresh wound; financial vultures circled the island hoping to make a deal (or steal), as its tiny nation attempted to come to terms with WTF had happened through the SIC report and a constant exchange of ideas. A clown became mayor, a volcano erupted, a tourism initiative was launched and a whole lot of concerts were staged.

It was, mostly, a rather good year. The magazine got a notable addition to its writing staff in February of 2010, when a young student called Anna Andersen signed on for a three-month internship. Anna quickly proved herself a skilled and attentive writer—so much in fact that she's currently Grapevine's editor. Her first article was published in March, and it was certainly an indicator of the good things to come. Entitled "Ice-

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**STUFFED WITH STUFF**

Issue 14

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**P.6**

“But Iceland is the only debt-ridden nation that has had an answer to the question: why did the banks fail? This impertinent question was answered quite thoroughly in a 2,600 page report published in April 2010 by the Special Investigative Commission (SIC) set up by Alþingi, the Icelandic Parliament.”

**Sigrún Davíðsdóttir takes a trip down memory lane to the kreppe and its aftermath**



**P.8**

“Most dramatically a French couple had to flee their rental car after flying pebbles broke their side windows, leaving them exposed to the full force of windassholery. In pictures, their car looks like it has been sanded down.”

**Sandstorms are sweeping the nation! Cue the Darude song**



**P.10**

“When third party negotiators are involved, they generally ask for higher salaries for men than they do for women. I feel this is the root of this problem, that women’s work is evaluated as being worth less than men’s work.”

**Getting to the root of Iceland’s gendered wage gap year.**



**P.34**

“With the continued melting of glaciers due to climate change, one might be inclined to see the boat as a metaphor for the huge meltdown, for the heavy burden we all have to carry, but that is of course just one possible interpretation.”

**Two dudes carried a boat across the Alps and are calling it art**



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ADVERTISING



## Sweet Notes And Soft Tunes Oyama, Mammút & Pétur Ben

*Gamli Gaukurinn | October 10 | 22:00 | 1,000 ISK*

As the other denizens of Reykjavík prepare to slow their metabolism and conserve their energy, Oyama are waking up from their summer of hibernation and unveiling some new tunes. Gamli Gaukurinn is, of course, their venue of choice to test the waters with this new material, but they do not tread alone. Joining these seasoned rockers are the melancholic but mesmerising Mammút, and the warm-hearted and magical Pétur Ben. It's a night of super performers putting on stellar performances. So cough up that thousand-krónur bill, and treat yourself. Winter is coming, after all. **TGB**

# MUSIC

## CONCERTS & NIGHTLIFE

September 27 -  
October 10

How to use the listings: Venues are listed alphabetically by day. For complete listings and detailed information on venues visit [www.grapevine.is](http://www.grapevine.is) Send us your listings: [listings@grapevine.is](mailto:listings@grapevine.is)

### Friday September 27

**Boston**  
22:00 DJ KGB  
**Café Rosenberg**  
21:00 Vocalist's Song Jam  
**Den Danske Kro**  
20:30 Troubadours Ingi Valur / Biggi  
**Dillon**  
22:00 DJ Andrea  
**Dolly**  
22:00 DJ Benni B-Ruff / B2B / KGB  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadours Raggi / Biggi & Maggi / Hjálmar & Dagur  
**Gamli Gaukurinn**  
22:00 DJ Elevator's Electro Swing  
**Night Harlem**  
22:00 Techno Night: Bitte Schön #3  
**Hressó**  
22:00 DJ Kongó  
**Kaffibarinn**  
22:00 DJ Kári  
**Lebowski Bar**  
22:00 DJ ANNA B.  
**Prikið**  
22:00 Long Happy Hour & Moonshine  
**Thorvaldsen**  
22:00 DJ Jón Gestur

### Saturday September 28

**Boston**  
22:00 DJ Unnur Andréa  
**Café Rosenberg**  
21:00 KK & Maggi  
**Den Danske Kro**  
21:00 Troubadours Andri / Hreimsborgarar  
**Dillon**  
22:00 KLIKK / MASS / ARIA LAMIA / DJ Andrea  
**Dolly**  
22:00 DJ Kárius / B2B / DJ Kári  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadours Einar A / Biggi & Co  
**Harlem**  
22:00 Techno Party: BORG 013 x  
**Hressó**  
21:00 Gunni Óla's Rock Quartet / VJ Fúzi  
**Kaffibarinn**  
21:00 Maggi Legó  
**Lebowski Bar**  
22:00 DJ Rúndrés  
**Prikið**  
22:00 Logi Pedro & Benni B-Ruff  
**Thorvaldsen**  
22:00 DJ Jón Gestur

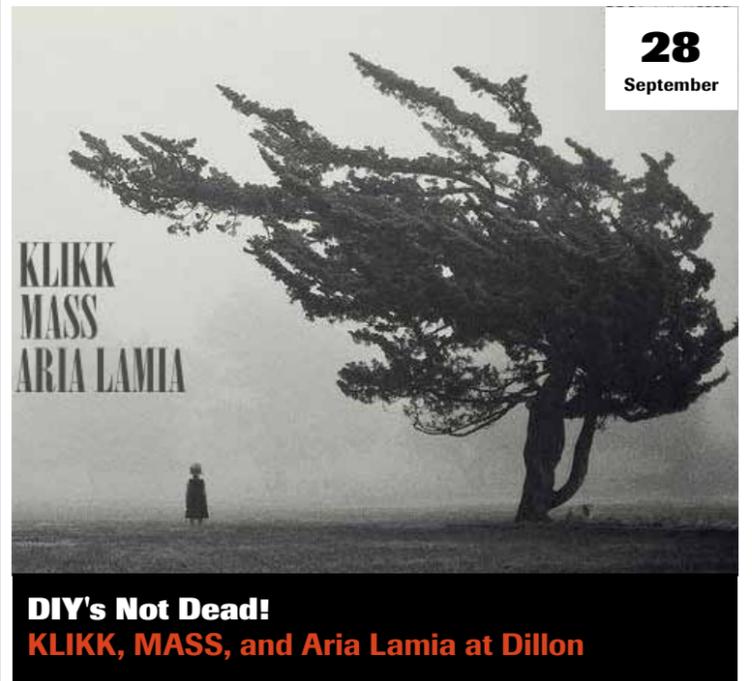
### Sunday September 29

**Den Danske Kro**  
22:00 Troubadour Tryggvi  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadour Addi  
**Harpa**  
19:30 Chamber Music Society Play  
Three String Quartets  
**Kaffibarinn**  
21:00 Party: FknSunday #1  
**Lebowski Bar**  
22:00 Troubadour Haraldur Einars

### Monday September 30

**Café Rosenberg**  
21:00 Troubadour Sveinbjörn  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadour Ingi Valur

28  
September



**DIY's Not Dead!**  
**KLIKK, MASS, and Aria Lamia at Dillon**

Dillon | 22:00 | Free!

Noisy, dirty, intense. This is how you could describe the music offered at this event. Prepare yourself for some good old DIY chaos! The hardcore punkers of KLIKK, as well as noise masterminds MASS, are going to be supported by the misanthropic punk band Aria Lamia. Their band members also play in the darkened hardcore and black metal bands Logn, Norn and Carpe Noctem and they just returned from a European tour – but big surprise: it's their first ever show in Iceland! Scream until you're hoarse, bang your head and fuck it up. **JK**



**Grassroots With Your Root Beer**  
**Tónleikur Grassroots Music**

Loft Hostel | October 3 & 10, 20:00 | Free!

Grassroots step into the limelight at Loft Hostel for two Thursdays in a row. The musicians will play a variety of music, some of which you may expect to hate, but will be surprised to love. The newly-minted bands may currently be unknown, but make no mistake; there is a Jónsi, Emilíana Torrini and Lay Low in the mix just waiting to be discovered. If you show up early, you can also catch Loft's wonderful happy hour and ferment with some bubbly wine on the forty-square-foot balcony before the bubbling artists start their show. **TGB**

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**Lebowski Bar**  
22:00 DJ AB  
**Loft Hostel**  
20:30 Piper Hayes (US)

**Tuesday October 1**

**Café Rosenberg**  
21:00 Róbert The Roomate  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadour Tryggvi  
**Gamli Gaukurinn**  
21:00 Amateur Night  
**KEX Hostel**  
20:30 KEXJazz

**Wednesday October 2**

**Dolly**  
22:00 BlazeSessh Vol.12  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadours Hjálmar & Dagur  
**Gamli Gaukurinn**  
21:00 Unplugged Night

**Thursday October 3**

**Café Rosenberg**  
21:00 Flamingo  
**Dolly**  
22:00 DJ Sura Guilty Pleasure Vol.15  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadour Eypór Ingi  
**Gamli Gaukurinn**  
21:00 Funk Night  
**Hressó**  
21:00 DJ Katla  
**Loft Hostel**  
20:00 Tónleikur Grassroots Music

**Friday October 4**

**Café Rosenberg**  
21:00 Kristína Stefáns & Guests  
**Dillon**  
22:00 DJ Andrea  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadours Raggi / Hjálmar & Dagur  
**Harlem**  
22:00 DJ Jón & DJ Steindór  
**Harpa**  
20:00 Moscow Virtuosi  
**Thorvaldsen**  
22:00 DJ Jón Gestur

**Saturday October 5**

**Café Rosenberg**  
21:00 Ómar Diðriks & Sveitasynir  
**Dillon**  
22:00 DJ Andrea  
**Dolly**  
22:00 DJ Plan B  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadours Raggi / Tryggvi & Ingi Valur  
**Gamli Gaukurinn**  
22:00 Tvö Dónaleg Haust  
**Harlem**  
22:00 Rix, BenSol, Steven Engelmann (DE)  
**Hressó**  
21:00 Babies  
**Thorvaldsen**  
22:00 DJ Jón Gestur

**Sunday October 6**

**Dolly**  
22:00 Old School House: DJ Margeir / DJ Frimann / DJ Grétar / DJ Andrés  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadour Danni

**Monday October 7**

**Café Rosenberg**  
21:00 Blúsfélagið  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadour Raggi

**Tuesday October 8**

**Café Rosenberg**  
21:00 Sam Sam  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadour Ingi Valur  
**KEX Hostel**  
20:30 KEXJazz

**Wednesday October 9**

**Café Rosenberg**  
21:00 Sigga Eyr  
**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadour Biggi  
**Stúdentakjallarinn**  
20:00 Jamsession FÍH – Join In With The Jam

**Thursday October 10**

**English Pub**  
22:00 Troubadours Danni & Jon  
**Gamli Gaukurinn**  
22:00 Oyama / Mammút / Pétur Ben  
**Hressó**  
20:00 Battle of the Icelandic Bands  
**Loft Hostel**  
20:00 Tónleikur Grassroots Music



**Return Of The Rockopalypse**  
**Rokkjöttnar II**

Kaplakriki, Hafnarfjörður | 13:00 - 23:00 | 5,999 ISK

Last year two thousand rockers made their way to the Kaplakriki sports centre to headbang their noggins out of their sockets. This year, the organisers are hoping to completely demolish the building with a whole day of heavy rock. The ten band lineup includes Strigaskór Nr. 42, Ophidian I, The Vintage Caravan, Agent Fresco, and Bubbi Morthens, the last of whom has not played anything that even resembles rock for decades. Fortunately, Bubbi has partnered up with an all-star band, so we can hopefully expect a throwback to his rock-infused days in Egó and Utangarðsmenn. It's a bit of a trek from 101 Reykjavík, but it's a great opportunity to quench your thirst for rock and fucking roll! TGB



**My Bratwurst Has A First Name**  
**Oktoberfest**

KEX Hostel | October 3-5 | Free! (Except for food)

Pretzels, schnitzel, schweinehaxe, sauerkraut, Maß jugs of beer... just the mention of these had our German intern, Jonas (pictured above on the childhood body of Rainier Wolfcastle), burying his face in his palms. "I escaped Germany to get away from all this!" he lamented. But we don't believe him one bit – his bratwurst has a second name and it's K-E-X-H-O-S-T-E-L! We're certain he'll be at their Bavarian Biergarten for the whole three days, yodelling along and dancing around in his Lederhosen to the blasmusik of München-natives Claus and Andreas. Go join him to celebrate the best festival from Deutschland since the Love Parade got cancelled for good. RL



**Revolution In Photography**  
**Alexander Rodchenko Retrospective**

Kjarvalsstaðir | Oct. 5 - January 12, 2014 | 1,200 ISK

Alexander Rodchenko was convinced of the power of photography and strove to make people see it as an art form. Through his pictures, he wanted people to see the world with new eyes, which you will have the rare opportunity to do at Kjarvalsstaðir. On October 6 at 15:00, Icelandic Academy of the Arts professor, Guðmundur Oddur Magnússon (aka Goddur), will give a seminar on the works of Rodchenko at the gallery. Come take advantage of this rare opportunity to see and hear about a unique artist. KL



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# ART

## OPENINGS AND ONGOING

September 27 -  
October 10

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### Opening

#### ASÍ Art Museum

October 5

##### Surrounding A Deep Fjord

Guðbjörg Lind Jónsdóttir and Hjörtur Marteinnsson put on a mixed media exhibit that overtakes the whole gallery. It features landscape paintings, a skeletal spinal column sculpture, and an arctic tern sitting on a cloud.

Runs until October 27

#### Hverfisgalleri

September 28

This is the first posthumous exhibition of Georg Guðni's works. The exhibition features a series of oil on canvas landscape paintings that have not been shown before in Iceland.

Runs until November 2

#### Icelandic Printmaker's Association

September 28

##### Fuglar Og Fífur

Erna Guðmundsdóttir opens up a new exhibition called 'Birds And Sedges,' which features colourful paintings of a variety of avians, as well as fauna.

Runs until October 13

#### Loft Hostel

October 21, 21:00

The storyteller Ismael Velasco returns from his trip to Greenland. On his way back home, he delivers his scintillating performance "The Life And Almost Death Of Riley."

#### Reykjavik Art Gallery

September 28

##### Collective Artist Exhibition

Fifteen Icelandic artists are displaying their works in this eclectic show.

Runs until October 12

#### Reykjavik Art Museum - Kjarvalsstaðir

October 5

##### Inside Alexander Rodchenko

Numerous photographs taken by one of the most important Russian artists of the early 20th century will be exhibited. Curator is Olga Sviblova

Runs until January 12

October 5

##### Jóhannes Kjarval By The Banks

In this exhibition, several artworks created by the museum's namesake, Jóhannes Kjarval, will be displayed. Since many of the paintings are privately owned, this will be the first time they'll all be visible in one place.

Runs until January 26

### Ongoing

#### Árbær Museum

A guided tour in English through this open air museum, which consists of twenty buildings happens daily at 13:00. Admission 1,100 ISK.

On permanent view

#### The Culture House

##### Medieval Manuscripts, Eddas, and Sagas

It includes principal medieval manuscripts, such as Codices Regii of the Poetic Edda, Prose Edda, law codices and Christian works, not forgetting the Icelandic Sagas.

On permanent view

##### Child of Hope - Youth and Jón Sigurðsson

Exploring the life of Icelandic national hero Jón Sigurðsson, made especially accessible to children, families and school groups.

On permanent view

##### Millennium - Phase One

A selection of pieces from the collection of the National Gallery, including a variety of works by Icelandic artists in the last two centuries.

On permanent view

##### The Library Room

The old reading room of the National



### Differences And Similarities

#### Anna Hallin - Interplay

Ásmundarsafn | Sept. 21 - January 5, 2014 | 1,200 ISK

In this exhibition, Swedish-Icelandic artist Anna Hallin explores the threads that form so many connections in the history of art - between different countries, cultures and periods, and between one artist and another. The interplay between her own works and the ones of the museum's namesake, Ásmundur Sveinsson (1893-1982), is the primary focus. The exhibition includes sculptures by Anna, as well as drawings and an installation, which interact with the building that Ásmundur constructed and now houses his own collected works. Come on in and find out about the differences and the similarities between these two artists. JK

Library displays books of Icelandic cultural history dating from the 16th century to the present day.

On permanent view

#### Eiðissker

##### Rembingur

Haraldur Sigmundsson has an exhibit of 14 pieces about Iceland's national macho pride.

Runs until October 4

#### The Einar Jónsson Museum

The museum contains close to 300 artworks including a beautiful garden with 26 bronze casts of the artist's works

On permanent view

#### Galleri Ófeigur

##### UPPÍMÓTI

An exhibit by Gugga, two years in the works. She uses oil and canvas to explore the magnitude of Icelandic waterfalls.

On permanent view

#### Gallery Sign (Skilti)

##### Skirt

Alison Willoughby displays a new photographic work on the cultural iconography of the British Kebab Shop.

Runs until December 20

#### i8 Gallery

##### Works on Paper

Thirty artists explore the medium of paper conceptually and literally as both a subject and/or object.

Runs until October 12

#### The Icelandic Phallogical Museum

The museum contains a collection of more than two hundred and fifteen penises and penile parts belonging to almost all the land and sea mammals that can be found in Iceland.

On permanent view

#### Knitting Iceland

Whether you are a beginner or pro, you can come knit at Laugavegur 25, 3rd floor, every Thursday, 14:00 - 18:00.

Ongoing

#### The Living Art Museum -

##### Nýlistasafnið

##### Embracing Impermanence

Works from the museum's collection will be presented alongside recent works by emerging artists. Works deal with impermanence and durability.

Runs until December 1

#### Latin Dance Studio, Faxafen 12

##### Guided Practica

Argentine tango, Sundays from 17:30-19:30. Register by phone 821 6929 or email [tangoadventure@gmail.com](mailto:tangoadventure@gmail.com), 500 ISK for students, 800 ISK for others. Six-week courses are also available.

On permanent view

#### Listamenn Galleri

##### Óvissulögmaðið

In Jón Axel Björnsson's "The Law Of Uncertainty," he showcases the potential of water paintings. Jón

Axel uses large canvases to project questions about the human condition.

Runs until October 5

#### Museum of Design and Applied Art

##### Chance Encounters - Toward Modernity In Iceland Design

The exhibit focuses on the introduction of modernism in Icelandic domestic interiors from the 1930s to the 1980s. It will feature well-known designs that have emerged from the modernist movement of the 20th century and made their way to Iceland.

Runs until October 13

#### Mokka Kaffi

##### Hakur Dór

Fifty years ago in the beginning of September, artist Haukur Dór opened his first exhibition at Mokka in 1963, now his paintings are coming full circle.

Runs until October 17

#### The National Gallery

##### Ups And Downs

This exhibition explores the career of Dutch artist Kees Visser, which has been closely linked to the evolution of Icelandic art in the 1970s and 80s.

Runs until October 27

##### Passage 2011

In 2011, the artists Thomas Huber and Wolfgang Aichner pulled a red boat over the approximately 3,000 meters high Neveßattel pass in the Zillertal Alps down to Italy, on the other side. The vessel and the documentation of the journey will be on display at The National Gallery.

Runs until October 27

#### The National Museum

##### The Making Of A Nation - Heritage and History in Iceland

This exhibition is intended to provide insight into the history of the Icelandic nation from the Settlement to the present day.

On permanent view

##### Icelandic Silverwork

Various silver items that have been made in Iceland over the last 150 years. A Part-Time Silver Smith, a separate exhibition, will run simultaneously and display a silversmith's workshop from the turn of the century.

Runs until December 31

##### Sigfús Eymundsson Photography

A pioneer of Icelandic photography, an exhibit that taps into the cultural heritage of Iceland.

Runs until January 2014

#### Nordic House

##### Heroes

This exhibition by Julie Edel Hardenberg is about the lack of Greenlandic actors and films. She wants to draw an imaginative picture of a world full of Greenlandic "heroes." Since she was born in Nuuk in 1971, she has a personal interest in this topic.

Runs until October 6

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[www.aurorareykjavik.is](http://www.aurorareykjavik.is)



The REYKJAVÍK GRAPEVINE

# IN YOUR POCKET

WHAT'S INSIDE | Reykjavík Map | Happy Hour Guide | Places We Like | Best Of Reykjavík | Practical Info

Reykjavík

September 27 - October 10

Keep it in your pocket

## Two Weeks

The Grapevine picks the events, places and what to experience in the next two weeks

14-29  
SEPTEMBER

Projections Of Nature  
Connected To Earth



Until Oct. 27 **PASSAGE 2011** In 2011, two German artists Thomas Huber and Wolfgang Aichner pulled a red boat over an elevation of 3000 meters in the Zillertal Alps down to Italy. The boat, and documentation of the journey, are on display at The National Gallery after premiering at the Venice Biennale festival.

Every Day **TROUBADOUR ALARM!** As you might have noticed, Reykjavík is a paradise for Troubadours and their profession as well. **Almost every bar** supports these folks. You might not have seen them all yet.

Every Friday & Saturday 23:00 **ROCK THIS WAY** Are you fed up of the same pop tunes playing in 101 Reykjavík, but don't feel like going to a gig? Head on over to **Dillon** you're your friends, enjoy a few pints, and let **DJ Andrea** guide you through the magical wonderland of rock and roll.

October 21 **LECTURE: "THE LIFE AND ALMOST DEATH OF RILEY"** Back from his trip to Greenland, storyteller **Ismael Velasco** delivers this stunning performance at **Loft Hostel**. Come on in, listen to his stories and ask yourself the basic questions about life. And death, of course. Free entry!

Exhibition On Snæfellsjökull  
Gallerí Fold

Free!

French-born, 'Land Art' artist Anne Herzog will be showing experimental paintings of the volcano Snæfellsjökull, made mostly from wax. Anne is inspired by nature in both projection as well as material use, often using elements found in the wilderness to evoke natural mysticism in her work. Anne has spent three years focused on creating work around Snæfellsjökull in an attempt to place it at the center of the earth. **AB**

October 9 **JAMSESSION FÍH** Everyone is invited to take place in this multi-instrumentalist jam session at **Stúdentakjallarinn**. Come on in, bring your guitars, your synths or whatever you'd like to play and have a great time while being a part of this crazy event.

October 4 - II **DEAD NAKED CLOWNS!** If you are afraid of clowns, you should head over to **Gallerí Fold!** Paintings of naked and very dead clowns litter the gallery, but don't go to the opening night unless you want to see still living, but naked, specimen.

October 7 21:00 **GET YO BLUES ON** Do you have a case of the autumn blues? Don't feel bad, just head over to **Café Rosenberg** to see Blúsfélagið perform songs about slow moving locomotives, and know that you are not alone in watching the leaves fall gently.

October 8 20:00 **FUSSBALL TOURNAMENT** Are you an expert at turning knobs and making small soccer figurines kick an even smaller ball into something that passes for a goal? Then head over to **Loft Hostel** and see if you can win the tourney! Winners get paid in cash and beer, and a ticket to the international finals.

28

SEPTEMBER

The Ultimate Challenge  
Sheer Beauty



'Into The Mind' Film Premiere  
Bío Paradís 20:00  
From 2,200 ISK

Blurring the line between dream state and reality, 'Into The Mind' will let you look into the psyche of a skier who has accepted a lofty challenge - to climb and ski the ultimate mountain. Through astonishing photography, you will be taken on a journey around the globe, from Alaska to Bolivia, Switzerland, Nepal and Costa Rica. But 'Into The Mind' also poses philosophical questions about what it is that inspires us to overcome life's obstacle and what we learn along the way. The result is both visually stunning and moving. Grab a ticket for this one-off special event on [midi.is](http://midi.is). **AKL**



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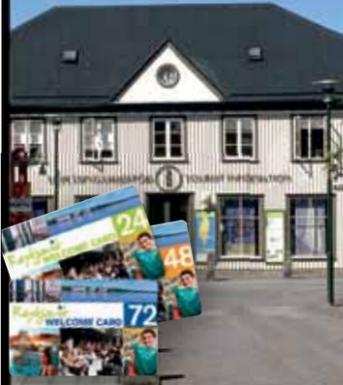
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Hálfarstræti 1 - 3 • Reykjavík  
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A

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We are open every day.  
[www.kraum.is](http://www.kraum.is)



B

## Café Loki in front of Hallgrímskirkja



Enjoy some solid homemade Icelandic food  
Open 9-21 Mon-Sat and 11-21 Sundays

C

# MAP

## Places We Like

### Food

#### 1 Gamla Smiðjan

Lækjargata 8  
This welcomed addition to Reykjavík's pizza palette has been steadily winning over fans since it opened for business, and with good reason. Gamla smiðjan seems to handle every single order with care, love and respect. As the dining area is sparse, locals usually opt for take-out.

#### 2 Bergsson Mathús

Templararsund 3  
Offering an eclectic selection of fresh and healthy flavours, this new addition to casual downtown dining prides itself on the use of local and seasonal produce. From their ingredient list they turn out Middle Eastern, soul food, vegetarian and vegan dishes that are perfect when you need more than a snack, but less than a full horse.

#### 3 Icelandic Fish & Chips

Tryggvagata 8  
Not your average fish'n'chips joint, this healthy restaurant uses only organic vegetables and quality fish products to serve their fancy take on a fast-food classic. The spiced 'Skyronnaise' sauce is a special treat, and their clean, casual location by the harbour is full of charm.

#### 4 KEX Hostel

Skúlagata 28  
KEX Hostel is the darling of Reykjavík hipsters and professionals and their visiting peers from abroad, drawing crowds daily. With its great views and cheap accommodation, excellent dining and choice beer selection—along with an abundance of exciting events—you don't have to wonder why.

#### 5 Laundromat Café

Austurstræti 9  
At the Laundromat Café you can do your laundry, drink a beer and have a grandma read to your children all under one roof. This kid-friendly café/bar/restaurant prides itself on its diverse menu, good service, a 5,000 book library, board games, and newspapers and magazines (including a fancy WALL OF GRAPEVINES!)

### Drinking

#### 6 Café Haiti

Geirsgata 7b/Verbúð 2  
Nestled in one of the former fishing warehouses of the old harbour, Café Haiti is surely one of Reykjavík's best cafés (and this is no mean feat, as the city has some nice coffee on offer). Go there for an excellent cup and some delicious light snacks during the day, or indulge in beer and low-key concerts at night.

#### Useful numbers

- Emergency number: **112**
- Medical help: **1770**
- Dental emergency: **575 0505**
- Information: **118**
- Taxi: Hreyfill-Bæjarleiðir: **588 5522**  
BSR: **561 0000**
- Tax Free Refund**
- Iceland Refund**, Aðalstræti 2, tel: 564 6400
- Tourist information**
- Arctic Adventures**, Laugavegur 11, tel: 562 7000
- City Centre**, Aðalstræti 2, tel: 590 1550
- Iceland Excursions – Grayline Iceland**,



#### 7 Kaffibarinn

Bergstaðastræti 1  
A popular café on weekdays, on weekends Kaffibarinn turns into a ticket for a wild night out, as the space fills up with the late-night souls oozing energy in every corner. With DJs playing and the occasional rock band, the party usually lasts until early morning, yet often manages to leave you begging for more.

#### 8 Kaldi Bar

Laugavegur 20b  
A small, stylish drinking hole popular with the after-work business crowd, this is a great place to feel a little classier and drink with dignity. The beer selection is top-notch, and the handcrafted interior tips the scales of upscale rustic charm. You can be certain that conversation will rule, not loud music.

#### 9 Harlem

Tryggvagata 22  
This super hip bar has the super unique signature of being handpainted by sixteen local artists and designers. So naturally it's really big for the art crowd! Come by any night for one of the many excellent DJs in their roster or regular events like karaoke and NBA screenings. Cheap drinks and good times abound.

Hafnarstræti 20, tel: 540 1313

**The Icelandic Travel Market**, Bankastræti 2, tel: 522 4979

**Trip**, Laugavegur 54, tel: 433 8747

#### Pharmacies

**Lyf og heilsa**, Egilsgata 3, tel: 563 1020

**Lyfja**, Laugavegur 16, tel: 552 4045 and Lág-  
múla 5, tel: 533-2300

#### Coach terminal

**BSÍ**, Vatnsmýrarvegur 10,  
tel: 562 1011, www.bsi.is

#### Domestic airlines

**Air Iceland**, Reykjavíkflugvöllur,  
tel: 570 3030, www.flugfelag.is

**Eagle Air**, Hótel Loftleiðir, tel: 562-4200

#### Public transport

The only public transport available in Reykjavík is the bus. Most buses run every 20–30 minutes (the wait may be longer on weekends) and the price per fare is 350 ISK for adults and children. Multiple day passes are available for purchase at select locations. Complete route map available at: [www.bus.is](http://www.bus.is). Tel: 540 2700. Buses run from 07:00–24:00 on weekdays and 10:00–24:00 on weekends. Main terminals are: Hlemmur and Lækjartorg

#### Opening Hours

**Bars and clubs:** According to regulations, bars can stay open until 01:00 on weekdays and 04:30 on weekends.

**Shops:** Mon.–Fri. 10:00–18:00, Sat. 10:00–

16:00, Sun. closed. The shopping centres Kringlan and Smáralind as well as most supermarkets and tourist shops have longer opening hours.

**Swimming pools:** Weekdays 06:30–22:00 and weekends 09:00–17:00, although each pool varies plus or minus a few hours.

**Banks** in the centre are open Mon.–Fri. 09:00–16:00.

#### Post Offices

Post offices are located around the city. The downtown post office is at Pósthússtræti 3–5, open Mon.–Fri. 09:00–18:00. Stamps are also sold at bookstores, gas stations, tourist shops and some grocery stores.

## LIVE MUSIC EVERY NIGHT

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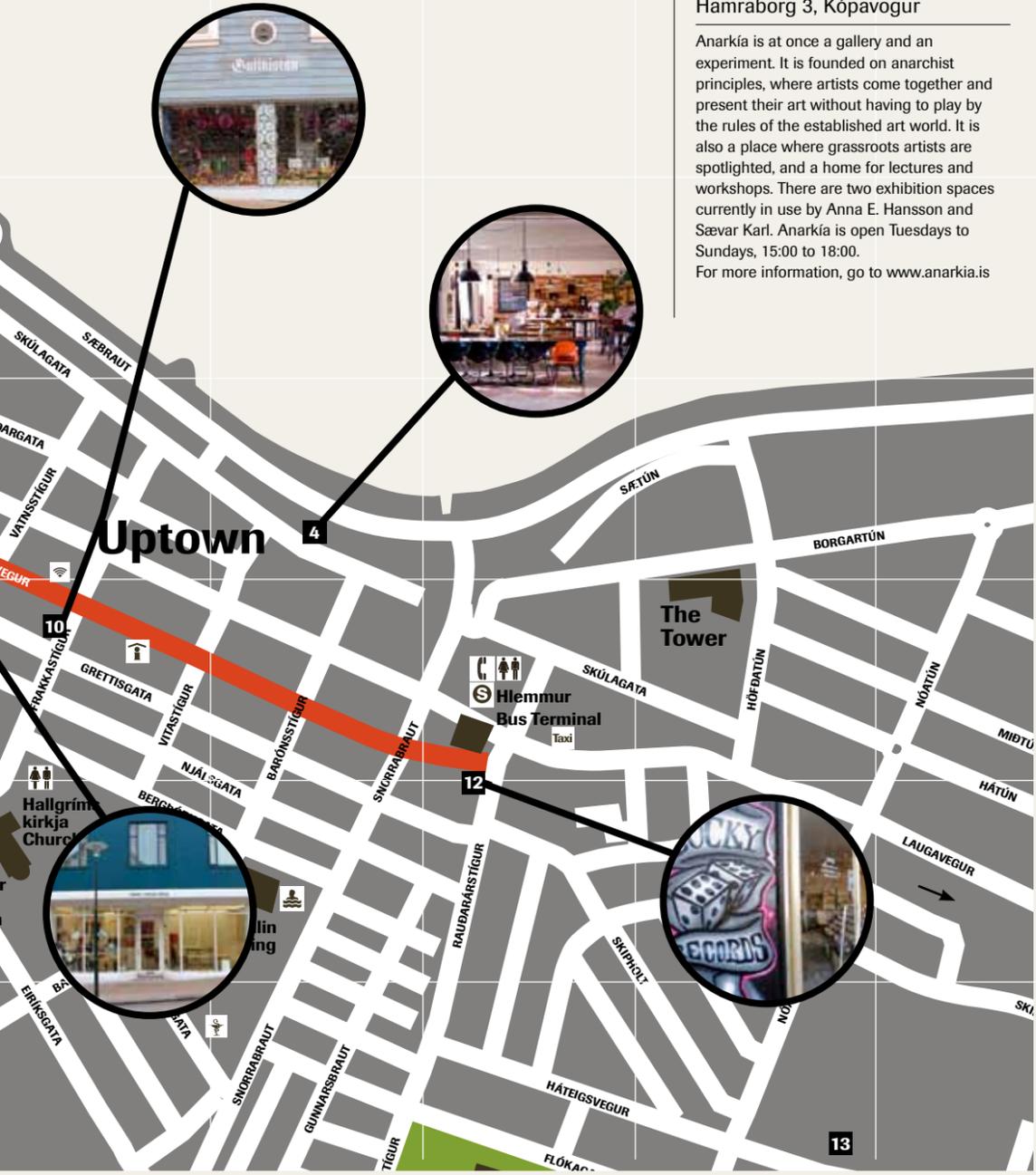
### New In Town



#### 13 Anarkía

Hamraborg 3, Kópavogur

Anarkía is at once a gallery and an experiment. It is founded on anarchist principles, where artists come together and present their art without having to play by the rules of the established art world. It is also a place where grassroots artists are spotlighted, and a home for lectures and workshops. There are two exhibition spaces currently in use by Anna E. Hansson and Sævar Karl. Anarkía is open Tuesdays to Sundays, 15:00 to 18:00. For more information, go to [www.anarkia.is](http://www.anarkia.is)



### Venue Finder Music & Entertainment

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Amsterdam</b><br>Hafnarstræti 5   D3       | <b>Harlem</b><br>Tryggvagata 22   D3           |
| <b>Austur</b><br>Austurstræti 7   E3          | <b>Hressó</b><br>Austurstræti 20   E4          |
| <b>B5</b><br>Bankastræti 5   E4               | <b>Kaffi Zimsen</b><br>Hafnarstræti 18   D4    |
| <b>Bar 11</b><br>Hverfisgötu 18   E5          | <b>Kaffibarinn</b><br>Bergstraðastræti 1   E5  |
| <b>Bjarni Fel</b><br>Austurstræti 20   E4     | <b>Kaldi Bar / Café</b><br>Laugavegur 20b   E5 |
| <b>Bíó Paradís</b><br>Hverfisgata 54   F6     | <b>Kofinn</b><br>Laugavegur 2   E5             |
| <b>Boston</b><br>Laugavegur 28b   F6          | <b>Loft Hostel</b><br>Bankastræti 7   E5       |
| <b>Bunk</b><br>Laugavegur 28   E5             | <b>Mánabar</b><br>Hverfisgata 20   E5          |
| <b>Celtic Cross</b><br>Hverfisgata 26   E5    | <b>Ölsmiðjan</b><br>Lækjargata 10   E4         |
| <b>Den Danske Kro</b><br>Ingólfsstræti 3   E4 | <b>Ölstofan</b><br>Vegamótastígur   E5         |
| <b>Dillon</b><br>Laugavegur 30   F6           | <b>Prikið</b><br>Bankastræti   E4              |
| <b>Dolly</b><br>Hafnarstræti 4   D3           | <b>Reykjavík Beats</b><br>Hverfisgata 46   E5  |
| <b>Dubliner</b><br>Hafnarstræti 1-3   D3      | <b>Röenberg</b><br>Klapparstígur 25   E5       |
| <b>English Pub</b><br>Austurstræti 12   E3    | <b>Stofan Café</b><br>Aðalstræti 7   D3        |
| <b>Gamli Gaukurinn</b><br>Tryggvagata 22   D3 | <b>Thorvaldsen</b><br>Austurstræti 8   D3      |
| <b>Glaumbar</b><br>Tryggvagata 20   D3        | <b>Vegamót</b><br>Vegamótastígur 4   E6        |

### Museums & Galleries

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>ART67</b><br>Laugavegur 67   F7<br>Mon - Fri 12 - 18 / Sat 12 - 16  | <b>The Nordic House</b><br>Sturlugata 5<br>Tue-Sun 12-17<br><a href="http://www.nordice.is">www.nordice.is</a>   |
| <b>Ásgrímur Jónsson Museum</b><br>Bergstaðastræti 74<br>Mon-Fri through Sept. 1  | <b>Reykjavík Art Gallery</b><br>Skúlagata 30   E7<br>Tuesday through Sunday 14-18<br><a href="http://www.artmuseum.is">www.artmuseum.is</a>  |
| <b>The Culture House</b><br>Hverfisgata 15   E5<br><a href="http://www.thjodmenning.is">www.thjodmenning.is</a>                                | <b>Reykjavík Art Museum - Hafnarhús</b><br>Tryggvagata 17   D3<br>Open 10-17<br>Thursday 10 - 20<br><b>Kjarvalsstaðir</b><br>Flókagata 24<br>Open 10 - 17<br><b>Ásmundarsafn</b><br>Sigtún<br>Open 10 - 17<br><a href="http://www.listsafnreykjavikur.is">www.listsafnreykjavikur.is</a> |
| <b>The Einar Jónsson Museum</b><br>Eiríksgata   G6<br>Tue-Sun 14-17<br><a href="http://www.skulptur.is">www.skulptur.is</a>                    | <b>Reykjavík City Library</b><br>Tryggvagata 15   D3<br><a href="http://www.borgarbokasafn.is">www.borgarbokasafn.is</a>   |
| <b>Galleri Ófeigur</b><br>Skólavörðustígur 5   E5<br><a href="http://ofeigur.notando.is">ofeigur.notando.is</a>                                | <b>Reykjavík City Museum - Árbæjarsafn</b><br>Kistuhylur 4<br>Open daily 10-17<br><b>Settlement Exhibition</b><br>Reykjavík 871+/-2<br>Aðalstræti 17   E3<br>Open daily 10-17  |
| <b>Hafnarborg</b><br>Strandgata 34, Hafnarfjörður<br><a href="http://www.hafnarborg.is">www.hafnarborg.is</a>                                  | <b>Reykjavík Maritime Museum</b><br>Grandagarður 8   B2<br><a href="http://www.maritime-wv-museum.is">www.maritime-wv-museum.is</a>  |
| <b>Hannesarholt</b><br>Grundarstígur 10   E5<br><a href="http://www.hannesarholt.is">www.hannesarholt.is</a>                                   | <b>Reykjavík Museum of Photography</b><br>Tryggvagata 16   D3<br>Weekdays 12-19 / Sat-Sun 13-17<br><a href="http://www.ljosmyndasafnreykjavikur.is">www.ljosmyndasafnreykjavikur.is</a>  |
| <b>Hitt Húsið</b><br>Gallery Tukt<br>Pósthússtræti 3-5   E4<br><a href="http://www.hittusid.is">www.hittusid.is</a>                            | <b>Saga Museum</b><br>Perlan, open daily 10-18<br><a href="http://www.sagamuseum.is">www.sagamuseum.is</a>   |
| <b>Hverfisgallerí</b><br>Hverfisgata 4   E4<br><a href="http://www.hverfisgalleri.is">www.hverfisgalleri.is</a>                                | <b>Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum</b><br>Laugamestangi 70<br><a href="http://www.lso.is">www.lso.is</a>  |
| <b>i8 Gallery</b><br>Tryggvagata 16   D3<br>Tue-Fri 11-17 / Sat 13-17 and by appointment. <a href="http://www.i8.is">www.i8.is</a>             | <b>SÍM</b><br>Hafnarstræti 16   D4<br>Mon-Fri 10-16<br><a href="http://www.sim.is">www.sim.is</a>  |
| <b>The Icelandic Phalological Museum</b><br>Laugavegur 116   F8<br><a href="http://www.phallus.is">www.phallus.is</a>                          | <b>Spark Design Space</b><br>Klapparstígur 33   E5<br>Mon-Fri 10-18<br>Sat 12-16<br><a href="http://www.sparkdesign-space.com">www.sparkdesign-space.com</a>   |
| <b>Kirsuberjatréð</b><br>Vesturgata 4   C2<br><a href="http://www.kirs.is">www.kirs.is</a>   | <b>Wind &amp; Weather Gallery</b><br>Hverfisgata 37   E6<br>Open daily 09-02<br><a href="http://www.windandweather.is">www.windandweather.is</a>   |
| <b>Kling &amp; Bang</b><br>Hverfisgata 42   E6<br>Thurs-Sun from 14-18<br><a href="http://www.this.is/klingogbang">www.this.is/klingogbang</a> | <b>POKA</b><br>Laugavegur 25   E5<br><a href="http://www.thoka.is">www.thoka.is</a>  |
| <b>Knitting Iceland</b><br>Laugavegur 25   E6<br><a href="http://www.knittingiceland.is">www.knittingiceland.is</a>                            |  |
| <b>Kunstschlager</b><br>Rauðarárstígur 1   G8<br>Mon-Sat from 15-18<br><a href="http://www.kunstschlager.com">www.kunstschlager.com</a>        |  |
| <b>Living Art Museum</b><br>Skúlagata 28   E7<br>Tue-Sun 12-17<br><a href="http://www.nylo.is">www.nylo.is</a>                                 |  |
| <b>Mokka Kaffi</b><br>Skólavörðustígur 3A   E5<br><a href="http://www.mokka.is">www.mokka.is</a>   |  |
| <b>The National Gallery of Iceland</b><br>Frikirkjuvegur 7   F4<br>Tue-Sun 11-17<br><a href="http://www.listsafn.is">www.listsafn.is</a>       |  |
| <b>The National Museum</b><br>Suðurgata 41   G2<br>Open daily 10-17<br><a href="http://www.natmus.is">www.natmus.is</a>                        |  |

### Shopping

#### 10 Gullkistan

Frakkastígur 10  
One of the oldest established businesses in the country, these goldsmiths have endured nearly 150 years and have seen three generations of the same family pass down their coveted tradition. Their works are truly unique pieces of Icelandic tradition.

#### 11 Spark Design Space

Klappastígur 33  
If you're looking for the newest and coolest in Icelandic design, look no further than Spark Design Space. The shop and gallery serves as a platform for artists and designers and their new projects that stimulate all four senses: touch, sight, smell and taste.

#### 12 Lucky Records

Rauðarárstígur 10  
All freshly set up in their brand new, huge location just next to Hlemmur, this is hands-down the finest record store in town. Crate-diggers will marvel and fawn over their selection while the lay music listener can easily pop in to pick up the latest from their favourites. Live music and DJs are regularly scheduled for live entertainment.

#### Public phones

There aren't many public payphones in the city centre. The tourist information centre at Aðalstræti 2, City Hall, Kolaportíð, entrance at Landsbankinn and in Lækjargata. Prepaid international phone cards are recommended for int'l callers.

#### Internet Access

Most cafés offer free wireless internet access. Computers with internet connections are available to use at:  
Ráðhúskaffi City Hall, Tjarnargata 11  
Ground Zero, Frakkastígur 8, near Laugavegur 45  
The Reykjavík City Library, Tryggvagata 15

#### Swimming Pools

There are several swimming pools in Reykjavík. The one in 101 Reykjavík, Sundhöll Reykjavíkur, is an indoor one, located at Barónsstígur. That pool features a nice sunbathing area and some outdoor hot tubs. Opening hours: Monday to Thursday from 06:30-22:00, Friday from 06:30-20:00, Saturday from 08:00-16:00, and Sunday from 10:00-18:00.

#### Public Toilets

Public toilets in the centre can be found inside the green poster covered towers located, for example, at Hlemmur, Ingólfstortorg, by Hallgrímskirkja, by Reykjavík Art Museum, Lækjargata and by Eymundsson on Skólavörðustígur. Toilets can also be found inside the Reykjavík City Hall and the Reykjavík Library.

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E



## Reykjavik Museum of Photography

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GRÓFARHÚS 6th Floor  
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[www.photomuseum.is](http://www.photomuseum.is)

# Best Of Reykjavík

Every year around the beginning of July, we make a BEST OF REYKJAVÍK ISSUE celebrating some of what makes Reykjavík-life worthwhile, posting some good entries into a hopefully never-ending discussion. The primary purpose of BEST OF REYKJAVÍK is celebration! It's about big-upping stuff, giving mad props to it and patting it on the shoulder. The following are some nice tips we pulled from BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2013 which you can read in full at [www.grapevine.is](http://www.grapevine.is)



### BEST BAKERY: SANDHOLT



For the third time Sandholt wins this category, which should not really come as a surprise. It is a little bit more expensive than the big bakery chains, but you'll be hard pressed to get better value for your money. They offer all sorts of pastries, chocolates, cakes, breads and sandwiches that the other bakeries in town don't and—as our resident Frenchie notes—they use real butter in their pastries. "This is the only bakery in town that is consistently on point with their baked goods," our former food critic says. "Their products also stand out and have a richer flavour than anything else I've tried."

Located at Laugavegur 36



### BEST MUSEUM: THE NATIONAL MUSEUM



There are so many curiosities about Icelandic culture, art and history that have been the focus in other museums around town, but this one has neatly condensed it all into one awesome building. We were totally on board to give it this honour as it's one of those places that kind of blends into the landscape, but when you go for a visit, you remember how fucking cool this country is. The permanent collection is impeccably displayed and is full of hidden gems (look up, look down) and their temporary exhibits are state of the art. Plus, they turned 150 this year! Top THAT!

Located in Suðurgata 41



### BEST BOOKSTORE: MÁL OG MENNING



Mál og Menning isn't just a place to buy your next recreational read. It's a place to buy your schoolbooks, literary tomes, get a caffeine fix, pick up the latest Sunday Times, grab a DVD for the weekend, get your kid some crayons and stock up on stationary to write home about it all. Even though the four storeys of Mál og Menning have more than you even thought you needed, it is very well-organised and easily navigable. The staff know their books and are happy to help you out. They also do writers' events and sometimes host concerts too.

Located at Laugavegur 18

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## A GUIDE THAT FUCKS YOU UP

A list of every Happy Hour in 101 Reykjavík

**101 Hótel**  
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00. Beer 475 ISK, wine 645 ISK, cocktails from 1000 ISK.

**Austur**  
Thursday to Saturday from 20:00 to 00:00  
Beer 550 ISK and wine 550 ISK.

**B5**  
Every day from 17:00 to 22:00.  
Beer 550 ISK, cider 700 ISK, wine 550 ISK.

**Bjarni Fel**  
Monday to Friday from 21:00 to 23:00.  
2 for 1 on all tap drinks, Beer for 445 ISK.

**Boston**  
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00,  
Beer 500 ISK, Wine 500 ISK.

**Bunk Bar**  
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00.  
Wine 700 ISK, Beer 2 for 1 900 ISK.

**Celtic Cross**  
Every day from 17:00 to 20:00.  
2 for 1 on Gull and Polar for 900 ISK.

**Den Danske Kro**  
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00. All Draught  
Beer 950 ISK and wine for 900 ISK.

**Dillon**  
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00.  
Beer 550 ISK.

**Dolly**  
Tuesday to Saturday from 17:00 to 20:00.  
Beer 500 ISK and wine 500 ISK.

**Dubliner**  
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00.  
2 for 1 Beer 1000 ISK.

**Einar Ben**  
Every day from 18:00 to 20:00.  
Beer 590 ISK, Wine 700 ISK.

**Gamli Gaukurinn**  
Every day from 21:00 to closing.  
Beer for 500 ISK.

**Glaubar**  
Every day from 21:00 to closing. Beer 390 ISK.

**Harlem**  
Every day from 17:00 to 22:00.  
Beer 550 ISK, wine 700 ISK.

## Download the FREE Grapevine Appy Hour app!

Every happy hour in town in your pocket. Available in the App store and on the Android Market.

**Hilton Hotel Bar**  
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00.  
All drinks half price.

**Hótel 1919**  
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00. 2 for 1 beer  
1000 ISK, Wine from 1290 ISK.

**Hótel Holt Gallery Bar**  
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00. Beer 550 ISK,  
Wine 695 ISK, Cocktail of the Week 950 ISK.

**Hótel Natura**  
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00.  
All drinks half price.

**Hótel Plaza Bar**  
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00. Beer 500 ISK.

**Iða Zimsen**  
Every Day from 19:00 to 22:00.  
All bottled beers 550 ISK.

**Kaffi Kompanið**  
Thursday to Sunday from 16:00 to 18:00.  
2 for 1 beer 550 ISK, wine 700 ISK.

**Kaffi Zimsen**  
Every day from 17:00 to 21:00. Beer 550 ISK.

**Kaldibar**  
Every day from 17:00 to 20:00.  
2 for 1 on beer and wine.

**Kiki Queer Bar**  
Thursdays from 20:00 to 22:00.  
Beer 450 ISK, wine 600 ISK.

**Kolabrautin**  
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00.  
Beer 450 ISK, Wine 700 ISK, Cocktails from  
1000 ISK, Champagne glass 1500 ISK.

**Lebowski Bar**  
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00.  
2 for 1 beer 900 ISK and wine for 1100 ISK.

**Loft Hostel Bar**  
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00.  
Beer 500 ISK, cider 500 ISK, wine 700 ISK.

**Micro Bar**  
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00. Beer 500 ISK.

**Miðgarður Bistro bar**  
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00. All drinks half price, Beer 500 ISK, Wine 600 ISK.

**Nora Magasin**  
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00. Viking Beer for 500 ISK, House Wine for 600 ISK.

**Prikið**  
Monday to Friday from 16:00 to 20:00. 2 for 1  
Viking 750 ISK, Viking Classic 850 ISK.

**Roadhouse**  
Friday and Saturday 22:00 to 23:00.  
2 for 1 Beer 895 ISK, Wine 895 ISK.

**SKY Bar & Lounge**  
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00. Beer 500 ISK,  
Wine 800 ISK.

**Slippbarinn**  
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00. Beer 500 ISK,  
Wine 500 ISK, selected cocktails 950 ISK.

**Stofan**  
Every day from 17:00 to 20:00.  
Beer 650 ISK and Wine 800 ISK.

**Tapashúsið**  
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00.  
All beer and wine half price.

**Uppsalar - Bar & Café**  
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00.  
2 for 1 on all drinks except cognac.

**Pingholtsbar**  
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00. Beer 500 ISK.

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# ART ONGOING

- continued -

## The Old Harbour

### Iceland Expo Pavillion

Every day from 10:00 to 22:00, Sagafilms projects a film of Icelandic scenery inside their Iceland Expo Pavillion which provides a unique 360 degree movie experience.

On permanent view

## Reykjavik Art Museum -

### Ásmundarsafn

#### Tales From the Vault - Sculpture Inspired by Literature

A collection of Ásmundur Sveinsson's sculptures tied together by a common literary thread. The exhibit presents key works inspired by Icelandic folklore, myth, and poetry.

Runs until December 30

#### Anna Hallin: Interplay

In her exhibition Interplay, Swedish-Icelandic artist Anna Hallin explores the threads that form connections in history, art, culture, time and between one artist and another. The exhibition includes sculptures by Anna, as well as drawings and an installation.

Runs until January 5, 2014

## Reykjavik Art Museum -

### Hafnarhús

#### Žilvinas Kempinas: Fountains

Lithuanian artist Žilvinas Kempinas installed reels of magnetic tape that ripple like waves with the help of industrial fans.

Runs until January 5, 2014

#### Tomas Martišauskis: Creature

Lithuanian artist Tomas Martišauskis translates the notion of traditional sculpture by translating an object into various mediums. The object itself will not appear in the exhibit.

Runs until January 12, 2014

#### Icelandic Video Art 1975 - 1990

This exhibition explores the first steps taken by Icelandic artists to use video as an artistic medium. The works shown were first exhibited in Iceland between 1980 and 1990 and only a few have been shown since then.

Runs until January 19, 2014

## The Reykjavik City Library

### Wandering Ghost

The German artist Moki, exhibits illustrations from her book, 'Wandering Ghost,' in the library including a special wall piece.

Runs until October 31

## Reykjavik City Museum

### Reykjavik 871 +/- 2: The Settlement Exhibition

Archaeological findings from ruins of one of the first houses in Iceland and other excavations in the city centre, open daily 10:00-17:00, 1,100 ISK per adult, 650 ISK per person in groups (10+) and free for children 18 and under.

On permanent view

## Reykjavik Maritime Museum

### From Poverty to Abundance

Photos documenting Icelandic fishermen at the turn of the 20th century.

On permanent view

### The History of Sailing

Iceland's maritime history and the growth of the Reykjavik Harbour.

On permanent view



## Tackling Macho Bullshit Rembingur / Macho

Eiðissker | Runs until October 4 | Free!

Artist Haraldur Sigmundsson has opened an exhibit mocking Icelandic society, in particular our culture of "rembingur" ("macho pride"). It is a mixed media exhibits featuring bright and colourful paintings, and sculptures, each with names such as "The Dream Land" and "The Icelandic Unicorn." If looking at sculptures of pink glittering flamingos, red spiky skulls, and blood soaked trousers is your kind of thing, then check out Haraldur's show and support an artist that clearly wants to smash the patriarchy! TGB



Find all art listings  
online  
listings.grapevine.is

### The Coast Guard Vessel Óðinn

This vessel sailed through all three Cod Wars and also served as a rescue ship to over 200 ships.

On permanent view

### 75th Anniversary of the Seaman's Day Council

An exhibit celebrating the 75th anniversary of Seaman's Day by telling the story of the Day from its first envisionment to current celebrations.

Runs until November 30

## Reykjavik Museum of

### Photography

#### Pipelines - Gentaro Ishizuka

This Japanese artist started this project on photographing pipelines back in 2011. Since then, he has taken many shots of the longest pipelines in the world. The works combine industrial construction with the beauty of nature.

Runs until November 5

#### Contemporary Landscape

This exhibition consists of 12 works by Icelandic Photographers who are focussing on nature in Iceland. It is not about "post card photography" but the connection between human beings and nature itself.

Runs until January 12, 2014

## Saga Museum

A Viking Museum that intimately recreates key moments in Iceland's history, giving a compelling view into how Icelanders have lived for more than a millenium. From the time of the earliest settlers, history is brought to life in a unique and exciting way with life-like figurines.

On permanent view

## Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum

### De Profundis

A collection of sculptures by Sigurjón Ólafsson and the paintings of his contemporaries. This group of artists are known today as "trailblazers of modernism" in Iceland. As the title points out, beneath the smooth surface of the works lies the

turbulence and anguish of the Cold War tensions.

Runs until December 1, only during weekends.

## Spark Design Space

### Anatomy of Letters

Sigríður Rún explores ancient Icelandic letters by imagining them as organisms with their own particular anatomies. She has just received the Art Directors Award of Europe in the student category, one of the most distinguished graphic design awards in the world.

Runs until September 30

## Wind and Weather Window

### Gallery

#### Rebekka Erin Moran - Das Ist

#### Keine Adidas

An installation of an Adidas jacket, plaster, freedom leg bag, and urine by Rebekka Erin Moran is on display in the windows of the Wind and Weather Window Gallery.

Runs until October 30

## Volcano House

The exhibition gives a brief overview of Iceland's geological history and volcanic systems, and there are superb photographs of volcanic eruptions and other magnificent aspects of Icelandic nature. A large collection of semi-precious rocks and minerals from around the country are also on display.

On permanent view

## Poka

### Screen Blind

Þór Sigurbórsson has an exhibit with a series of sculptures and wall pieces focusing on how we view nature today through the computer screen, reality through virtual reality. Instead of projecting nature on walls, he instead wraps beans, seeds, and objects in the thin films that make up our computer monitors.

Runs until October 20

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www.honnunarsafn.is

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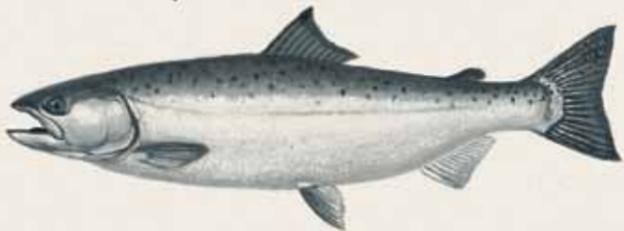
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# F O O D

FOR YOUR MIND, BODY AND SOUL



## Come For The Baba Ganush

### Balkanika

Vitastígur 10, 101 Reykjavík

#### What We Think:

Quaint & quiet, perfect for an unusual date

#### Flavour:

No-frills ethnic comfort food

#### Ambiance:

Intimate/kitschy

#### Service:

Will refuse you with a smile

#### Price for 2:

(no drinks): 4,900-9,800 ISK mixed platter



On a Friday night in Reykjavík, you simply couldn't ask for a more peaceful, intimate setting. I doubt you could fit more than twelve people in here, and yet nothing about it was cramped. With its dark wood panelling and orange-washed walls, the décor couldn't be more at odds with itself, but it was warmer and far more inviting than some of the chic interiors of Reykjavík's newest restaurants.

We were greeted by a smiling waitress, who looked at me incredulously when I asked if she had a table for two—maybe because there were at least three empty ones right

next to us. We picked our own seats and proceeded to browse the menu.

Being a stranger to Balkan food, most of the dishes on the menu were unfamiliar to me, so we took the waitress's recommendation and went for the mixed platter (10 small dishes). As an afterthought we threw in a mixed grill for an extra 3,990 ISK, mostly because it had "BONUS—TURKISH COFFEE AND BAKLAVA" written next to it, which, in the author's humble opinion, is one of the greatest dessert combinations known to man.

First to arrive were the appetisers: hummus, tzaziki, red pepper paste and baba ganush served with piping hot pita bread. Their flavours were rather timid, but the baba ganush had a wonderfully fresh taste that was easily gulped down.

After what seemed like only a couple of bites, a flood of dishes began rolling in so fast that we suddenly found ourselves swamped with exotic-looking fare. Highlights included the paprika borek (a deep-fried dream stuffed with feta) and the lamb shish dripping with smoky juices. The sesame chicken strips had sounded terrific on the menu, but were not as cracklingly fresh as I'd imagined. The curious "Cigarette Borek" turned out to be a deep-fried pastry roll stuffed with feta, an imaginative concept but too mild to be genuinely interesting. I preferred the cigar-like dolma: savoury rice stuffed in vine leaves and dipped in

yoghurt sauce. That was definitely the most exotic dish of the evening and it was surprisingly yummy.

We lingered over the remains of our meal for what seemed like a long time before the baklava was finally brought to us. Our waitress's former enthusiasm seemed to have died suddenly over the course of the evening. We kept on chatting and picked at our sticky baklava (which was little too compact and dry), all the while waiting for our Turkish coffee. After a while, I got the uneasy feeling that we had overstayed our welcome, so I casually asked our waitress about the coffee. We received a tired smile with the explanation that this was indeed normally included but she had decided not to offer it to us as the hour had grown late.

While there's nothing pyrotechnical about this fare, it's certainly not without character and there's an authentic cosiness to it that's hard to find elsewhere. I'm definitely coming back for more baba ganush.

But I still feel ripped off by the lack of coffee.

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## Revival Of The Fittest

### Argentína

Barónsstígur 11a, 101 Reykjavík

#### What We Think:

It's an Argentina steakhouse—rustic, macho and meaty

#### Flavour:

South American, southern European

#### Ambiance:

Fine dining, but relaxed and homey too.

#### Service:

Service is second to none

#### Price for 2 (with drinks):

30-35,000 ISK



Argentína has been a well-known establishment in Reykjavík since it first opened in 1989, but its heyday was undoubtedly in the '90s. Throughout the decade of questionable hairstyles and 501 Levi's jeans, Argentína was the restaurant of choice for lead singers of pop groups, movie stars and business moguls who wanted to see and be seen. This, however, has not been the case after the turn of the century.

As the name suggests, Argentína's forte is something very Argentinian—huge charcoal grilled steaks. The place itself is very "macho," as far as the term goes: there's a lot of wood on the walls and a large grill is placed in the middle of the dining area next to the kitchen. The decor is somewhere between a hunting lodge and the inside of a medieval castle—but in a good way. The place is very

clean and the air is not too heavy or stuffy, despite the grill. I'd hate to imagine how it was, however, when Argentína offered up huge cigars after the meal, back in the days when indoor smoking was allowed. Ahh, the '90s...

In any case, today's menu is made up of starters consisting of either something with langoustines or Carpaccio. My companion chose roasted langoustines and escargot in garlic and coriander (2,980 ISK). The dish came with a bit of rocket salad and a citrus dressing which was very refreshing. The langoustines were a touch overcooked, but overall a fine starter. I had the lobster soup with lobster tails and cream (2,420 ISK). It was a cognac-based soup, very powerful and tasty. There tends to be confusion in Iceland about what a lobster is and what a langoustine is, and this was not lobster, but langoustine. There could have been more langoustine tails, but knowing what was coming up next, there was no reason to complain.

Before our main course, our waiter also brought us a palette-cleanser. A mint sorbet served in a wine glass with sparkling wine. This was a nice touch, very refreshing, perfect for starting anew.

For our main courses we had already decided that we were going to "pack in an artery," to quote Seinfeld. When in Rome and all that. My companion had the 35-day dry aged rib-eye (6,350 ISK) and I went for the more conventional T-Bone steak (5,930 ISK). All steaks at Argentína are served with a baked potato with sour cream, wok-fried vegetables and a sauce of choice. My companion

chose the classic béarnaise, while I had the foyot-version—basically a béarnaise with beef stock. Both our steaks were cooked to a tender medium-rare perfection, they were truly "melt in your mouth" delicious, not really needing anything like the sauce or extra seasoning. True meat heaven. The sauces were however, quite good. The foyot was excellent even.

For dessert my companion decided on a warm Valrhona chocolate cake served with home-made vanilla ice cream (1,940 ISK). I was basically too full by this point and simply asked for a spiked coffee drink, the "Argentina" (1,450 ISK) with amaretto, tequila and whipped cream. Perfect for the time and place and very tasty. The Valrhona takes 20 minutes, as it is made from scratch, but it was totally worth it. It had a wet and oozy centre and it went well with the fresh vanilla ice cream and honey-roasted crushed nuts for some crunchy texture—a true delight.

All in all we were very pleased with our meal. There were hardly any faults and the service was impeccable. Everything was explained very clearly, our glasses were always full and we were made to feel very relaxed and at home—the way it should be. We both agreed that Argentína is due for a revival. The meaty, creamy, buttery culinary arts might not be good for you on a daily basis, but if you want to indulge in those elements once in a while—Argentína is the place for you.

 BJÖRN TEITSSON  
 MAGNÚS ANDERSEN



# SNAPS

BISTRO - BAR



#109



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