

The Reykjavík Grapevine



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Volume 21

Issue 14 2024

Best before September 19

Tourism At Breaking Point

Culture

Music

Travel

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On The Cover

When ice cave tourism first started on Vatnajökull, the tours were aimed at professional photographers. Small groups were taken on a handful of carefully planned trips in the depths of winter. The pictures that came out of these trips were amazing, showing graceful, rippling tunnels carved out by glacial meltwater during the summer months. The images stoked the imagination of a general audience, who wanted to see the caves for themselves – and that's where the problems began.

COVER PHOTO:
Axel Sigurðarson

Editorial The Limits Of Trust



WORDS John Rogers
Issue Editor

Every time we stand at a pedestrian crossing waiting for the lights to change, we're trusting the person next to us not to push us in front of a bus. When we board a plane, we're trusting the chain of people who made it safe to fly. In apartment blocks, we rely on our neighbours not to set the building on fire.

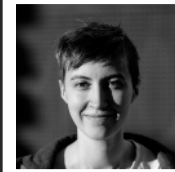
All of that is normal and healthy. But trust has limits, and can be taken advantage of – especially when money is involved. Whether it's squeezing salaries and eroding standards to maximise profits, or just charging more for less, money has a way of incrementally warping decisions. People chasing profit above all else cannot be trusted to do the right thing, and that's when we need safety rails in place – or the whole thing will come crashing down.

The recent death of an American tourist on Breiðamerkurjökull was a result of a lot of trust being broken. He trusted his guides to ensure the tour was safe. The Vatnajökull park rangers trusted tourism companies to operate within best practices and safety guidelines. Lawmakers trusted those officials to monitor the safety of glacier tourism. And everyone trusted the lawmakers to administer the whole damn thing.

As you'll read in this issue's cover story (pages 14-16), experts have been sounding the alarm on the excesses of ice cave tourism for years. Nobody listened to them, and this avoidable tragedy was the result. No amount of trust will bring that person back. The ramifications are already happening for the tour company responsible, but the root causes are systemic – whether the investigation will follow the money remains to be seen. ■

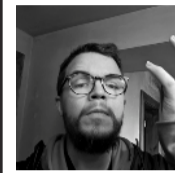
Catharine Fulton is away.

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CATHERINE
MAGNÚSDÓTTIR

Catherine studies culture and literature in Iceland and came to the Grapevine for the internship but ended up freelancing for the magazine. When she's not trying to reconnect with her Icelandic roots, she's usually watching video essays or attempting to finally come up with that one good story idea that she can actually finish writing.



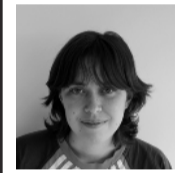
CIARÁN DALY

Ciarán is a UK-based journalist and game developer who first started writing for the Grapevine in 2015. He currently resides with his cat and his partner on the Kent coast where he spends his time exploring rock formations, programming, and struggling with self-induced acid reflux. He refuses to go to war.



GRAYSON DEL FARO

Grayson is a longtime contributor to the Grapevine and the author of a book called *The Sagas and Shit: Icelandic Literature Crudely Abridged*. He would rather be writing poetry in a castle. He would even settle for a small tower.



ISH SVEINSSON HOULE

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



IRYNA ZUBENKO

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



JOANA FONTINHA

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



JÓHANNES BJARKI
BJARKASON

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

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What The News!?

An Unnatural Amount Of Loss

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

WORDS The Reykjavik Grapevine
IMAGE Timothée Lambrecq

Iceland is regularly touted as one of the safest countries in the world. So when multiple unnatural deaths occur within a short timespan, it leaves gaping holes in our national psyche – not to mention the devastating effects it has on those close to the victims. These are the top stories in Iceland in recent weeks. Be prepared, this is going to get grim.

ICELANDIC YOUTHS ARE CARRYING KNIVES

The Icelandic government recently launched a national campaign to combat the apparently increasing knife carry amongst Icelandic teenagers. The call to action followed the murder of 17-year-old Bryndís Klara Birgisdóttir on Culture Night, August 24, when she was one of three

people stabbed near Skúlagata in Reykjavik. Bryndís was rushed to hospital, but tragically died of her wounds a few days later. The other victims survived. The attacker is currently in custody.

After the attack about 15,000 families in Reykjavik received a formal email from the city's Department of Education and Youth, imploring parents to discuss youth violence with their children. In conversation with RÚV, head of central investigation unit Grímur Grímsson said that knife carrying has been prevalent among youths for a while. Following the Culture Night incident, additional cases of physical assault involving juvenile offenders were reported in Selfoss, Breiðholt, and Mosfellsbær. According to new findings by the National Youth Study, four to five percent of primary and secondary school students carry weapons on a daily basis.

TOURIST KILLED IN ICE CAVE COLLAPSE

On August 25, an American tourist died during a group visit to an ice cave near Breiðarmerkurjökull glacier. A part of the cave collapsed, killing the man and leaving his partner injured. Search and rescue teams were called to the site to search for two more people thought to be trapped in the debris. The missing pair turned out to not be a thing. According to the initial count, 25 people were touring the cave, but a revised number confirmed that only 23 were present – confusion

stemming from poor record keeping from the tour company Ice Pic Journeys.

The incident has sparked a major debate concerning the training of glacier guides and tour operators' safety permits, as well as the safety of touring ice caves in the summertime. The case is currently under investigation by police in South Iceland. Representatives of Vatnajökull National Park have asked tour operators to discontinue any ice cave excursions for the time being. Our cover feature (pages 12-14) goes through the incident in detail.

A SMALL TOWN NIGHTMARE

Approximately one hundred people living in the quiet town of Neskaupstaður in East Iceland have received crisis counselling following three sudden deaths in the community. A man in his thirties was accidentally shot while goose hunting near Háslón. A few weeks before, the man and his wife saw the sudden death of their child, aged two. On the day of the man's vigil, August 22, an elderly couple was found dead in their home. Police suspected foul play at once, with one man being arrested in Reykjavik. The suspect is in custody, awaiting a mental evaluation. Neskaupstaður is a community of only 1500 people, making the events all the more harrowing.

The Grapevine extends their deepest sympathies to everyone affected. ■



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The Reykjavik Grapevine is published every month by Fröken Ltd.

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

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

The Grapevine is an independent publication. You may not agree with what we print, but at least our hot takes aren't paid for.

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Word On The Street

Shit's Expensive!

The kids can't even afford crack anymore

WORDS The Common Folk
IMAGES Joana Fontinha

Youth violence and tourist accidents are not the only hot potatoes taking place in the national discourse. As always, cost of living is a hot topic among locals and visitors. Earlier in the month, the new budget-friendly grocery store Prís opened, promising more competition and lower prices for the people. So in this edition, we took to the streets to hear from regular people – native or not – about prices and cost of living in Iceland.

VÍKINGUR
(Iceland)

Grapevine: What do you think about cost of living in Iceland?

I think it's pretty expensive. I've mostly noticed lunch meals being priced the same as something you'd expect from dinner. I usually pack my lunches and have potatoes. And beef. It's okay. It's very basic. It suits me personally. But I still want to keep the restaurants alive. It's not a hard and fast rule, but I try to frequent places I like. I think it's also important that locals visit the good spots, and not only the tourists.



LEILA & CAROLINE
(Sweden)

C: We're on a work trip. We're doing a course in Iceland.
L: I Googled "Is Iceland expensive?" yesterday. The answer was yes.

C: We also asked Google what is grown here and what's the main import and export. We were a bit shocked about the lack of trees. We were a bit concerned [about the prices], but then we realised most of our things are paid via our work. But if it wouldn't be paid by work, we'd be a bit worried about it.

Grapevine: Have you had a chance to walk around town?

L: We only just got here. This is our first stop. We were really hungry.

C: And we decided to go with Korean food.

L: I mean. We're from Sweden and Sweden is also expensive. But this is a bit more.



BRUNO
(Brazil)

For the last three years I've been working on a cruise ship. Now I'm working with a Norwegian cruise line so I'm used to travelling the world. I've been to 25 different countries and this is my first year getting a chance to know Iceland. We live in the ship for eight months when we start a contract. So wherever this ship goes, I go as well. Our current itinerary has Reykjavik as one of the main ports. So every week, we're here.

Grapevine: What do you make of the cost of living in Iceland?

Since I've been to a lot of different countries, I can definitely compare. It's a little bit expensive. Luckily, I can afford to eat out and try different kinds of food. If I had to compare Iceland to other countries in Europe – Italy, France, Portugal, Spain – it's more expensive here, and in Norway. ■



Word Of The Issue

A Word of Moony Syllables

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

WORDS Ish Sveinsson Houle
IMAGE Adobe Stock

It's two (or more) words for the price of one!

Hæhæ! If, like me, you have embarked on the journey of trying to learn Icelandic, you might have already noticed that the language is a fan of the compound word. Sometimes, that can lead to some really intimidating words – like "Vaðlaheiðarvegavinnuverkfærageymsluskúrslakippuhringurinn," which is the longest Icelandic word and will come in handy if you're ever in need of "the key ring to the tool work shed in the road works of Mount Vaðlaheiði."

But looks can be deceiving! If you break down these compound words, they often end up being not as scary as they first seemed. I'd like to take this truth about the language, introduce you to a new word and explain how that compound word got made.

To start today's compound word, let's talk about the moon! In Icelandic, there are two words most commonly used: tungl or máni. Tungl is more standard; if you're talking about that rock in the sky in science class, you're probably going to say tungl. Máni is more conceptual and often used poetically, as it comes from the Old Norse. Which also gives you the Icelandic word for Monday, *mánudagur* – Moon Day, following *sunnudagur*/Sunday!

Today's word of the issue is *gervitungl*. If you're keeping up, you know that this word is something + moon. To charm you with the Icelandic language, *gervitungl* means satellite. Gervi, as a prefix, means artificial. Artificial + moon = satellite! In essence, sure, a satellite is an artificial object orbiting our earth, just like the moon does, but damn! Fake moon. How great is that?

Now, go forth and talk to astronauts and scientists with confidence. Shoot for the tungl! ■

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Move Shit **Move House, And Live To Tell The Tale**

Our ongoing útlendingar's guide to getting shit done

WORDS John Rogers
IMAGE Adobe Stock

Moving fucking sucks, and there's no two ways about it. It's tiring, it's a huge amount of hassle, and upending your only truly safe space is psychologically gruelling. It's an inevitable part of the process that you'll end up covered in dust at your wits end holding a letter from a distant ex in one hand and a somehow-suddenly-sentimental cracked

mug in the other, on the verge of giving up.

And if you've lived here for a while – or read this paper recently – you'll know that moving is a regular thing for a lot of Reykvikingur. The housing market is brutal, with low availability and sky-high rent. The nice places move between friends, and everyone else gets bounced around like a pinball as apartment after overpriced apartment gets renovated into yet another soulless Airbnb, leaving its unfortunate occupants kicked to the kerb. What's left online is the dregs of Icelandic accommodation – halfheartedly converted storage spaces, misshapen architectural offcuts posing as studios, and miniscule box rooms that you'd still have to sell a kidney or two to afford.

But hey, moving sucks anywhere, and we all have to do it. When it comes to practicalities of actually moving your shit from place to

place, here are your options, ranging from optimal to convenient to downright humiliating. Let's start at the top.

1. HIRE A DUDE WITH A VAN

If you happen to have the cash, a van person is 100% the way to go. There are a few companies you can call, such as Nýja Sendibílastöðin. Just book a time, pray to the parking gods, and your new best friend will arrive like Gandalf at Helm's Deep. They will have ideas about how to best angle that desk down the stairs. They will produce a trolley, if you're lucky. They will lift like a champ, no doubt. It will cost you several tens of thousands of krónur. And it will be worth it.

2. RENT SOMETHING YOU CAN DRIVE YOURSELF

If you can't afford a Hercules-for-hire, maybe you can still afford a plain old van. You can hire something solid for a cheap price at Thrifty or Bílaleiga Akureyrar, or

use the Hopp app to grab a car off the street. If you have time, go get a drive-through KFC or something to make the most of it – and when you wake up tomorrow with every muscle aching, just try to remember the good parts.

3. BRIBE A CAR-OWNING FRIEND WITH PIZZA

Nobody tells you that when you drive, you take on a whole load of invisible social responsibility. A friend twists an ankle? You're taking them to the doctor. Their flat got turned into an Airbnb? Looks like you're giving them a lift. Pick some chill moving day music like Soft Hair or something. Set the vibe to "buddy movie." Wear a vest and some old denim, and idk, a beaten up trucker cap. Cosplay hard enough, and it might actually become fun.

4. GO ON STRÆTÓ LIKE AN ABSOLUTE MANIAC

Look, this is a dumb idea. But if there are a couple of advantageous-

ly placed bus stops at each end, then why not. You can be That Guy using the pram space to stash your ironing board – and if you get lucky, @originalsleepygirl will put you in her Instagram story with a quippy caption. If you're gonna go through true moving hell, you might as well go viral. Go get your 15 seconds of fame.

5. DO IT ON FOOT I GUESS

Ah, yes – the Kerouac dream. We don't need mere things. We have downsized, and cast our useless corporeal trinkets back into the ether from which they came. We have been to SORPA, and SORPed til we're blue in the face, then obnoxiously filled the shared house wheelie bin to the brim. We have our notebook, a pen, a shitty bluetooth speaker, and hopefully the right cable to charge it. Everything is squashed into two cases. We will move on foot, and it will be fucking poetic. And then it will be over – for another few months. ■

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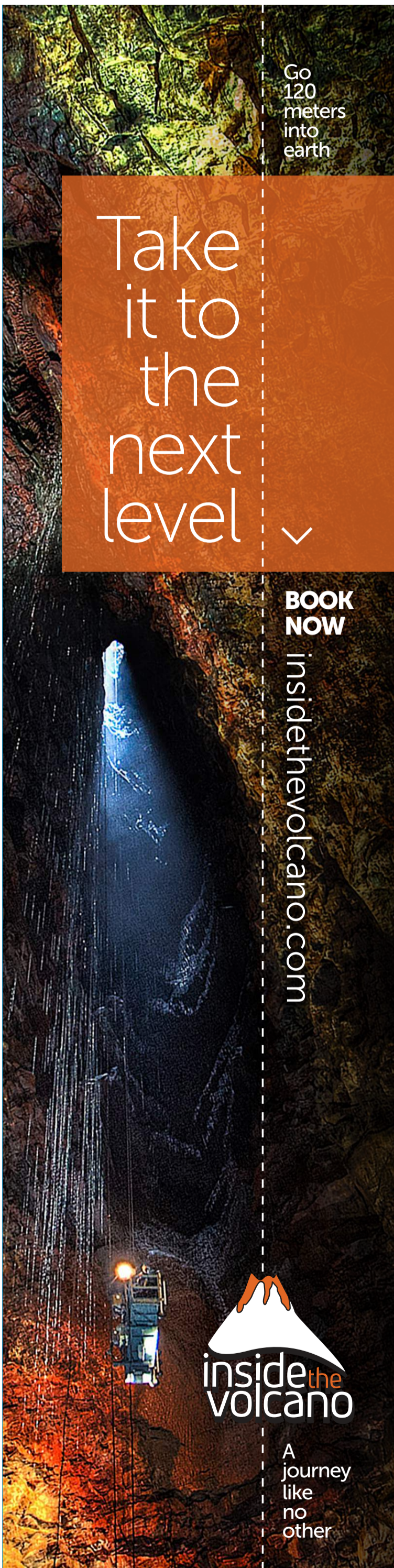
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On The Fringes

The Soul Of Pole

Gravity defying dance as a form of self discovery

WORDS Catherine Magnúsdóttir
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

Pole dancers are able to perform awe inspiring feats of grace and agility, seeming to defy gravity itself. They also rarely get enough recognition for how much work, practice, and passion goes into this pursuit. But if you have ever wondered whether you should approach the pole yourself, fear not! For I have sought out one of Reykjavik's most prolific dancers, Neyta, to discuss the art of the pole, and what it means to her.

Neyta first started practicing pole aged 17, in the basement of her family home. "Back then there was only one pole studio in my home city, which was very expensive," she says "So, I asked my parents for a pole for Christmas and then watched video tutorials to teach myself."

It was the culmination of an interest in what she calls "circus-y stuff": aerial silks, climbing, and acrobatics. "Initially it was me by myself," she says. "Although I did go to a few studios later on. Those were more focused on pole sport and acrobatic tricks, which is also really cool – but I think what really changed things for me was getting to know other people who were doing a more sensual style. It was such a powerful change – almost an awakening in a way."

EXPLORING THE TABOO

The taboo around sensual pole dancing was a draw for Neyta. "It intrigued me, and I just got more and more into it," she says. "I was very fascinated by people who dance this way, and I'm still very much in love with this style of pole dancing."

But it isn't something that's always embraced by the wider community. "Something everybody that gets into pole has to face at some point is its origins," she says. "I feel it's an on-going discussion in the scene. There was a trend in the beginning to sanitise it of the strip clubs and sex work associations. But I find it sad to not give credit to this form of dance. I used to strip for a while in Germany, and I've become passionate about this topic – about making a positive impact."

UNAPOLOGETIC EXPRESSION

After teaching pole dance for a while, Neyta and some of her friends and colleagues got together last year to produce Strip Lab Reykjavik. Part of the proceeds go to Rauða Regnhlífin, and the programme varies from life drawings to Stripaoke (combining strip and karaoke). "We usually also have a segment at our shows that's just about educating people about what the situation in Iceland is," she says, "or what we would like people to know – sex workers rights, etcetera. So, it's very much 'titties, and sneaking some education.'"

The performers aren't able to show any actual nudity, as stripping is technically illegal in Iceland. But interest in pole dancing is high, with sold out shows being something of a give-away. There's also healthy interest in participating, with dancers leading try-out classes after every show. "We've had people who are touching a pole for the first time connecting with a side of themselves that they are maybe intimidated in expressing," says Neyta. "It was a changing point for me to see other women unapologetically embracing that side of themselves. It helped me embrace it myself, and I just want to share that." ■

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Side Hustle

Linguist, Influencer, Author, Actor

Hongling Song doesn't waste a single day

WORDS Ciarán Daly
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

Hongling Song uses her superhuman work ethic to bridge the gap between China and Iceland as a linguist – and finds time to write books and act in between.

and was the first person on both sides of her family to attain higher education.

When she was 19 years old, her family arranged a blind date for her. They told her that the most important thing for a girl to do is to find a good husband and a good job; to stay in her hometown; to take care of her husband and kids.

That girl was me. That was how my life was supposed to go. That's where I was told I was going to end up.

DOING IT ALL

I did not get married or stay at home. Instead, I went to university. I got a bachelor's degree in Business English, and then a master's in translation and interpretation. I did well enough to get multiple scholarships – enough to become financially independent.

This enabled me to travel around Europe, India, the USA, and the UK. I speak five languages: Chinese, English, French, Swedish, and Icelandic. Eventually, I got a job at the University of Iceland and began teaching Chinese there. Six years on, I'm pursuing a PhD on tourism and language, and teaching Mandarin at Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík.

I've also published a book called *How To Live Icelandic*. It's the first Chinese publication to introduce the Icelandic lifestyle and society,

and has sparked significant interest in Iceland among readers in China. As a social media influencer, I also share photos and stories from life in Iceland with people in China.

PURSUIING A BIGGER WORLD

I do a lot of things, but it's not all for the money. I strongly believe that life is all about adventure. It's not a package tour. For me, it's about travelling and language learning and ultimately, exploring the world.

That's why my PhD combines aspects of travelling and language, and it's why I try my best to convey the things I learn to my audience in China. I want to inspire girls with a similar background to me to pursue a bigger world.

When I moved to Reykjavík, I was surprised at how slow everything was – even how slow the people were. In China, I worked 10 hours per day every day, either studying or part-time jobs, and slept about six or seven hours a night. I'm the kind of person who can't stop. So I had to find something to do when I wasn't at work.

SPINNING PLATES

On an average day, I spend a few hours preparing for my lessons and teaching. I take an hour for content creation – drafting posts, editing photos, that kind of thing. Then I spend around three hours on my

PhD. When I've got spare time, I work as a freelance translator or tutor. I'm currently translating my book, and often work on it until one or two in the morning.

I also work as a translator and interpreter for the Icelandic and Chinese governments. A couple of months ago, I worked as a simultaneous interpreter for the former Icelandic president and Chinese delegates at a conference on geothermal development.

I do take days off occasionally to travel. But I take photos, so I'm still active on social media. When I'm not travelling, I just like to walk around Reykjavík and people-watch. Reykjavík is small, but it's very international. It's easy to encounter different cultures and meet people from different backgrounds. It's a welcoming, friendly place and I feel very safe here. I feel like I can do whatever I want.

CHASING THE LIFE YOU WANT

It's this way of life that I am really keen to educate Chinese readers about. It's partly why I wrote my book. The first thing I really want to convey to them, as a woman, is that gender doesn't matter. Everyone is equal. As a girl, you have the right to chase the life you want. You don't have to live for a man or your family. You have the right to choose your own life. That's what I think Icelandic culture does very well.

The other thing is that people shouldn't push themselves too much. Chinese people work too hard. It's good for the economy, but you will not get a balance between life and family and work. That's not easy. You've got to learn to enjoy life, nature, and what's in front of you.

WORKING AS AN ACTRESS

As well as all of my work as a linguist, I have also acted in a number of productions. I never had any experience working as an actress or model before when I was in China, because the competition is fierce. For ordinary people like me, it's not something you get a chance at. But, after living in Reykjavík for one year, I saw a casting advert looking for Asian actresses for commercials, TV shows and movies, and I applied. And wow, it was so easy to get a job! So now I regularly sign up for projects.

I've recently acted in the Netflix film, *Heart of Stone* starring Gal Gadot, as well as the Icelandic movie *Northern Comfort*. It has meant I've been able to meet some famous movie stars and I've even been in the Icelandic commercials. This really is something I could not have ever imagined while I was living in China. ■

Want to share how you're making ends meet? Email us at grapevine@grapevine.is with the subject line "Side Hustle." We'll happily keep your identity anonymous.

Hongling Song, 30, linguist

Before I start sharing my story, I would like to tell you about a very different girl.

She comes from a very small, underdeveloped city in a developing country. It's a city that's so small, 99% of people in her country have never even heard of it. Before going to university at 18 years old, this girl never left her hometown – not to study or even to travel. She was very shy, without many friends at school,



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Feature

Breaking Point

Experts have been sounding the alarm for years – so how did the fatal Breiðamerkurjökull ice cave tour go ahead?

WORDS Ciarán Daly
IMAGES Art Bicnick
Emma Ledbetter
Timothée Lambrecq

You may know the story by now. A group of 23 tourists were taken on a visit to an ice cave during warm weather, with the increased glacial melt that entails. An ice wall collapsed, killing an American tourist and injuring his pregnant fiancé.

Two more people were suspected missing, prompting a large-scale search effort involving 200 people and two helicopters. Volunteers worked with minimal equipment over two days on the treacherous glacier, until the search was abruptly called off. It turned out the tour company – Ice Pic Journeys, started in 2019 by US citizens Michael Ward Reid and Ryan Matthew Newburn (pictured on page 15 – had provided what the police called ‘misleading information’ on the tour’s participants, and the missing people did not exist.

When a tragedy like this occurs, the gut reaction is to look for those responsible. Much of the attention has fallen on Ice Pic Journeys, who took a large group of tourists into an ice cave during a time of year when it is universally regarded as exceptionally dangerous to do so.

But there’s much more at play here than the tragically reckless decisions of a single organisation. How did that company gain access to the ice? Who gave them the permits? What safety procedures were in place? And what sort of business practices are at play in a sector that’s growing so big, so quickly, that industrial scale fuck-ups of this ilk are even possible?

PLAYING WITH FIRE

Magnús Tumi Guðmundsson is sitting at his desk in front of a large

bookshelf. We’re far away from ice caves and glaciers; his office at the University of Iceland is warm. A leading glaciologist and a climber with decades of experience, Magnús was asked in 2017 by Vatnajökull National Park to produce a report into the safety of ice cave tourism.

“At that time, there were never any trips in summer,” he explains. “It was absolutely clear to most of the local people, the people who pioneered this kind of work, that it was simply too dangerous. The scope of the discussion was mainly about which time period of the year it would be safe for visitors to visit these caves.”

There’s quite a simple reason why an ice cave is so dangerous to visit in summer. The kind of caves that it is possible to visit in places like Vatnajökull are carved out at the base of glaciers by streams of meltwater. That’s why they’re often easily accessible and so stunning to look at.

But glaciers move – and they melt.

“From October to April, there is very little melting, if any,” says Magnús. “In summer, however, a cave can easily experience 10 centimetres of melting per day. That means the walls and the roof of the cave is getting thinner by 10 centimetres every single day. They can start to crack, and then they might even collapse – as we’ve seen. If you enter a structure that is unstable and at risk of collapse, that is dangerous. This should be obvious to everybody.”

Magnús and his colleague Jón Gauti Jónsson produced a safety report that formulated a number of simple safety checks that should be conducted before visiting an ice cave. In the two days leading up to a cave

visit, and on the day itself, the outdoor temperature and wind speed should be checked. At the opening of the cave, it should be ascertained whether the ice is wet or dry. If water, loose material, broken ice, or cracks in the ceiling are found, then the cave is not safe. On the other hand, if there’s been snow, or the temperature is near freezing, and there’s no visible melting or water flowing, then it’s relatively safe to visit.

In Magnús’s view, applying this methodology in summer will almost universally tend to produce one answer: visiting an ice cave is not safe.

And yet, tours continue.

“They are playing with fire,” says Magnús. “If you go climbing on your own or with friends, and you decide to explore a cave, then taking the risk is a personal decision. However, there is a fundamental difference between somebody doing something on their own, and selling a trip

so I can talk to you.”

However, Einar is not an airport engineer. He is, in fact, the longest serving mountain and glacier guide in Iceland, and comes from a dynasty of intrepid Icelandic explorers. His great grandfather, Páll Jónsson, was the first person to climb Iceland’s highest peak – Hvannadalshnúkur, the top of Vatnajökull – in 1891. He guided numerous travellers and visitors to the mountaintop afterwards, making him arguably the first mountain guide in Iceland.

Einar himself has been climbing for decades, and began guiding people up Hvannadalshnúkur in 1994 as part of the company his father founded, ÖRÆFAFERÐIR. As well as holding the world record for the most summits of the mountain (327), Einar was also the very first person to offer tours of the ice caves.

“I feel a little bit sick to the stomach even talking about these things,”

In summer, the walls and the roof of an ice cave can get thinner by 10 centimetres every single day.

to people that you claim is safe, but is not safe.”

THE ICE CAVE PIONEER

When the phone rings, Einar R. Sigurðsson – also known as Einar Öraefingur – is driving his tractor in the shadow of Vatnajökull. He’s helping renew a landing strip beacon for the aviation company Isavia. “Hello!” he cries. “I just need to stop

says Einar, still sitting on the tractor. “It’s nothing to do with what happened the other week. Through the years, I have developed a disgust for everything about the ice caves, and business in Iceland. About quality, and safety, and all of that.”

Between 1994 and 2012, Einar was the only guide consistently offering tours of Vatnajökull during the winter. Two other companies were

Ever since the dawn of Iceland’s tourism boom, there have been countless examples of visitors to the island making decisions that are misinformed, foolish, or downright dangerous. From people picnicking on floating icebergs to the woman who joined a search party to look for herself, there’s plenty of Darwinist humour to be found in the misadventures of Iceland’s summer visitors.

However, what happened at Breiðamerkurjökull on Sunday, August 25 is categorically not one of these events.



in operation, but he says they would mostly go back to Reykjavik until the summer as there were barely any tourists during the winter months.

THE CAVES ARE ALWAYS CHANGING

Einar says that pioneering ice cave tourism was something he did by chance. “Around 2006 or 2007, I showed some photographers the ice caves after getting some special requests from colleagues. I eventually started offering photography workshops and tours of the caves

“They were pressuring us to offer more and more tours, and take on bigger groups.”

What followed was an aggressive consolidation of the market by big business. Einar explains that initially, if a tour was booked out, then the local tour companies would offer to help fulfil the reservations. However, around 2015, this lack of capacity was no longer tolerated by the big players in the industry, and instead of turning to local experts for help with bookings, they started to be circumvented.

numbers swelled by another 39%, to an estimated 1.8 million. Dozens of new tour vendors started setting up shop in places that had previously only had a handful of companies, and glacier tours — including ice cave visits — evolved into an industry all of their own.

INEXPERIENCED PEOPLE

Two major risk areas developed alongside this growth in the market. Firstly, the number of tours increased significantly, and spilled into the summer season. When Einar and his colleagues first offered ice cave tours, they ran from November to March. “After all these years, I’m still the first to stop,” he says. “Around March 20, I don’t feel so good because the sun gets higher and warmer. It’s not always totally dangerous or anything like that, but I don’t see the need to keep going there every day. I need to monitor them for several weeks before I feel good about going to some of these places.”

Einar recounts how other companies started offering ice cave tours earlier and earlier, on October 1, and then September. “And several companies continue until the end of April, when the Easter sun is so much warmer,” he says. “Over the years, people have been pushing it: one more month, one more month. And at some point in summer, around the time of the accident, I found out that some companies were still running ice cave tours.”

Secondly, the personnel running the tours changed. “There are so many new guides entering the market,” says Einar. “More experienced Icelandic guides who’ve been working for some of these big companies

have gotten the message that, next season you will get less pay, but you’ll have to work twice as hard. So they resign from these companies. And the companies hire very inexperienced people from other countries who are willing to work for nothing in exchange for fun and experience.”

For Einar, this shift is the crux of the issue. “The problem is not the ice caves,” he says. “The problem is that we now have a lot of very inexperienced people doing these jobs. They are meant to be ice cave guides or mountain guides, but in reality, some of them have less experience than some of the clients in the tour group. And the most experienced person in a tour group should not be one of the tourists.”

The combined effect of a huge increase in tourism and the reduced

contracts that are signed with tour companies operating in the area. She personally approved the applications of the 27 tour vendors currently operating in Vatnajökull this year — including Ice Pic Journeys.

In order to operate in the national park, tour companies must submit an application for a 12-month permit. These permits are reviewed annually by Steinunn and her team, and must be in line with the safety standards set by the Tourist Board and the mountain guides association. Once approved, the tour companies have a licence to take people on glacier walks year-round.

When Steinunn became aware that Ice Pic Journeys were offering summer ice cave tours, she broached the issue with the company’s owner. “I reminded them that this is not a safe thing to do at this time of year,”

The problem is not ice caves. The problem is that we now have a lot of very inexperienced people doing these jobs.

as part of my everyday tour programme. I think ice caves are great for photographers. I didn’t think they would be interesting for the average tourist.”

To Einar’s surprise, the ice cave tours caught on, with more and more regular tourists joining the tours. “I called them ‘the iPhone people’ at first,” he says, “because they were carrying around GoPros or iPhones rather than professional cameras.”

As ice caves became a highlight of the Instagram tourist trail, the industry smelled an opportunity. “There were these big companies in Reykjavik that saw the potential of ice cave tours, who thought this was a great product to sell,” says Einar.

“Guys like me were hesitant about putting too much pressure on these caves with mass tourism,” Einar explains. “I ran few photography tours with a lot of thought put into them, and warned customers that they had to be flexible because the caves are always changing. But these sales offices saw that the local companies were always full, and that many more people wanted to go on the tours. So they just created their own companies.”

2015 marked a point of no return for the growth of the Icelandic tourism industry in many ways. According to the Icelandic Tourist Board, around 1.3 million tourists came to Iceland that year, marking a year-on-year increase of 29.2%. The next year, the

He assured me they were doing everything by the book, that they were making risk assessments regularly, and had trained guides.

collective expertise of the guides conducting them poses a serious problem for the safety of these tours.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Steinunn Hödd Harðardóttir is the park manager of the eastern part of Vatnajökull National Park, where the ice cave collapse took place. She oversees everything from the day-to-day running of the park to the

she says. “But they assured me they were doing everything by the book. That they were making risk assessments regularly, and they had trained guides.”

The company’s word was good enough for Steinunn. “We trust the companies that have a contract with us,” she explains. “Because they’ve agreed to provide experienced guides and follow safety plans and guidelines. The contracts are for 12



months, and the companies that are operating are going on glacier hikes which are relatively safe year round. So I trust them. I have no reason not to trust them.”

Like Einar, Steinunn has watched the gradual shift away from local guides. “A decade ago, the only companies operating here were local,” she says. “Local people that grew up here, know the area, know the history, know the stories, know the nature. But with tourism – as with all industries – it’s supply and demand.”

The park estimates that during the last 11 months – since the last contracts were signed – around 240,000 people have been on a glacier hike or an ice cave tour in the south of Vatnajökull. “That’s roughly 25% of all the people visiting the park,” she says. “Which of course increases the pressure on all of our infrastructure and staff. With more people wanting to go on these tours, some companies have felt the need to increase the supply – to buy more cars, hire more people. And at some point, they have thought: ‘we need to start doing tours in summer.’ But in my personal opinion, sometimes it’s just okay if a tour is sold out. It increases the value of the tour if sometimes it’s sold out.”

SAFETY AND QUALITY

People like Einar personify the spirit in which the Icelandic tourism industry was founded. It was built by knowledgeable, experienced people who prioritised caution, safety, and sustainability. The surrounding regulatory and legal frameworks, as exercised by Steinunn, were predicated on this expertise and diligence – and the assumption that all tour companies and guides could be trusted to uphold them.

There was little cause for con-

cern, because things were running smoothly and largely without incident. And, for a long time, they continued to do so. But now, the cracks are showing.

I have been saying for some time it would probably take someone dying for anything to change.

cern, because things were running smoothly and largely without incident. And, for a long time, they continued to do so. But now, the cracks are showing.

So let’s address the elephant in the room.

Many of the tours to Iceland’s national parks and natural sites are not booked directly with the tour groups who provide them. In fact, they aren’t even necessarily marketed by them. These tours are, by and large,

being sold by large booking companies who operate out of Reykjavik, hundreds of kilometres away. These companies have names and addresses, and so do the people who run them. And they have been heaping more pressure on the sector every single year, with exponential demands being placed upon vendors to fulfil bookings by any means necessary.

As the circumstances surrounding the ill-fated Breiðamerkjökull ice cave tour show, standards have changed as a result. Now, serious questions need to be asked of the authorities about how much accountability the companies involved will face. Unfortunately, the head of the Icelandic Tourism Board, Arnar Már Ólafsson, did not respond to multiple requests for comment in time for publication. So for now, these are questions that Icelanders must ask themselves – and their officials.

With several government ministries and the police currently engaged in

an investigation into the accident, the dominoes are starting to fall. Mike Reid of Ice Pic Journeys is no longer a member of The Association of Icelandic Mountain Guides, and it’s only a matter of time before we start seeing more answers. Key information is very shortly going to come to light about who sold the summer ice cave tours, who provided the vehicles, and who pocketed the profits. Once these practices become clearer, the industry will have a brief window of opportunity to take decisive action and stamp out these dangerous business practices wherever they are taking place – before something else goes terribly wrong.

Unless stronger rules and legal mechanisms are brought in to ensure safety recommendations are enshrined in law, incidents like this will continue to happen in future. “What happened on this glacier over a week ago could have happened on any glacier where tours are taking place,” says Einar. “For example, a few years ago, I was on a committee trying to improve safety and quality on tours. Then Guide To Iceland [Iceland’s largest online travel agency] sued the National Park, and we couldn’t change anything because there were legal proceedings. So this whole thing is so handicapped. They have no power or authority. And this has to change. I have been say-

ing for some time it would probably take someone dying for anything to change. I just hope that, at the very least, because of what happened last week when this young man died, that things will move forward to where they need to be.”

MELTING AWAY

The trust that the Icelandic authorities have put in tour companies to do the right thing is part of what defines Iceland’s character. But as the ice cave accident shows, this trust can also lead to disaster. The rapid growth of the tourism industry – coupled with weak regulatory frameworks and an overreliance on good faith – has strained this system to breaking point. The demands of profit and capital are outpacing the capacity of ordinary people to deliver safe, sustainable tourism.

As a result, the foundations of that trust – rooted in knowledge, expertise, and ties to the land – are melting away. Push things too far, and the whole system begins to collapse. In the absence of accountability, trust becomes dangerous. It becomes deadly. ■

Additional reporting by Jón Trausti Sigurðarson

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MULTIPLE VENUES

Move over Viking Festival, there's a new event celebrating Icelandic heritage in town. The Vaka association works all throughout the year promoting folk art activities, building a vibrant, inclusive folk arts community in Iceland. Their flagship event, the Vaka Folk Festival, happens around September 15 – better known by folk arts enthusiasts as the day of rímur, a type of epic poem. The festival is formally opened at the Reykjavík Town Hall on Friday, September 13, with festivities happening around town all throughout the weekend. A full festival pass is 11.900 ISK, with tickets available for separate events. JB



FAR FEST AFRIKA REYKJAVÍK
SEPTEMBER 14
4.999 ISK
SYKURSALUR, GRÓSKA

Although I wouldn't call African music a big thing in Reykjavík, FAR Fest Afrika Reykjavík is surely in position to change that. The annual music and cultural festival was conceived in 2009 by local Cheick T. A. Bangoura, meaning this year it celebrates its 15th iteration. The event focuses on promoting African music, dance, and culture in collaboration with Icelandic and Nordic artists. Among the artists performing are experimental dance music group Mañana Mañana, the Namibian Jackson Wahengo, and Dawda Jobarteh. JB



ERLENDUR FASHION WEEK
SEPTEMBER 18 – SEPTEMBER 22
7.500 ISK – 30.000 ISK
WHALES OF ICELAND

More than just a runway show, Iceland-based talent and casting agency Erlendur hosts a celebration of cultural diversity through fashion with their upcoming fashion week. Highlighting the influence of creativity and culture on fashion, Erlendur brings together international and local designers, models, industry professionals and influencers to this unique event. This week's theme is 'Cultural Diversity and Technology,' opening at the Reykjavík Maritime Museum on September 18. Two days of runway shows take place on September 20 and 21, with many more events happening over the course of the week. JB



Art A Mountain For A Muse

Stórval was an eccentric art icon, showing now at Gallery i8

WORDS Ish Sveinsson Houle
IMAGE Provided by i8

A CREATIVE WELLSPRING

First shown at the legendary Gallery SÚM in 1972, Stórval's most well-known works are depictions of Herðubreið – the “Queen of Icelandic Mountains” – that features in twelve of the works on show. Situated in the northern part of Vatnajökull National Park in the highlands of Iceland, Herðubreið was Stórval's muse. “It was the mountain he could never get enough of,” writes Unnar Örn. “He couldn't grasp it. But it was the foundation of his creative force and existence – the mountain within.”

The colourful paintings are hung unpretentiously in i8's Tryggvagata space, lined up side by side around the brightly lit gallery. Evoking the image of a child running a brush around the stark white walls, they sit close together, steeping visitors in the work's vivid colours.

THE PEOPLE'S PAINTER

Stórval's fun renderings of Herðubreið proved very popular, and today they hang in all sorts of spaces, from summerhouses to art museums, coffee houses, and private residences. A 2007 photo book called *Herðubreið at Home*, created by renowned artist Roni Horn, shows Stórval's paintings in situ in homes all around Iceland.

In addition to his Herðubreið works, the exhibition also shows a se-

lection of portraits, landscapes, a horse, and the piece *Hrútarnir Mírir* (My Rams, in English). Below the eight painted ram symbols sits a name: Kari, Svanur, Sómi. The piece perfectly evokes the tender concentration that Stórval was able to knowingly embody; in Unnar Örn's words, “He painted with conviction, sensitivity, and boisterousness.”

PASSION AND REVERENCE

“Stefán from Möðrudal” – another of Stefan's pseudonyms – is a core part of his identity that he held onto after moving to the big city. The piece *Örnefni í Möðrudal og Víðidal* (Place Names in Möðrudal and Víðidal) shows the attention Stórval gave to the nature around him. The core of his work is an amalgamation of place names scrawled onto all parts of his canvases.

As Unnar Örn says: “Speed was the primary measure of quality, and repetition showed his passion for the subject.” Whether exploring his fixation on Herðubreið, or diligently chronicling names of animals and places, the marrow of Stórval's work is passion and reverence for the natural world around him. To experience it yourself, step into Gallery i8, and immerse yourself in *The Mountain Within*. ■

See the exhibition at i8 on Tryggvagata until October 5



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Pole Arts

Acrobatics With Attitude

SEIÐR's pole arts bring the drama, the comedy, and the sexy

WORDS Catherine Magnúsdóttir
IMAGES Joana Fontinha

slightly more befitting their spell-binding performances: SEIÐR (an old Norse word for magic).

Lára, aka Aurora Vortex, is one of the co-founders of the group. When we meet, she and Kamilla, one of SEIÐR's numerous performers, are sitting comfortably in their studio. The room is adorned with some of the intriguing apparatus used in their performances, and a display shelf contains a number of (very) high heels, all reflected in a wall-covering mirror.

STRENGTH THROUGH VARIETY

Thus, SEIÐR was formed. Their first performance – entitled *Origins*, fittingly – was at the Reykjavik Fringe festival in 2020, and it brought some Icelandic cultural themes to the medium of pole arts. The group performs four or five times per year, and each show has a theme to it – a red thread the performers follow, whilst still being able to express themselves.

We want to bring the drama and the comedy and the sexy and everything in between.

Back in 2020 a group of pole dance students and instructors came together with a newly awakened thirst for performance. The resulting troupe performs pole arts and dance live on stage, using the pole, hoops (aka lyras), aerial silks, and even actual flames. Initially known as The Aerialists, they changed their name to something

SEIÐR began when various members of the group got a taste for performing at Pole Theatre Iceland, a contest organised by Iceland's two biggest dance groups. "At that time, there were no events to perform at – only competitions," says Lára. "Some of us got the taste for performing by taking part in that show. It was more based on performance, in addition to doing tricks."

"We want to bring the drama and the comedy and the sexy and everything in between," says Kamilla. "Like in our recent show *Most Wanted*. It was easy to bring out the comedy, but we also wanted more realistic and dramatic elements. I think we kept the balance quite well."

Most Wanted was made with creative input from the whole ensemble, who delved into diverse inspirations



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from Icelandic crime documentary series *Sönn íslensk sakamál* to *Chicago's Cell Block Tango*.

But there are personal notes in there too. "My act was about killing my abusive husband," Kamilla says. "It was a bit darker than some of the other acts. The next act brought everybody back up again!" Lára was in the audience for that show. She adds: "Even with that sort of darker mood Kamilla still had those power moves. Strength moves on the pole. It was a dark piece – very emotional, and still powerful and strong."

Kamilla replies: "I like my strong moves, my toughness, my 'I can beat your ass' attitude – but strong people get abused too. That was the point of it. I like that I can perform a piece like this, while still having more of an upbeat show."

FROM THE GROUND UP

Organising SEIDR's shows takes a lot of preparation. When the group applied for the Fringe Festival, they already had a theme and rough outline in mind – then came organising the performers, props, programming, and costuming. All the performers also have day jobs, but

each performer gets space to prepare their routine in their own time, which can take anything from weeks to months.

"We have a runthrough at least a week before a bigger show," says Lára. "We meet at the studio, prepare the area, and dim the lights to get into the mood. We perform for each other and give tips, help to complete each other's pieces, and maybe reorder them. I always feel more confident afterwards, and I think that shows in our performances." The world seems to agree – SEIDR collaborated with the National Theatre on choreography for the play *Ást Fedru* in 2023, garnering a nomination at Gríman – Iceland's theatrical arts awards.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

When asked about what lies at the core of SEIDR, Lára and Kamilla emphasise freedom of expression, creative exploration, and the sense of an empowering community that celebrates all backgrounds, ages, and body types.

"It's also very diverse in style," Kamilla says. "Some people are

very sensual, others more acrobatic, with expressive parkour elements. I come from a dance background, but not everyone does."

Some of the stigma surrounding pole arts has eroded in recent years, with giggles giving way to a shared understanding of pole arts as a form of exercise. Even so, Lára and Kamilla lament some of the gendered notions around pole sport and dance.

"In Iceland it still seems kind of taboo for boys, which is a shame," says Kamilla. "We have one boy but we'd love to have more." Lára is encouraging towards anyone who's curious to give pole arts a try, saying: "Just give it a go! You don't have to do the sexy thing if you don't want to. You can focus a bit more on acrobatics, whatever you want – which is kind of the point of what we want to portray!"

In fact, the next show will be Halloween-themed, and may incorporate some interactive aspects for the audience. Who knows, maybe you'll get the urge to perform yourself if you fall under the powerful spell of SEIDR. ■

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Film Feature

A Love Letter To Nature

Katla Sólnes' *Weather Rules the Field, but Whim the Child* is a poignant yet hopeful story of the struggle between human and nature.

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGES Joana Fontinha & supplied stills

“What I love about directing is that it’s a combination of all the artistic cycles – it’s photography, it’s acting, it’s music, it’s styling, it’s interior design, it’s everything,” says writer and director Katla Sólnes.

When we speak, it’s morning in New York, where she’s currently based, and afternoon in Reykjavík, but Katla is full of energy. You can almost feel her eyes light up as she passionately speaks about her work. But her path here wasn’t easy. It took a pivotal

moment at the age of 18 for Katla to ask: “Why am I studying engineering when I hate it? Why am I not doing something artistic, which is what I truly love?”

That moment of clarity set Katla on a whirlwind journey. Now, almost ten years later, she has just finished an MFA film programme at Columbia University, made a couple of award-winning short films, and teaches screenwriting. Her latest project, a short film *Weather Rules the Field, but Whim the Child* (*Veður ræður akri, en vit syni* in Icelandic) is set to have its Icelandic premiere during the Reykjavik International Film Festival this September.

A BATTLE WITH NATURE

The film had its international premiere in Tokyo after being selected from over 5,000 submissions for the prestigious Short Shorts Film Festival. In just 13 minutes, *Weather Rules the Field, but Whim the Child* tells the story of a growing conflict within

a family as a son tries to convince his mother to move to the city due to the increasing danger of flooding, but she is determined to stay.

Katla. “The crux of the film is about a woman who would rather stay and grapple with the elements than be taken away from the place she calls home.”

The crux of the film is about a woman who would rather stay and grapple with the elements than be taken away from the place she calls home.

The title *Veður ræður akri, en vit syni* is a quote from *Hávamál*, an ancient Norse poem dating back to around 900-1000 AD, comprising various shorter poems. These verses offer guidance on life, proper behaviour, and wisdom.

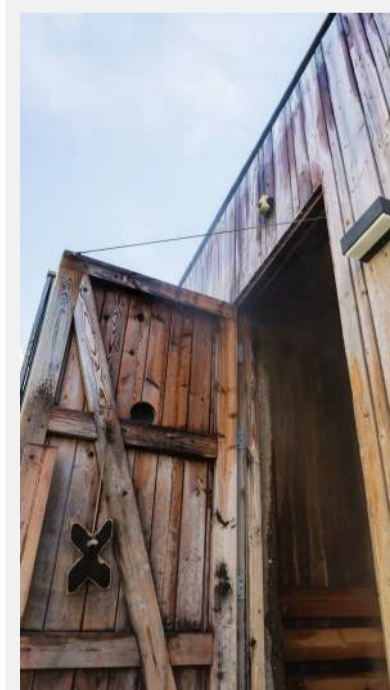
“It’s a very obscure quote about how people are influenced by nature and their surroundings,” says

The idea of *Weather Rules the Field, but Whim the Child* goes back to a conversation Katla had with a Mexican-Icelandic cinematographer Irene Gomez-Emilsson, who proposed to collaborate on a series of films about climate change in Iceland, inviting Katla to write and direct.

“At the time, I didn’t have any ideas

that were sort of in that world, or at least not so openly in that world,” Katla explains. “I remember just going on a drive, which is funny, because, of course, driving around to get ideas is not very environmentally friendly, but very helpful.”

During this drive around Hvalfjörður, Katla had an epiphany. “There is sort of a genre in Icelandic film, which is what I call ‘the old man on a farm’ genre,” she explains. “It often has the man listening to RÚV and making some disgusting food like sheep’s head or whatever. These films are about loneliness. I wanted to not necessarily subvert it, but just do my own take on it – first of all, with a woman, and second of all, what would it look like if the film was set in the near future?” This choice keeps the vibe of the genre, but intentionally brings it into a modern day setting. “Because when I grow old, I’m not going to be eating sheep’s head,” Katla muses. “I’m probably going to just be having sushi.”



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After contemplating a few climate-related ideas, Katla decided to focus on rising sea levels — a pressing issue in places like Florida and Venice that may soon be a pressing factor in Iceland's coastal towns. "I was thinking how would climate change affect a person that lives alone in this way," she says.

CREATIVE FUSION

Katla wore many hats during the film's production — in addition to writing and directing, she also handled the editing herself. "I always edit my own work," she says. "It's been said in film that the story is written three times — once on the page, once on set, and then again in the edits. So in this film, I was sort of omnipresent. But that's usually what I do," she says, quickly adding: "I do love collaborating. I think I want to try working with an editor."

Taking the idea to a complete film was a long process, complicated primarily by the main players all liv-

ing in different countries. "It took forever," Katla sighs, "It was a very slow burn. But then once it ramped up, it ramped up very fast." The film was shot in the summer of 2023 over the period of two and a half days.

Apart from the challenges of Icelandic weather, the crew faced some scheduling constraints that meant they couldn't film at night. This resulted in Katla rewriting the script just a few days before the shoot, and changing the setting to June-July rather than late August. "As often happens with sort of serendipitous coincidences, I actually now really like the fact that it's on one of these midsummer nights," she says.

The film stars just three actors: Edda Björgvinsdóttir, Jörundur Ragnars-son and Móeiður Ronja Davíðsdóttir. Casting was a rigorous process Katla was fully immersed in, despite the challenges of distance. "When I wrote the first draft years ago, I always pictured [lead actress] Edda Björgvinsdóttir," she says. "She's

perfect for the role, and such an icon — so kind and gracious. She's also

While Katla is proud of all the collaborations that made the film possible,

This is a film of hope.

a big environmentalist which might be one of the things that drew her to the script."

Weather Rules the Field, but Whim the Child features an original score composed by Sævar Jóhannsson, the winner of the Grapevine's "You Should Have Heard This" award in 2023. His soundtrack includes a collaboration with renowned violist Ásta, adding a rich texture to the film's emotional landscape.

"The soundtrack takes up a lot of space," says Katla. "Like all people, last summer, I saw *Oppenheimer*, and in *Oppenheimer*, the music is so constant and loud and overbearing in a way. I loved that, so I told Sævar, 'Just go ahead with the music.' Working with him is easy because everything he creates is stunning."

she particularly highlights her work with Irene. "The cinematography really shines," she says. "It was such a beautiful collaboration. Sometimes it felt like we didn't even need to speak — we understood each other completely."

CRAFTING HOPE

Ironically, the natural beauty and power of the film's Hvalfjörður setting was somewhat overshadowed by a large aluminium factory located just across the fjord. This factory had to be removed in post-production. With the factory removed from the final cut, Katla hopes the film will convey a message of optimism to its audience. "This is a film of hope," she says. "It's a love letter to Hvalfjörður, and the ocean."

"The haunting thing about climate change is that people are alarmed and aware, but the people in power don't seem to be willing to do enough," she says. "But if anything, I hope people come away from the film with a heightened sense of what's to come — maybe feeling the ambition to make a change."

Having recently wrapped another short film, Katla is slowly setting her sights on making a feature film. "My dream is to make a feature in the next three years or so," she says. "I recently turned 28, and my dream was always to be on set by the time I'm 30. We'll see if that happens. I'm manifesting." ■

Weather Rules the Field, but Whim the Child premieres in Iceland during the Reykjavík International Film Festival happening September 26-October 6

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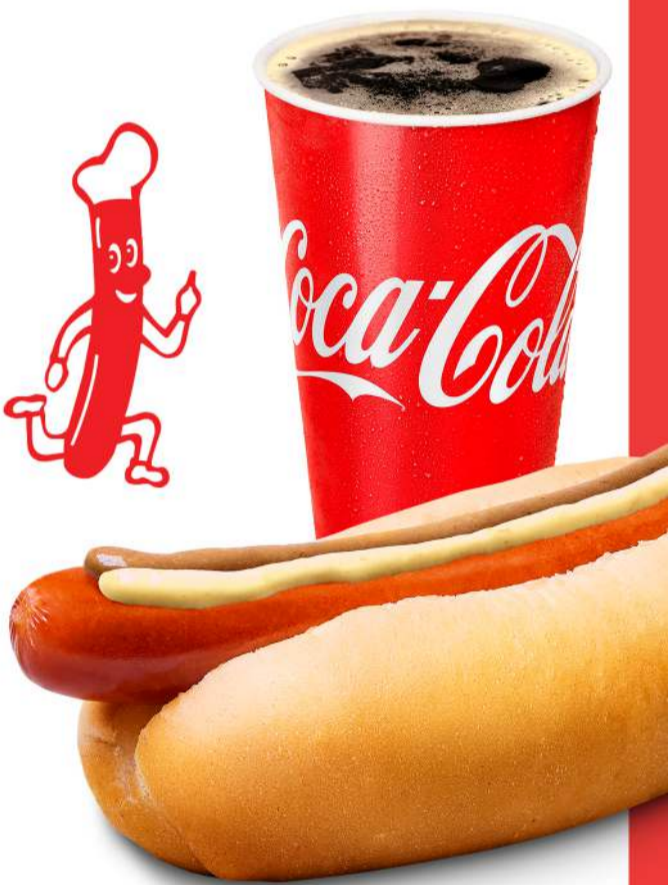
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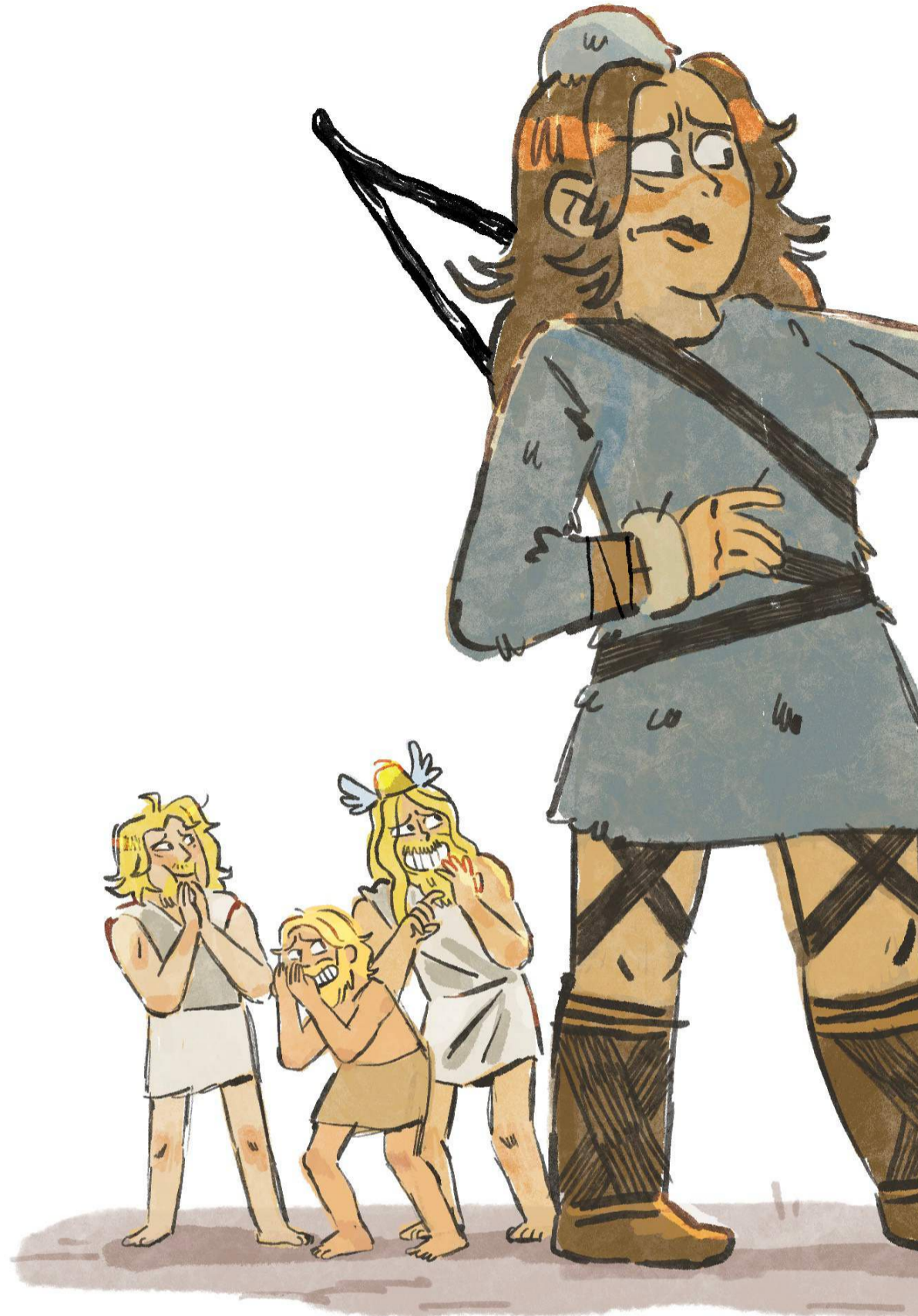
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The Edda Or
Whatever

Skksksksk-Skáldská

The one where Óðinn invents poetry by drooling

WORDS Grayson del Faro
IMAGE Maria R. Dell'Olio

a whole lot of sass. (Not to mention ass!) If you've ever wondered, "Wasn't Þórr like the frat bro of the Norse gods?" (he was) or, "Didn't Loki get dicked down by a literal horse?" (he did)... Then shut up, I'm getting to it.

HOW ABOUT THEM APPLES

This week's section of the Prose Edda is called Skáldskaparmál. It translates to something like the Language of Poetry, which is your casual reminder that the Edda was meant to be a poetry textbook. It looks like the author, Snorri Sturluson, has finally gotten to the educational shit. Even though poetry stuff is kinda my vibe, I'll skip most of it because I know you're probably a normal person. The good news is that all the weird words are based on Norse mythology, so the stories wedged in between are total bangers.

The section begins with Ægir, one of several Old Norse deities of the sea but also maybe a giant, who is invited into Ásgarður, the fortress of the gods, for drinks. Like Thirsty Thursday, but with the entire Norse pantheon. He's sitting next to Bragi, the

god of poetry, who gives him some goss about the other gods. Apparently, a giant who's also an eagle tricked Loki into giving him food and then Loki got pissed and stabbed the eagle. It flew off with Loki, saying he'd only be released if he lured the goddess Iðunn away from Ásgarður for some unknown reason.

Loki is basically a walking red flag, so of course he agrees. He tells Iðunn – who is famous for her apples – that he found some even better ones that she just has to check out. When she does, she is carried off to Giantland by the eagle, which happens to actually be a giant named Þjazi. Without them apples, the gods instantly get old af, and heaven forbid they have grey hair, so they force Loki to bring Iðunn back. When Þjazi chases them back into Ásgarður, the gods kill him. Then his daughter claps back.

FEET IT OR YEET IT

Þjazi's daughter Skaði marches into Ásgarður heavily armed and dripping with armour, ready to crush some skulls. They offer to compensate her for the death of her father

Welcome to The Edda or Whatever, where I'm spilling the tea on Norse mythology. We're breaking down the Prose Edda, a Medieval Icelandic textbook that also low-key recaps most of what we know about the Norse gods today, but we're doing it with a little bit of style and



aparmál

by allowing her to marry a god, but she is only allowed to choose which one by looking at their feet! It's like that hilariously trashy British reality show *Naked Attraction*, except it stops at their feet. So, more like Ankle Attraction? Skaði's horny for the himbo god Baldur and tries to choose him, but she fails and accidentally picks the old, crusty sea god Njörður. Like the Hemingway novel, he is both *The Old Man and the Sea*, and probably just as boring.

This is not enough for Skaði. She insists they do the impossible: make her laugh. So Loki ties one end of a rope to a goat and the other to his nutsack, then plays tug-of-war with his fucking balls. That is not my spicy version of it; that is the honest-to-goddess literal translation of the Old Norse text. Naturally, Skaði lols and now she's the goddess of skiing. As a little treat, Óðinn rips her father's eyeballs out of his face and turns them into stars. Isn't that sweet?

Of course Skaði and Njörður's marriage doesn't last — but it doesn't sound like too bad of a settlement to me. Earlier in the Edda, it's men-

tioned that Skaði hates living in the sea because she can't stand the seagulls, and Njörður hates living in the mountains because of the howling of the wolves, so they go their separate ways. She wanted a trophy husband but she got the ultimate sugar daddy, complete with a happy divorce. Honestly, who needs a Pink Ferrari when you can become the goddess of your favorite hobby?

POETRY AND HO-ETRY

Next Ægir asks Bragi about the origin of poetry. There is no one better to explain poetry than the god of it himself.

Bragi explains that there was once some beef between the two different groups of Norse gods, the Æsir and the Vanir. In order to settle it, they all spat into a big bowl and mixed it together. That gives me the ick, but I hear spitting is actually a pretty common fetish so to each their own, I guess.

This spit blob turns into a wise man, but he randomly gets murdered by dwarves. They mix his blood with honey and turn it into a magical

mead that gives the power of poetry to anyone who drinks it. It is eventually sealed up inside a mountain for safekeeping, guarded by a giantess named Gunnlöð. Óðinn transforms into a snake to slither through a hole in the mountain (totally not a metaphor or anything) and they Netflix and chill for no less than three days.

Óðinn must be pretty damn good in bed, because Gunnlöð offers him three drinks of the magic mead to reward his services. He slurps it all up (not a metaphor), transforms into an eagle, and flies off with it. He makes it back to Ásgarður just in the nick of time to spit it out (only literally) and share it with the other gods, but he dribbles out a little bit on the way (don't worry about it). So let's just say that Óðinn gave 'em the old "hawk tuah" and that's how poetry was invented.

Morals of the story:

1. An apple a day keeps the ravages of age away. (Only applies to Norse gods. Sorry.)
2. You are the goddess of your own favorite hobby and you don't even need a sugar daddy to give you that! ■

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Centre Map

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

Dining

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Drinking

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

12 KEX HOSTEL
Skúlagata 28
The former biscuit factory now serves as a trendy hostel, with a bar, restaurant and a live concert space. There's always something going on, and if not, it's a great spot to grab those after-work drinks. With a rotation of foreign tourists who stumble onto a heavy metal show happening in the restaurant, you're always bound for an enjoyable experience. JB

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

14 VITABAR
Bergþórugata 21
If you're staying in Reykjavik more than a few days, you ought to find

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

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

Shopping & Activities

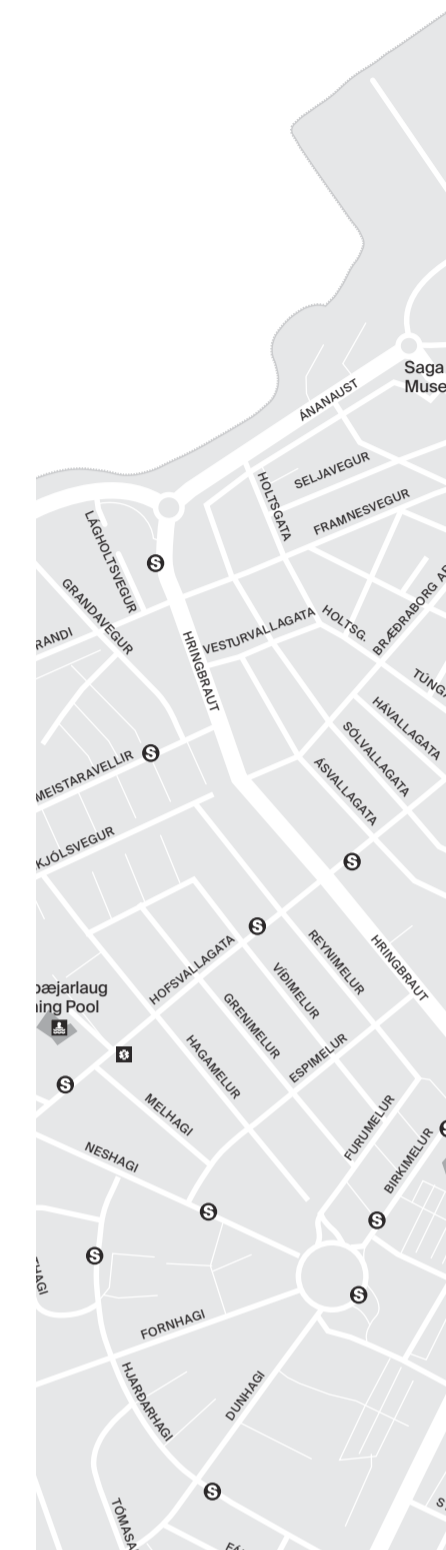
16 BÍÓ PARADÍS
Hverfisgata 54
Sometimes the smell of popcorn fills the air of Hverfisgata, as if beckoning you to come inside. You succumb and find yourself in the cutest art house cinema with colourful posters on the walls and vintage-looking bar straight outta Wes Anderson movie. There's always a film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

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

18 THE REYKJAVÍK WHEEL
Miðbakkí harbour
If you're looking for a knockoff London Eye experience, look no further than the Reykjavik Wheel. A ferris wheel by the docks, it opened in the summer of 2024 for a limited lease of one summer. Heck, if things go well, you might still see it next year. JB

Be Warned

19 101 BISTRO
Austurstræti 3
The bistro on the corner of Ingólfs-torg and Austurstræti that has a plaque outside saying, "Come in and try the worst [insert popular food item] that one guy on Tripadvisor said we had", or something like that. It's a trap, do not go there. That plaque



has been in the same spot ever since Hrunið. RG

20 10-11
Austurstræti 17
If you're shopping here, I hope it's because you consider this an absolute last-minute resort. Like, you're down-and-out after a night of partying and you need some form of carbohydrates (or for that matter, protection). Don't make this a frequent pitstop in your grocery-shopping because: a) their prices are gouged to compensate for the fact they're always open, and b) their product variety is shit – even by Icelandic standards. Check out Krónan instead, a stone's throw away. RG

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

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Vaka Folk Festival
17:00 Iðnó
King Lucky
21:00 Kaffibarinn
My Body Is A Bowl
20:30 Tjarnarbió

Monday September 16
The Bootleg Beatles
20:00 Harpa (Eldborg)
Jón Halldór
21:00 Kaffibarinn

Tuesday September 17
Party Karaoke
21:00 Gaukurinn
DJ Ómar E
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Nordic Affect
20:00 Mengi

Wednesday September 18
Kraftgalli DJ Set
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Vinyl Wednesday: Þorgerður
21:00 Röntgen

Thursday September 19
Casio Fatso & Rythmatik
21:00 Gaukurinn
Fusion Groove
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Valdimar & Örn Eldjárn
20:00 Kaffi Flora
Art School Burlesque
21:00 LEMMY
DJ Coco Channel
21:00 Röntgen
Tvíhöfði
20:30 Salurinn

Saturday September 14
Á Móti Só!
20:00 Bæjarbió
No Wukkas (UK) & Hylur
21:00 Bird
Stripaoke
21:00 Gaukurinn
Iceland Symphony Orchestra: Video Games In Concert
16:00 Harpa (Eldborg)
Masood Boomgaard Presents: Self-Help Singh
20:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)
Ásgeir Trausti
21:00 Háskólabíó
Vaka Folk Festival
19:00 Iðnó
DJ Óli Dóri
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Exos Invites: Blawan (UK) & Guests
22:00 Radar
JoeBoxer
22:00 Röntgen
Heaven & Earth: Gunnar Þórðarson's Folk Songs
20:30 Salurinn
House of Heart: A Drag Saga
21:00 Tjarnarbió

Sunday September 15
Seth Newton (US)
20:00 Gaukurinn
Eivör
20:00 Harpa (Silfurberg)



Featured Happy Hour

The English Pub

AUSTURSTRÆTI 12

The English Pub is the sticky, dark, busy drinking hole where nobody knows your name. But one thing that we can recommend it for is one of the happiest happy hours in town. You'll be hard pressed to find a cheaper Guinness – 950 ISK until 7pm – and we have it on good authority from Irish friends that it's "not all bad!", which qualifies as huge praise. Not only that, but you get to watch obscure sports like hurling or hobby horsing or badminton. And if you end up ordering a pint when happy hour is over, you can even get a punch card and work towards everyone's life goal: free booze. Follow your dreams, people. JR

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Music News



NOMEX Unveils 20 Under 30

The pan-Nordic music export office NOMEX has published its annual list of 20 young music professionals currently driving the industry forward. The prizes, hosted by the Nordic Music Biz, are awarded at the Norwegian music festival BY:LARM in Oslo on September 12.

Among this year's honorees are Icelandic music professionals Gabriel Ólafsson and Klaudia Gawryluk. Gabriel is the co-founder of Reykjavik Orkestra, an ensemble of Iceland's top musicians and audio profes-

sionals specialising in recordings for film, TV, and various media. Klaudia is the co-founder of Reykjavik's only electronic music club Radar, opened in 2023, and has been instrumental in platforming Icelandic electronic music through grassroots endeavours. The Icelandic jury consisted of Inga Magnes Weisshappel, creative manager at Wise Music Publishing, Bjarni Daniel Þorvaldsson, co-founder of art collective post-dreifing, and Sólveig Matthildur of Kælan Mikla. **JB**



OPIA Community Presents Its Next Festival

The music community OPIA, spearheaded by Icelandic artist Ólafur Arnalds, has announced its second festival iteration. Their first gathering took place in Berlin in October 2023, and featured performances by Ólafur, JFDR, and the Berlin-based Costa Rican Sofi Paez. The community's upcoming festival goes back to Berlin on December 14. Taking place in Silent Green's venues Kupelhalle and Betonhalle, the seven performers include Davids-

son, Sofi Paez, Ela Minus, and The Vernon Spring. OPIA Community's aim includes fostering experiments and collaborations, strengthening the ties between contemporary classical and electronic music. The collective is defined as a travelling musical series, a record label, and a community hub, partnered with companies Decca/UMG, Wise Music/Bosworth GmbH, von der haardt, and Keychange. **JB**



Treble Technologies Acquire Massive Investment

Startup company Treble Technologies, which develops sound simulation and spatial audio technology, raised €11,000,000 in a Series A round led by venture capital firm KOMPAS VC. The investment will be used to expand the company's team of employees, enhance research and development efforts, forging new enterprise clients, and breaking into new markets. Reykjavik-based Treble was founded in 2020 by acoustic engineers Dr.

Finnur Pind and Jesper Pedersen. Having researched sound simulation technology for close to a decade, the pair launched the Treble platform in 2023 becoming the first cloud-based sound simulation and synthetic audio data generation platform in the world. The company enables industries to bring down costs and produce better sounding environments, products and services. **JB**



Music

Score-Core

Conductor and composer Eimear Noone levels up at Harpa

WORDS Grayson Del Faro
IMAGE RPO

all in my imagination," she laughs. "I haven't been there yet! But I have so many Icelandic colleagues that I know and love, I feel connected already."

These ties to the Icelandic music scene are definitely more than imaginary. Eimear is a longtime friend of composer Atli Örvarson, and knows composer Hildur Guðnadóttir, the first Icelander to win an Academy Award for her work on the film *Joker*. Eimear was not only present at the 2020 ceremony, but was conducting the orchestra — making her the first woman to ever do so. "I was in the pit when she got her Oscar and I was screaming my head off," she admits. "I had Scarlett Johansson right behind me and I was absolutely screaming — I may as well have been at a football match."

NO RAIN, NO GAIN

The similarities between Iceland and Ireland's creative spark extend

beyond the industry, to the climate. "The feeling and the sound of the rainfall," she explains, "It's almost like it occupies your consciousness, and lets the subconscious come through. A bright day is good for orchestration and production and all the nuts and bolts, but a rainy day is great for the kernels, the ideas."

Like many of us kids kept cooped up in cold places, Eimear discovered her passion for video games at an early age. Unlike most of us, however, she found video game music to be a lasting source of inspiration — and specifically, the music of *The Legend Of Zelda* series. "It was listening to Koji Kondo reaching for the [sound of an] orchestra when the technology wasn't there yet," she recalls. "I think that's why his Mario and Zelda themes are so lasting, and we've rearranged them in so many different ways."

Little did Eimear know at the time, but she'd go on to compose music

“We like to be on the cutting edge, but we live in a place that's so old. We live surrounded by history and living history," says Eimear Noone, about her native Ireland. "And I feel like Iceland is like that."

Acclaimed for her work on video game soundtracks, Eimear is soon heading to Reykjavik to conduct Video Games in Concert with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra. She's positively buzzing about it. "This is



for Zelda series herself, and tour North America as the conductor of *The Symphony of the Goddesses* for the franchise's 25th anniversary.

ALL TOGETHER NOW

But Eimear's work has other aspects, too. "I do everything and anything," she says. "I score films and games, I do rock concerts, I do opera, ballet — everything. I have a terribly low boredom threshold!"

Composing for games offers more freedom than working in film, with a variety of different kinds of music required. "You could have a composer writing a sweeping orchestral score and then like a garage band bar music, or Jacuzzi jazz in a hotel," she explains. "Recently, I got to write a piece of French chanson, and we weaved it into the score and really made it belong to the project."

Despite her passions for all kinds of games and music, Eimear's deepest

motivation is her audience. They're not (entirely) your typical season ticket-holders, aging anywhere from five to 80 years old. She finds

I had Scarlett Johansson right behind me and I was absolutely screaming — I may as well have been at a football match.

it incredibly moving when she sees three generations of a family at a performance together, their reactions ranging from "I have never played a video game in my life, but this was really enjoyable" to "I came for the kids, but I cried during the Kingdom Hearts section!"

The audience isn't dissimilar from Eimear's own family. "This is where the kids play," she laughs, pointing

to the dub stage in her home studio. "With complete Dolby Atmos surround sound — I mean, come on!" This custom-made space was

designed for mixing sound for the cinema, but it's strewn with controllers and a Nintendo Switch. "I'll play the odd bit of Fortnite with them in there," she admits. "But I swear we do work in there. I swear the work gets done!" ■

Eimear conducts Video Games in Concert at the Iceland Symphony Orchestra on September 13th and 14th. Get tickets here.

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Ego Death And Enlightenment

Biggi Maus returns with *Litli Dauði / Stóri Hvellur*

WORDS **Birgir Örn Steinarrson**
IMAGE Supplied by the artist

Biggi Maus is the solo project of Birgir Örn Steinarrson of Maus, Króna, and Bigítal. In this track by track, he talks us through his latest solo LP, the '80s new wave-inspired *Litli Dauði / Stóri Hvellur*. Hear it at biggimaus.bandcamp.com.

MÁ ÉG SNÚZA MEIR? (CAN I SNOOZE SOME MORE?)

This sad disco tune was the spark that turned into this album. The lyrics are about grief. That split second when you wake up dreaming of your lost loved one just to realise that the person is no more. "As I write this I am in mourning." The beautiful truth of these words haunt and strangely soothe me.

GLEÝMDU MÉR (FORGET ME)

The punk song of the album, with a badass bassline. The lyrics are about conflict and dichotomy in public discourse. Just because people feel conflicted, they feel entitled for their opinions to be heard at that moment. I disagree. If you feel that strongly about anything, relax before you tweet about it. Emotional comments do more harm than good.

I DON'T REMEMBER YOUR NAME

A cover of Friðrik Dór, written for his 2012 album with Ólafur Arnalds and Janus Rasmussen. Hearing this was when I realised this heartthrob was more than just a pretty face. I thought it could be a good cover to reach a bigger audience in Iceland, but the opposite happened. The radio stations passed, and it blew up on U.S. Spotify. I have no idea what happened. Does anyone understand the algorithm?

ÓARGARDÝR (WILD ANIMAL)

A ballad I made with Valmar Valjaots of Hvanndalsbræður. I wrote it after a conversation with a friend about creativity and the self. We have different views on life, and I hoped it might help him see how he creates his own suffering. I doubt it did, but the song remains a reminder to know one's own faults, and take responsibility for them.

HVERSDAGS-SLEIKUR (THE MUNDANE FRENCH KISS)

A love song to the mundane. I'm 48, and live a happy, fulfilled existence with a beautiful family who accept me for what I am. The lyrics are snap-shots of small moments in everyday activities. I realise I might sound like an annoying prick to some... but I don't give a shit. I'm loving every mundane second.

EKKI VERA AÐ EYÐA MÍNUM TÍMA (DON'T BE WASTING MY TIME)

This song hopefully serves as a guide on how to spot toxic behaviour in others. Funnily enough, I have never been asked so often: 'Who this song is really about?' You're so vain — you probably think this song is about you, don't you?

TÖLUM BARA UM VEDRID (LET'S JUST TALK ABOUT THE WEATHER)

Most people are afraid of their own emotions. In Iceland, when awkward emotional occasions present themselves, we tend to talk about the weather. This is a song about those moments. When we feel bursting with emotion, but say 'Hey... it's a bit nippy outside, isn't it?'

LITLI DAUÐI (LA PETIT MORTE)

A song about the eternal present moment, inspired by the writing of Alan Watts and our own painter and columnist Erna Mist who I really enjoy reading. A song about everything and nothing at all. A fitting end to the album... or at least the digital version. ■

Check out the online article for the scoop on the album's two vinyl-only bonus tracks at grapevine.is/music.



Jazz, Baby

Mánudjass Jams On

Reykjavík's legendary weekly jazz night is thriving at Le Kock

WORDS **Ish Sveinsson Houle**
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

adding a Thursday evening (Fimmtudjass, anyone?) to the regular Mondays. But it's difficult to finance another night, having received a single grant of 500,000 ISK. "You can't really do much with it," says Sveinn. "But still, it helps."

IN A JAM

One of the core tenets of Mánudjass is splitting the evening into an opening ensemble performance, followed by a jam session. Mánudjass is the only consistent jazz night in town that provides this staple of jazz experimentation.

Being able to provide a welcoming stage for learners, experienced players who want to try new things, or musicians returning to jazz after some time away is essential to the Mánudjass ethos. "Last Monday, we had a tourist come by and join in, in his mountain suit and boots," says Sveinn. "It's a melting pot, you could say, to have a jam session."

A JAZZ MASTERCLASS

This air of acceptance also creates the space for whatever happens in the session to unfold. "I know for a fact that this is a place where you can come and just try new things out and just let loose," says Sveinn. "You can goof around and mess around with ideas, and to be able to have that certain freedom — it's a kind of inspiration."

These jam sessions also provide a stage to up-and-coming jazz musicians, many of whom are students. "A lot of people who come are teachers, or at least mentors," says Sveinn. "You can see it — they come to their students and talk them into playing, just getting the new musicians' confidence up, and getting them up on stage." Mánudjass is really the only spot in town to do that.

PROTECTING THE FUTURE

The topic of places to play leads to a familiar conversation — the lack of small/mid-sized venues for new musicians to perform at. "With the number of young musicians that are getting their education, I think the future is really bright," says Sveinn. "I just hope that we will have the foresight to help the venues give these artists a stage, for them to progress and introduce their music."

The scene does have another hope: Bird, a new bar where Frederiksen Ale House used to be. It opened this past June, and is working to establish itself as an approachable music venue. The Reykjavík Jazz Festival hosted post-performance concerts at Bird this year, and welcomed students to the stage.

Sveinn also contends that music isn't just for locals, listing it alongside nature and volcanoes as one of the top reasons people visit Iceland. "Music is a big reason we have tourists coming over," he says. He smiles knowingly. "It's a large part of what keeps us here. It's not great weather, or cheap food. It's something else. Icelanders will say literature is our greatest value of wealth, but I think music is becoming our greatest wealth today, and our musicians our best representatives abroad."

Despite the fact that more venues are closing than opening, Sveinn does feel confident about one thing: "Monday Jazz as an establishment is set, and that will continue in this form or another for the coming years. I think it's a really, really significant part of the Icelandic jazz scene, and for musicians to grow and then to know each other and just to progress." ■

Mánudjass happens every Monday at 19:30 at Le Kock on Tryggvagata.



Sound And Music

The Spaces In Between

Masaya Ozaki's musical worlds

WORDS Ciarán Daly
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

As one of the most photographed countries on the planet, it's easy to communicate what Iceland looks like – even what it feels like. But what does Iceland *sound* like? For Masaya Ozaki, a composer and audio artist based in Reykjavik, the answer is as complex and captivating as the land beneath his feet.

Masaya is known for his deep explorations of space through sound installations, noise, and contemporary classical music. He has crafted a unique aural experience of this environment with his latest album, *Mizukara*. Blending ambient and atonal influences with positively geological soundscapes, the album is a richly textured tapestry of local field recordings, electronics, stringed

instruments, and more.

Recorded in Iceland over the last year or so, it's a fitting release for an artist who thrives at the boundaries of genres and mediums; atmospheres and environments; inner and outer worlds.

"Once, my work was all about sound. My sound," says Masaya. "But now, I think more about the environment. What kind of space? What kind of structures? What about the material?"

VIBRATION OF THE SPACE

Born in Niigata, Japan, Masaya's journey to Iceland began with his passion for music. After feeling like an outsider in his youth, his teen-aged discovery of Nirvana opened the door to a musical world. This path led him to Berklee College in Boston and, eventually, New York, where he spent over a decade composing commercial music for TV, films, and adverts.

It was the closure of music venues during the pandemic that sparked a shift in Masaya's creative thinking. "I realised that physical spaces are vital for music," he says. "Instead, you had to listen to live sets online. I

felt like it wasn't real. I realised that going to a venue and sharing the moment with other audiences is so important – hearing the vibration of the space is a big part of live music."

After a series of changes in his personal life ("I had no strings attached to New York anymore"), Masaya moved to Reykjavik for an artist residency. A field recording session in an ice cave profoundly impacted his musical world. "That's the moment I realised that the sound of water is everywhere," he says. "It's usually kind of mundane and everyday – the sound of the shower, or rain dripping from the gutter. But when I noticed the sound of the water dripping in that cave, it was very beautiful because of the space and the acoustics. The realisation that space is essential for sound and music prompted me to really change my composition style."

GARDENING IN LIGHT-HOUSES

This shift is evident when you compare Masaya's 2017 studio album *Mythologies* with the more recent *Echoes for Gróttu Lighthouse*, which was composed and recorded entirely on location. In a format reminiscent of Ragnar Kjartansson's *The*

Visitors, five musicians occupied different floors of the Gróttu lighthouse, creating an improvised interplay of sound throughout the space. It was an immersive encounter that explored the acoustic peculiarities of a unique building.

Masaya's digital recordings provide a distinctly more curated experience – a carefully crafted window into a controlled space as it was on that day; a single piece of media which flattens all of that physical acoustic *resonance* into elegant, densely textured *audio*.

"It's important to understand the difference between an MP3 and a live performance, and the possibilities of where this can lead," says Masaya. "When I'm composing, I often think about Japanese gardeners. Japanese gardening is very different from Western-style gardening. In Japan, gardeners don't bring materials into the garden – they just rearrange the rocks or cut the bushes, and make a composition out of it."

VERTICAL SHIFTS

This approach is partly why Masaya decided to focus on collaborating with Icelandic artists in *Mizukara*. "These artists were my rocks," he

laughs. "What is so special about being in Iceland is not just the nature, but the community of musicians. For me, it is very, very unique compared to other cities or countries. In New York, musicians work in separate scenes. They rarely seem to cross over, which I feel is very sad. But here, they connect across genres. People here are very humble, very genuine, and very supportive of one another."

This flirting between scenes and genres mirrors Masaya's approach to music, which flits between composition, noise, ambient, and sound art. "I'm keen to connect with different crowds and make music on the borderline," he says. "I want to explore the in-between. That's why the weather here is important to me. It's true what they say about Iceland – you can experience every type of weather in one day. It happens very vertically: rain, then wind, then snow, then sun. It's rarely crossfaded. One thing I focus on in my latest album is this sense of vertical shifts. I trust nature, and I feel that if nature can behave in this way, I can too through my music." ■

Check out Masaya's latest work and upcoming live performances at masayaozaki.com

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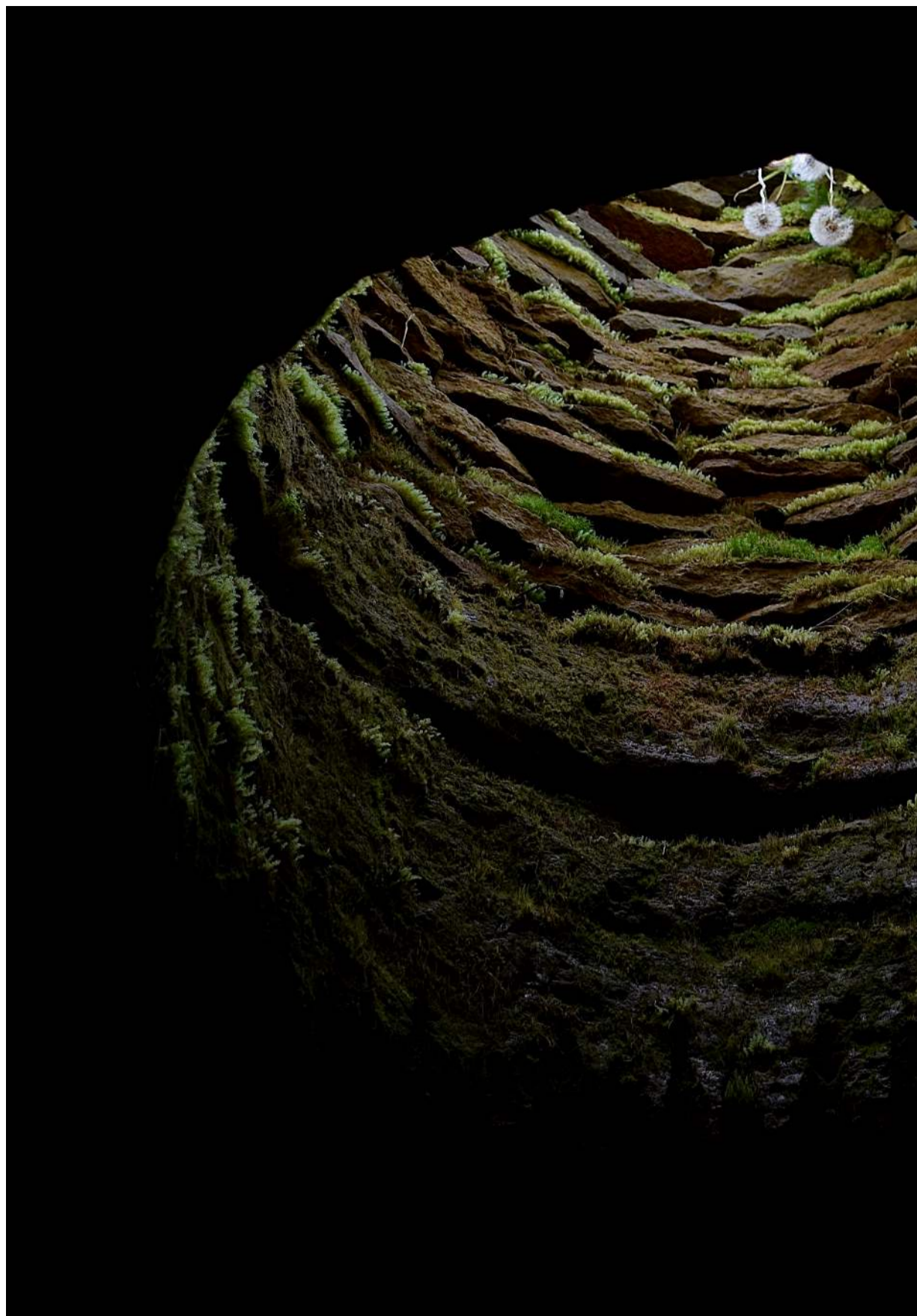

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Road Trip **The Old Ways**

A road trip along the historied southwest coast

WORDS John Rogers
IMAGES John Rogers

crops, and the floodplains streaked with intertwining meltwater rivers. In summer, the glaciers are lit bright pink by the endless sun, and in winter the icy shoreline is lined with waterfalls that have frozen midair.

Compared to all that majesty and drama, it's understandable that we hear less about the 100km inland drive it takes to get there. This part of Route One passes sleepy villages and horse farms with riding paths

at Hveragerði, leaving the steady flow of tourist traffic behind. The skies are blue with hardly a cloud to be seen, and it's warm enough to roll down the windows and blast some music as we streak down Route 38 towards the coastline. The road winds through a forested area dotted with cabins before crossing some wild, wide-open flatlands, and soon after turning onto Route 34 we're rocketing along the coastline.

It seems like there are glittering waves crashing down around us from every direction.

through the mossy foothills and tundra. Salmon fishing rivers wend their way towards the ocean, and a succession of discreet roads trail off temptingly towards the southern coastline.

THE LONG SPIT

It's around noon on a late summer day when we head out from Reykjavik to explore this calm and sleepy area. We turn off Route One

On the way towards Eyrarbakki, the road crosses an improbable spot – a long, sandy spit that forms a natural land bridge with a lagoon on one side and the roiling ocean on the other. Shrieking gulls fly alongside us, briny sea air fills the car, and it seems for a moment like there are glittering waves crashing down around us in every direction. It's a sensorily overwhelming spot, in the best way.

When people talk about road tripping along the south coast, they're most often referring to a certain dramatic stretch of Route One. You probably know which one. It starts at the slender torrent of Seljalandsfoss, and from there it's a solid 300km of sea stacks, boulder-strewn mountain slopes, turf-houses built into dramatic out-



It's also the home of Hafið Bláa, a café at the apex of the land bar. It sits on a small hill marked by a giant lobster statue, and has huge windows that look out in all directions for a panoramic view of the area. There's a bar and indoor seating under its hull-shaped roof, with a sun trap balcony looking out over the black sand beach behind. The speciality of the house is delicious local langoustine, served simple as can be with salad, buttered bread, and a wedge of lemon. It's a perfect lunch spot enveloped by the surrounding nature.

ANCIENT AND RECENT HISTORY

A short drive away lies the village of Eyrarbakki, population 604. It's a small network of seaside streets with a long history, visible in the well-maintained old town, a local museum, and an old store called Laugabúð. Its doors were first opened in 1917 by famous shopkeeper Guðlaugur Pálssonar, who lived and worked there until he died in 1985.

The building has been renovated several times, and today holds photo albums, documents and memorabilia from its lengthy run as the village

everything-store. Guðlaug's records reveal countless fascinating details, including his first customer – a local priest called Rev. Gísli Skúlason, who bought a small notebook – and his first day earnings of a princely 28 krónur.

Just a few minutes down the coast is Stokkseyri, where we hop out of the car and climb up the sea wall for a look at the beach. The shallows are littered with tens of tiny black islands holding a network of gleaming tide pools. A sign tells us this is the terminus of Þjórsárhraun, Iceland's largest lava field, which rolled here all the way from Hekla over 11,000 years ago. It took the Atlantic ocean to stop the lava's flow.

CREAM AND CAVES

Our next stop is the Bausgsstaðir Creamery. Only open in the summer months, this neat little house was built to produce butter and cheese in 1905, and still holds the original milk churns and butter moulds. The waterwheel that powered the place rumbles and grinds away on the building's side, sending shimmering splashes high into the warm air, like a flashback to life before industrialisation.

Eventually the road hits the wide expanse of the Þjórsá river, and we turn north to reconnect with Route One. There's time for one more stop on this potted history tour – The Caves of Hella. This mysterious series of man-made caves are located on a local farm, where they were used as storage rooms as late as the 1980s.

The caves are much older, dating all the way back to the Viking era. Centuries of wear and tear has left only tantalising clues as to their nature. Our guide Stefán takes pleasure in joining the dots between Irish style cross carvings, historic factlettes, and tall tales to weave a tempting speculative history. He wonders out loud if the Irish monks the first Viking settlers found here were more numerous and established than the record shows – and if this site might have been the hub of an all-but forgotten religious community that coexisted with their new Viking neighbours.

We emerge blinking into the daylight, and watch the stream of shining rental cars and buses heading towards the south coast's natural wonders. They're on track for some memorable sights, but they also don't know what they're missing. ■




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Travel FAQ

Stay Away From The E

Don't go to the volcano, because you might die

WORDS Jón Trausti Sigurðarson
IMAGES Art Bicnick

The temptation to go for a look is strong, and understandable. Most people don't get to see an erupting volcano in their lifetime. But this eruption and its recent predecessors are closed for some extremely

Firstly, the ground in the erupting area is extremely treacherous. It's old lava that's full of crevasses. Sometimes the chasms are superficially covered by soft, overgrown moss, meaning even the most

If you somehow don't break a leg, you might step on a mortar round and explode.

It has escaped no one's attention that yet another eruption is taking place on the Reykjanes peninsula. Just like the other four eruptions this year, this one is closed to visitors. I'll say this again: The area has been closed off by the authorities, and the ban is being enforced by the police. So there's no going there, no hiking, and no pulling over on the road between Keflavík and Reykjavík.

good reasons. And we, your friends at the Grapevine, are here to help you not hurt yourself with this official Reasons You Shouldn't Visit The Volcano FAQ.

careful eyes won't see the danger until it's too late. So if you're looking to break a leg, or disappear forever – or to hide a body, nudge nudge – that's your hike.

Q: Why can't I hike to the volcano?

Second, there are now five overlapping recent lava fields in the area, and even though they might seem solid, they're anything but. Only the top layer has solidified, with steaming hot lava right beneath the surface. And if you've seen the

A: Pull up a chair and make yourself comfortable – because the reasons why hiking in the area is banned are numerous.



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Eruption, Please!

end of *Terminator 2*, you know what falling into hot lava does to a killer robot from the future, never mind a soft-bodied tourist like you.

Third – even if there were a hiking trail, it would start near the Grindavík-Keflavík road junction. This area used to be a training ground for the US Army back in *Dr. Strangelove* times. The US Army is not known for cleaning up messes they've created – remember Iraq? – and they left unexploded bombs strewn all over the area. Yeah, we're not even kidding. So if you ignore the hiking ban and somehow manage to not break a leg or fall through the ground into lava, you might step on a Korean War-era mortar round and explode.

Q: Well can I at least drive there and take a look?

A: Sorry, but no. The ban on cars pulling over and parking on the road that passes the eruption is a simple

safety issue. It's a 90 km/h road, and cars slowing down suddenly, parking willy nilly on the side of the road, or just behaving unpredictably creates obvious collision hazards. So if that volcano glow catches your eye – keep your eyes on the road, and your phone in your pocket.

Q: Okay, okay, no volcano, I get it. Am I allowed to do anything fun?

A: We recommend hiking to dormant rather than active volcanoes. And since Iceland is basically one big dormant volcano, your options are many. Here are a few of our favourite places to witness nature while also not dying. Many of them are within easy reach of Reykjavík.

MT. HELGAFELL
(338 meters)

Our first recommendation is located in the Hafnarfjörður vicinity at the southern end of the Capital Area, so

not that far from the live volcano. It's basically a round pile of subglacially formed volcanic rock that stands in a flat, solid lava field that one has to hike through before getting to the base of the mountain. It's a pleasant, easy hike with an incredibly good view for little work.

MT. ESJA
(770 meters)

On the northern end of the Capital Area you'll find Mt. Esja, the favourite mountain of the local population. Most people measure the hike up to the so-called "Rock" at 600 metres of elevation. The view to the north

you'll get to the town of Akranes in about 40 minutes. The town stands next to a mountain called Akrafjall, which has a straightforward path eastwards along the southern edge of the mountain. You'll be at the top in an hour and a half.

GRÁBRÓK
(170 meters)

Since our choice of hikes have been slowly taking you northwest, it seems good to end with this gem. It's situated on the Ring Road about 45 kilometres north of Borgarnes. It's a proper 3,400 old crater, and it's also the easiest of all these hikes – you'll summit within minutes of parking your car next to it.

We hope this article talked you out of potentially becoming a news story yourself. Have fun out there, and stay safe. ■

We recommend hiking to dormant rather than active volcanoes.

BÚRFELL CRATER
(179 meters)

If you want to see how a volcanic crater looks, this 7,000 year old crater near Hafnarfjörður is a good, safe choice. The hike to the crater is three or four kilometres, and you hike there through a beautiful long lava channel called Búrfellsgjá.

is limited by the mountain itself, but on a good day you'll get a good view of the whole capital area. The trail is about three kilometres each way and takes one to three hours based on your fitness, or how hungover you are.

AKRAFJALL
(566 meters)

If you drive northwest from Reykjavík



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Environment

Last Chance Tourism

Tourists are flocking to see the shrinking glaciers, posing new problems for

WORDS Cody Skahan
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

eruption, reopening on August 28. A hiker fell into a crevasse on August 25 while observing the eruption, and had to be retrieved by search and rescue.

But the most significant of these was the collapse of an ice cave on Breiðamerkurjökull on Sunday August 25 [see this issue's cover story], which saw two members of a 23-person guided tour group become trapped under falling ice. One was rescued – albeit seriously injured and hospitalised – and the other was tragically pronounced dead at the scene.

PUSHING THE ECOSYSTEM

Many of Iceland's tourists are engaging in the phenomenon known as "last chance tourism". Also known as "doom tourism" in relation to climate change, this is a form of travel based on visiting sites that will soon disappear, or otherwise be destroyed.

Sophia Schneider is researching this idea for her masters thesis at the Reykjavik School of Energy. "The tragedy that occurred this week in

the ice cave is a clear indication of the limits we are willing to push our ecosystem to for the value of a tourist dollar," she says.

According to Sophia, Iceland has perfected the process of disaster packages for tourist consumption: "To see the great wonders of the world before they are gone." Natural ice caves (as opposed to human-made drilled caves) are particularly interesting in this context, because they are caused by glacial meltwater. Iceland's glaciers are melting at a rate over 150 metres a year – a fact that's particularly visible at Sólheimajökull on the south coast, where plaques show how the glacier's retreat over the past decades. "Sólheimajökull is a visual representation of the constant effects of last chance tourism in Iceland, and especially Myrdalshreppur," says Sophie.

THE RISING TIDE

Sophie's research primarily focuses on the waste created by increased tourism in the South of Iceland. "When Iceland reaches its peak of tourism each year, more visitors

The last week of August 2024 saw several natural hazards that significantly affected tourism in Iceland. First, 1,300 people were evacuated from the Blue Lagoon within 40 mins in response to the latest



r Iceland

mean more emissions and more waste," she says. "Tourists are travelling to Mýrdalshreppur in record numbers to see locations such as glaciers, black sand beaches, puffins and waterfalls. What they see is fleeting. But the waste they leave behind is forever."

Tourism, and the waste it produces, is on the rise. The number of international visitors coming through Keflavik Airport from July 2023 to June 2024 was 2.224.042 – an increase of 14% on the 22-23 total. Sophie found that the municipality of Mýrdalshreppur had 626 residents in 2017, and tallied up the waste alongside the population to show that 951.52 tonnes of waste were generated per resident.

This means the average resident generated 1.52 tonnes per annum. In Fjarðabyggð – the largest municipality in the east, with 1998 residents – this total was about a third of that, at 499.5 tonnes per person. "The residents of Mýrdalshreppur are not more wasteful in the sense that they generate 1.30 tonnes more per person," says Sophie. "They have to absorb the waste of visitors."

WASTEFUL EMISSIONS

The creation of this waste is only the start of the problem, with its collection and processing generating considerable emissions. Sophie's thesis is the design and theoretical application of absorbing waste that is both generated for tourists, and by tourists.

current process for much of the south coast. We have to take the problem of waste from tourism and make solutions from it."

At the moment the only biogas plant in Iceland is in Reykjavík, and Sophie contends that infrastructure should be expanded to meet the rising demand. "This also all corre-

It's up to Iceland to decide if last chance tourism means we've given up on combating climate change.

"Biofuels are a solution to both emissions and the waste generated by tourists," she says, referring to fuels produced directly from organic waste. "Iceland is an island, and the waste that record-breaking tourism creates does not leave the island when tourists leave. It's too much responsibility for rural regions to find solutions for waste management, rather than bringing that waste all the way to Reykjavik, which is the

lates with carbon neutral goals," she says. "Geothermal and hydropower have already been harvested, and it's time to diversify and consider all the options. The disasters that have occurred this week should act as a wakeup call. It may be that last chance tourism drives the economy, but it's up to Iceland to decide if last chance tourism means we've given up on combating climate change." ■

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101 Institutions

The Survivors

The never-changing staples of ever-changing downtown

WORDS John Rogers & Jón Trausti Sigurðarson
IMAGES The Grapevine Archive

that just hangs in there somehow, through the rising rents and buildings changing hands and economic turbulence and gentrification. And though their numbers are slowly dwindling, these 101 institutions gain a certain prestige through their sheer longevity.

some things can survive the capitalist hellscape of Iceland's tourism boom. And if they can do it, so might we all.

HORNIÐ
Hafnarstræti 15

Still run by the original father-and-siblings quartet that opened it in 1979, Hornið was the first place to serve pizza in Iceland, and remains in its original spot, in one of the last ungentrified buildings downtown Reykjavík. The pizza has always been great, the Italian style menu is consistent, and the vibe is

We're not saying they're all must-visit hot spots or anything like that. It may not be fine dining. In some instances, it may not even be that good. But through the 2000-problem, The Economic Collapse™, and other assorted calamities, these places have just kept at it, doing

They say that you're a New Yorker once you lived there long enough to remember what was in that spot before the new business opened there. The same thing won't make you a Reykjavík local – it will only act as proof you've been in town for a couple of months. Because in 101, new places open and close in the blink of an eye. A classic shoe store can become a short-lived dumping spot that's already something else by the time you go to try and eat there. But there's a certain brand of place

The incredible thing is that people will eat this while sober.

now what they did while grunge was a thing, or JFK was alive, or what have you. We find comfort in their consistency – the reassurance that

rock solid. The family are a musically inclined bunch, and have also maintained a live venue in the basement during all of these years, offering

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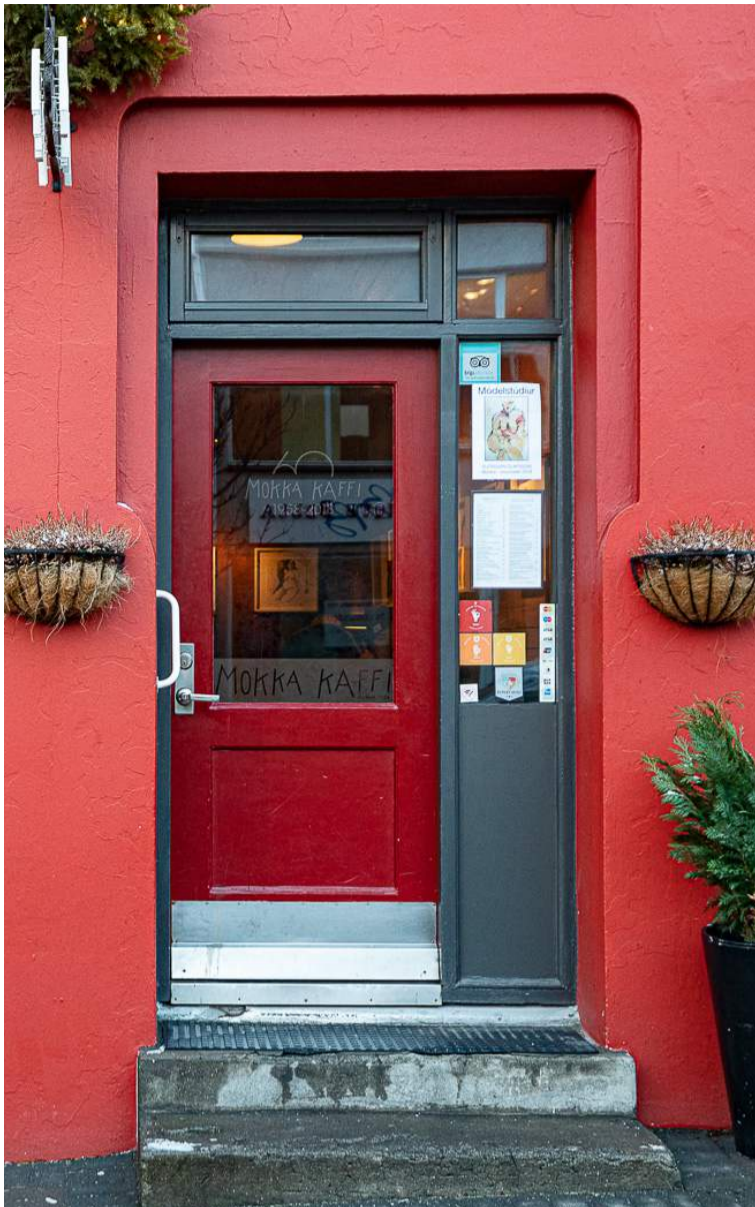
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regular jazz concerts and sporadic events from the rest of the world's music genres. JT

HLÖLLABÁTAR
Ingólfstorgi 1

"The Hlöllabátar experience is best reserved for dire moments that usually occur in the wee hours after heavy drinking." This was true when we wrote that in 2006, it's been true since the place opened up in 1986, and it's still true today. Hlöllabátar sub sandwiches are anything but health food, and your health would be better served elsewhere. But the reasons why you'd have a "Hlöllili" have remained as unaltered by time as their taste. The incredible thing is that people will eat this while sober. And guess what? So can you. JT

VITABAR
Bergþórugata 21

This cosy, super chill neighbourhood burger bar first opened in the 1960s. It was taken over for a bit by a fast

food franchise, then reborn in the '80s – making it not only a survivor, but a member of the undead. We're glad it rose from the grave, because the fare is simple, honest, and reliable: kick-ass cheeseburgers, crispy fries, and cold soda and beers. We've raged about their "forget-me-not" blue cheese burger since this publication's first issue, and we still love it now. JR

MOKKA
Skólavörðustígur 3A

The first café in Iceland to get an espresso machine, the wood-lined Mokka café has been there since 1958. But unlike most boomers, it has stayed true to itself ever since, and hasn't started voting for Trump, posting weird-ass conspiracy theories on Facebook, or spending all its free time commenting on videos of cute dogs. Mokka got it right the first time, and it has hummed that tune ever since, with regular art exhibits alongside a damn good cup of coffee. JT

DEVITO'S
Laugavegur 126

Even if the world completely falls into ruin, the global supply chain collapses, and fresh mozzarella becomes something people will kill for, Devito's will be there. Pedro Pascal

commercial whaling. Until whaling resumed again in 2006, Þrír Frakkar was the only restaurant in the country to serve whale steak, a tribute to the fact that the founder/owner Úlfar somehow got his hands on a few containers worth of deep frozen fin whale. Whale steak is still on the

the regulars' liver gives out next. Mónakó is truly a country of its own, remaining the only proper dive bar in Iceland, with a customer base that shows up on the first of the month, and then falls away as the weeks, and their money, run out. JT

KAFFIBARINN
Bergstaðastræti 1

Part nightlife institution and part daytime creche for functioning alcoholics, Kaffibarinn turned 30 last year. Like any good middle-aged thing, it's been having a bit of a midlife crisis of late, ditching its casual, heavily-worn drinking hole vibe in favour of a gin joint makeover. But hey, maybe it's just a phase. Aesthetic wobble aside, it's still one of the most reliably fun bars in town, with DJs every night, happy hour from 15:00-19:00, and a motley cast of regulars who are so loyal they made a book about them. Long live KB. JR ■

We are all temporary. Devito's is eternal.

and Bella Ramsey could be ambling through the devastated remains of Reykjavík, and still stop for a perfectly greasy slice in Devito's strip-lit confines. Viggo Mortenson could be fleeing cannibals through the shattered wreck of Hlemmur, and grab a cheeky margherita to go. We are all temporary. Devito's is eternal. JR

menu today, alongside fish dishes that have remained a staple in the ever changing restaurant landscape of Iceland. Whatever your opinion on eating whale meat is – anti, we assume – the fish dishes are constantly great. JT

ÞRÍR FRAKKAR
Baldursgata 14

Þrír Frakkar opened up in 1989, the same year Iceland discontinued

MÓNAKÓ
Laugavegur 78

No, you won't meet the count of Monte Cristo, there is no film festival, and there is no casino... or if there is, it's betting on which of



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Islanders

Art You Can Eat

Pola Sutryk is blurring lines between food and art

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

"I'm a multidisciplinary artist, food artist, cook, chef, forager. It definitely changes depending on the context – it's all of these things at once and neither at the same time," says Pola Sutryk, by way of explaining what she does. "I just juggle all these different names." Originally from Poland, Pola has spent the last five years in Reykjavík, but her home culture remains deeply rooted in her work. By night, she bartends; by day, she immerses herself in creating edible installations that foster connection: waste feasts crafted from scraps and wonky veggies, edible sculptures, and jello – so much jello. Pola is certain of one thing: food art is slowly but surely having its moment. After all, we all eat, don't we?

I've been working with food somehow since high school, first as a side job in a cooking school for kids. I was running classes for kids, doing special culinary classes for schools and cooking for birthday parties. That's where I got my interest in food. Then I was studying pedagogy, so I was interested in the teaching aspect of the job that I was doing. But over the years in university, I realised I liked the cooking part of it more than the teaching part and the kids part, so I started cooking professionally in restaurants and culinary events as an assistant.

Five years ago, I moved to Iceland, and when Covid hit, I had a lot of free time. I started to realise that the things I do with food fit more in the arts world than the gastronomy world. I started doing more organically, one step at a time. Using food as an artistic medium is a very fast-growing movement. More peo-

ple got interested and started inviting me to collaborate on different projects, or commissioning things from me.

On the side, I work as a bartender. For financial reasons – but also, it really helps me. When you're freelancing, it's hard to leave your job. You just think about work all the time. For me, it's been really helpful to have another job that's not related to food and cooking, where I can just turn off that aspect of my brain.

WORKING RESTAURANT

One of the first big projects I did was at a post-artistic festival in Poland, where I organised a pop up restaurant inspired by Gordon Matta-Clark restaurant's food. It's a project from the 70s that was a "working restaurant," employing artists to work there as cooks because they couldn't live from their art. We did three dinners for the festival's audience, sharing a communal moment of eating

together with hands.

There's more produce in Poland, both seasonal local ingredients, and interesting things from around

ic to Iceland. For example, learning how to cook and use seaweed. That was something great that Iceland gave me, because I've never lived by the sea before.

I started to realise that the things I do with food fit more in the arts world than the gastronomy world.

the world. So obviously, I can cook more interesting things there. But I really like the challenge of Iceland. I learned a lot from having to figure out what to cook with the small amount of ingredients we have.

I've been foraging since childhood, and it was fascinating to get to know Iceland and see what plants here are the same as in Poland – the ecosystem I know from childhood – and which are new to me and specif-

WASTE NOT

One of the areas I'm interested in is food waste and how to prevent it – ways of using all the parts of produce that we have. Reusing scraps, dumpster diving, and using unwanted food to prevent waste. Because we waste a lot. In Iceland, it's very, very visible, because we have to rely on imported produce so much. We bring most of the food we eat from



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abroad and often it gets damaged during transportation or in storage. Both the importing companies and shops that we sometimes collaborate with see that as a problem, and really want to reduce waste. For me, it's a very important subject in times of climate crisis.

Together with Elín Margot we've done a few waste feast projects, using the unwanted and discarded resources. We forage, dumpster dive

Any project I do is always fully edible... it becomes part of the audience on a physical level.

and collaborate with companies by taking their produce that they have to throw away and then cleaning it — picking the good parts from the bad parts, and cooking with all those that are still good and fully usable.

I've been vegetarian my whole life, but I mostly try to cook vegan because I think it's the most inclusive way. Most people can eat a vegan diet; this is just the simplest, most ethical and closest to me way of cooking. But it's difficult. Locality is very important for me, so in Iceland, local fish would be way better for the environment than soy vegan produce shipped here from the other side of the world. But since I'm a vegetarian, I never learned how to cook meat or fish. It's not something I know.

BIZARRE BITES

Any project I do is always fully edible. It's not only there for visual effect, it becomes part of the audience as it disappears on a very physical level.

I'm constantly learning about food. I love reading and watching movies about it, and my social media algo-

rithms mostly show me food-related content — recipes from different parts of the world, food movies and books, cookbooks, and even old cookbooks. I remember, for example, researching brauðterta, a Scandinavian dish that might seem very weird to people outside of those countries. It's a sandwich cake — a birthday cake made from bread, mayonnaise, and various fillings. It's also a popular traditional dish in Iceland. For me, coming from abroad, it

was a very weirdly flavoured tradition. During my research, I looked through old magazines, translated recipes, and studied pictures, trying to create my own version using AI. Looking at this connection — both me as a foreigner and AI as a new technology, we're learning about this local tradition.

I love jello! I work with agar, which is a vegan gelling agent made from agar-agar seaweed that mostly grows and is harvested around Japan and Korea, but with climate change, it also starts appearing in places that it wasn't growing before. It's one of my favourite substances to work with. It's very fun as you can achieve a lot of different textures with it. I'm constantly finding new ways to use it. Once, for a Buxur rave, Natka Klimowicz and I did a sculpture and jellies with electrolytes because I really wanted to do something that supports you in partying in a healthy but fun way.

COOKING UP LANDSCAPES

This piece [pictured] was for a collaborative event with artists Natka Klimowicz, Katie Hitchcock, Kosmodod, Knackered, XWIFE, Jadzia

and Hell Moonk. We're doing a tour in Poland, going to three cities, and creating a multidisciplinary evening, combining a poster exhibition, a dance performance, audio reactive visuals and a live concert, as well as a food installation that reacts to the dancer and reacts to the audience when the audience interacts with it.

The goal of our tour is to showcase the Icelandic DIY scene to the Polish audience. We're all drawing from our personal experiences of Iceland and what it means for us. This food installation represents the Icelandic landscape and different elements of it that are dear to me or inspired me in some way — there's edible black sand and dried jelly crystals that look like ice pieces on black sand, and crunchy edible moss and things like that. How did I make the black sand? It's just crushed, blended Oreo. I had to take the cream out of 10 boxes of Oreo cookies to make it.

UNIVERSAL MEDIUM

People are generally very open and interested in interacting with edible art. More and more people are learning this as an art language and more often know how to interact with it. Something I really like about edible art is how inclusive it is as an art language. We all eat, and we all know how to eat, so seeing an installation like that everyone can ingest it and take a piece of art with them.

On a planetary level, we definitely have to learn how to produce food and eat food differently, just for our own survival and for the planet survival's. Food is a crucial element of our culture, and how we eat dictates how we live and how we operate as a society. The food culture is definitely changing, but it needs to change more. I really hope it will. ■



The Haul

A Bag Full Of Smelly Things

Yes, we're including harðfiskur. No, we're not taking questions.

WORDS John Rogers
IMAGES The Internet

From the fine aromas of Fischer, to earthy scents of up-and-coming perfumier Ilmur og Sjór, to the pungent reek of a freshly opened bag of harðfiskur, this week's shopping bag is particularly whiffy. Here are a few very Icelandic products that are worth giving a sniff. ■



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9

1. *Angan Icelandic Moss Bath Scrub*
6.990 ISK, various stockists

2. *Ilmur & Sjór Discovery Set*
8.900 ISK, Madison Ilmhús, Aðalstræti 9, or online at ilmursjor.is

3. *Reykjavík Candle Co. by Krummi*
4.900 ISK, at Rammagerðin, Skólavörðustígur 12

4. *Fischer No. 8 Candle*
12.900 ISK, available from Fischer on Fischersund

5. *Sóley Græðir Essentials Kit*
5.100 ISK, available at Lyfja and in supermarkets

6. *Hvammsvík Aromatherapy Spray*
11.900 ISK, available from Hvammsvík Hot Springs or Grófinni 1 in Reykjavík

7. *URÐ Fjall Soap – Stormur*
2.250 ISK, available at Rammagerðin and various stockists: urd.is/vendors

8. *Saltverk Birch Smoked Salt*
729 ISK, available in Krónan and many other stores

9. *Bitafiskur*
1.599 ISK, from grocery stores, convenience stores, and everywhere

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Musings

Is Menningarnótt Spiralling Out Of Control?

Reykjavik's Culture Night is getting messy

WORDS
IMAGE Iryna Zubenko
The Reykjavik
Grapevine Archives

My very first visit to Reykjavik fell on Menningarnótt. I landed here without a clue how to pronounce that word correctly, or what it actually meant. But I was immediately drawn to the city. There was so much happening for its size. Every street I turned onto was transformed into a DIY event of some kind – backyard concerts, clothing swaps, barbecues, weird tiny exhibitions and all

sorts of pop-ups. The raw, unpretentious charm of Reykjavik turned into one giant block party that day made me instantly feel welcome. The whole thing was topped up with a concert you could watch from what I didn't know back then was Arnarhöll hill and a fireworks display that illuminated the lingering twilight of the summer sky.

On that night, Reykjavik felt like one of the most vibrant places I'd ever been, even though it also felt new and unknown. First impressions are important, aren't they?

As you can imagine, it was all downhill from there.

Back then, I didn't know Menningarnótt happens just once a year. The usual weekends in Reykjavik, while still lively, never quite reach that same level of exuberance. Years passed, and as I settled into Reykjavik life, I began to hear a differ-

ent perspective from locals – who advised trying to leave the fireworks show early, before it all turns into a mess of teenagers on their first proper night out, their backpacks loaded with cheap alcohol as they stumble through the streets.

Over the years, this reputation has only intensified. It seems that Menningarnótt has become a day for those who “choose wisely, come early,” but a night that many prefer to completely avoid.

The tragic death of a 17-year old girl this year, stabbed by another teenager on Skúlagata along with two injured peers, has confronted Reykjavik's residents with a sobering reality: Menningarnótt is no longer about culture. It's a night that raises questions about safety, about what kind of culture is being celebrated, and whether the event has strayed too far from its original intent.

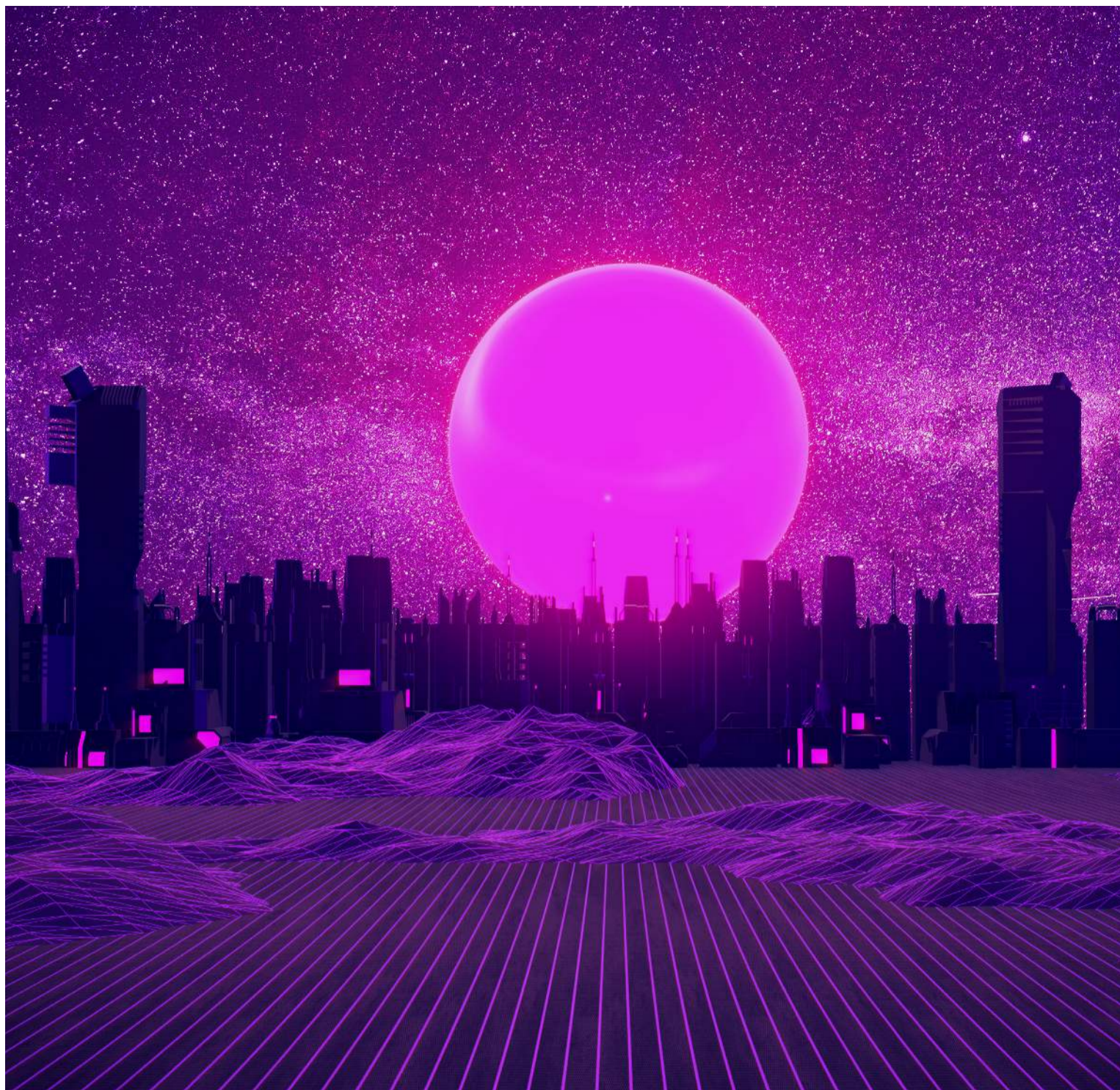
The clash between cultural expression and mainstream entertainment was starkly illustrated when the second-hand bookstore Bókin, on the corner of Klapparstígur and Hverfisgata, had to cancel its poetry reading due to noise from DJ Margeir's tent set up right outside its window. This incident sparked a debate about whether the city is adequately balancing the interests of all its residents.

Why wasn't the schedule negotiated in a way that would allow both the poetry reading and the DJ performance to coexist? This question becomes more complex when considering that DJ Margeir's Culture Night yoga sessions have been taking place in the same location for years. Does this history make the owners of Bókin responsible for planning their Menningarnótt schedule around external events, rather than the other way around?

While violence and similar incidents can happen in any big city, the aftermath of this year's Menningarnótt should prompt the organisers to consider what kind of Culture Night they want to create. Is this truly a celebration of Reykjavik's rich artistic and cultural heritage, or has it devolved into an excuse for a night of reckless, even dangerous, abandon?

Perhaps part of the problem is the concentration of Menningarnótt events within the perimeter of downtown. What if it were spread out to other parts of the city? This could give teenagers from the suburbs a chance to participate without resorting to hiding bottles of alcohol in 101 alleyways to dodge their parents.

As things stand, Menningarnótt has become a rowdy, intimidating street party. But maybe it's always been this way – and maybe it's an honest representation of downtown culture after all. ■



Horotropes

Cyber-Junk

These horrorscopes are coming from inside the house

WORDS Charlie Winters & Catherine Magnúsdóttir
IMAGE Adobe Stock

In 2077, Reykjavik was voted the worst cyber-city in the whole of Iceland to live in. The main issues: sky high rent and more flying scooters than anywhere else. Welcome to the future c0wb0y – it's lit up, gritty, and punk as a neon sign. Let's jack in and see what the algorithm is predicting for your future.



AQUARIUS
(January 20 – Feb 18)
Cold and calculating Aquarius was made for this role. You were born ACAB (Assigned Cop At Birth) and they bioengineered you in a lab, so now you're a Judge Dredd knockoff – Judge Dreddur.



TAURUS
(April 20 – May 20)
Do you really wanna get all philosophical about the ship of Theseus? Or do you just want this sick fuckin' gun arm, bro? As long as you have the creds, Taurus, now's the perfect time to replace body parts with machinery. It'll only cost you an arm and a leg.



LEO
(July 23 – August 22)
You've been running this city for a while, Leo, and you got eyes in every half assed hostel this side of the Ring Road. Nothing goes on in 101 without you knowing about it. And dear God, the bullshit people get up to. Knowledge is a curse.



SCORPIO
(October 23 – November 21)
You drew the short credstick, Scorpio, so sadly you have to be the slightly racist stereotype of a futuristic samurai played by a white woman. We don't make these tropes, we just enforce 'em.



PISCES
(February 19 – March 20)
The Litla Hraun prison was rebuilt way back in 2055 to be the world's most advanced cryo-prison. We call it Litli Jökull now. On account of your crimes this month, we're putting your ass on ice, literally. See you in 2177.



GEMINI
(May 21 – June 20)
(Shhhh shut up, shut up, they picked up.) "Uuuh, hey choom, is your blade running™?" (muffled snickering)
"Yeah? Well... you better go catch it!"



VIRGO
(August 23 – September 22)
They call you Cyborg Walter White. Congratulations, Virgo – cyberpunk couldn't exist if you hadn't invented [Insert futuristic drug name that is definitely not coke here]. You are a staple of the genre. And you will be defeated before the end of Act One.



SAGITTARIUS
(November 22 – December 21)
Oh, poor Sagittarius. We know you've been surfing the dark web with your brainframe, and we know you turned safe search off. That "Hot Cyborgs Near You" link was a hack, and now you're gonna lose access to your bionic limbs. Sorry 'bout it.



CAPRICORN
(December 22 – January 19)
As a Capricorn you're used to building it up, but this month you'll be breaking it down. The system is broken, and corporations may run everything – but you run the rebellion. Leather jacket, combat boots, and Marxist undertones... you've got it all.



ARIES
(March 21 – April 19)
Long before the MegaCorps took over the Internet, people sent mail – and "outmoded" is hot right now. So grab that floppy disk, Aries, and parkour your pretty little machine heart out. Let's see those nerds try to hack your Walkman.



CANCER
(June 21 – July 22)
These Corpo schmoozes couldn't tell a 'roided up borg from a boided up ganic even if they downloaded the datapacks directly to their brainframe. It's time to show these zuckers what a real hacker looks like, Cancer. It's binary, baby – you're number 1, and they're a 0.



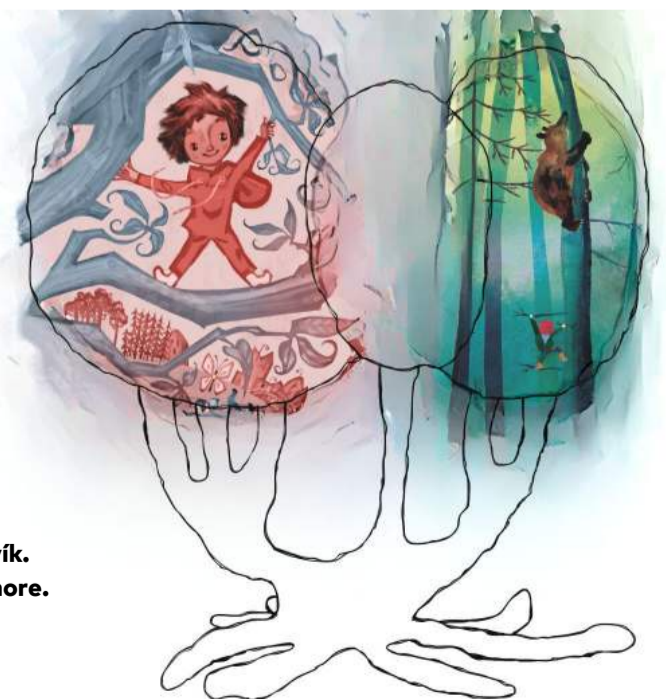
LIBRA
(September 23 – October 22)
We're putting you in the Matrix, Libra – and we're talking the real deal here. We've simulated Reykjavik's every last pothole, confused tourist, and puffin plushie. You ain't even gonna know what the real world is anymore.

"Wake the fuck up Samurai, we have a city to burn." Was that... was that cool? Did... did we sound like Keanu Reeves? Do you think they'll hire us for the next expo? I paid a lot for this gun arm. More Horrortropes next issue.audience." (Carol J. Clover). And we wouldn't have it any other way! ■



Last Look ILLUSTRATION Halldór Baldursson

Tréð - The Tree - Trädet



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Potent Quotables

When I moved to Reykjavík, I was surprised at how slow everything was — even how slow the people were.

Hongling Song compares work and life in China and Iceland as she juggles multiple jobs on page 12

I have been saying for some time it would probably take someone dying for anything to change.

Ciarán Daly examines the recent tragedy on an ice cave tour, trying to find answers about who is responsible on page 14

It's a love letter to Hvalfjörður, and the ocean.

Writer and director Katla Sólne prepares for the European premiere of her latest short film *Weather Rules the Field, but Whim the Child* on page 20

When I'm composing, I often think about Japanese gardeners.

Musician Masaya Ozaki talks about the growing role of the environment in his music on page 33

We find it comforting that some things can survive the capitalist hellscape of Iceland's tourism boom.

Turn to page 40 for some reminiscing about some unchanging staples in the constantly changing downtown landscape.



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