

The Reykjavík Grapevine



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Volume 21

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Best before June 27

There's No Going Back

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Travel

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On The Cover

On November 10, 2023, as an earthquake swarm that had started weeks earlier suddenly increased in intensity, the 3,700 residents of Grindavík were ordered to evacuate. A magma incursion had burrowed beneath the village on the south coast of the Reykjanes peninsula, inflicting extensive damage. Then, after six weeks of calm, the eruptions began. The residents of Grindavík haven't been able to move back home and still don't know if that will ever be an option. Elías Þórsson spoke with Grindavík's mayor and other displaced residents about the town, their trauma and what's next. Read it on pages 14-16.

COVER IMAGE:
Axel Sigurðarson

Editorial Revisiting Grindavík

WORDS Catharine Fulton,
Editor in Chief

A volcanic eruption is still ongoing on the Reykjanes peninsula. The latest lava flow – originating from the fifth eruption in the area since December 2023 – began on May 29, adding to the rapidly expanding field of newborn rock that now characterises a large swath of the region after years of volcanic activity.

The protective berms that were erected around the town of Grindavík, and the Blue Lagoon and Svartsengi Power Plant have done their jobs, redirecting lava flow away from the town, vital infrastructure and a touristic cash grab [insert eye-roll emoji]. Seeing drone footage shot around Grindavík is a testament to just how effective the walls have been, as the lava flow is quite literally encircling the town and reaching for the sea to the east and west of the town limits.

Our cover feature this issue takes a closer look at where things stand in Grindavík, or rather where things stand outside of Grindavík. Elías Þórsson spoke with Grindavík's mayor and displaced residents about their lives since being evacuated from their homes on November 10 and their thoughts about what the future could hold for their village.

While the people of Grindavík remain scattered around the country, in the process of rebuilding their lives and livelihoods, the Blue Lagoon remains open for business as the volcano erupts. Not only that, but Icelandic tax-payers – the very same who paid in the billions of krónur for the protective walls around the tourist attraction – have now paid for a second new road to be laid to provide travellers and tour companies access to the site after lava in a previous eruption and the current one blocked access.

Business owners in Grindavík may not be getting worthy of government assistance, but thank god the ultra-wealthy owners of the Blue Lagoon – with the backing of the ultra-wealthy tourist association – get everything they need to keep their doors open and keep raking in the dough.

So go read about Grindavík and maybe spare a thought for displaced Grindavík residents when planning your activities in Iceland.

Also, free Palestine.

Contributors



CATHARINE FULTON

Catharine Fulton has been mulling around the Reykjavík Grapevine since 2009, while simultaneously working in international media development and press freedom, and writing and editing for publications in her native Canada. She's probably only editor of the Grapevine thanks to nepotism. Shrug.



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.



ISH SVEINSSON HOULE

Ish Sveinsson Houle is a former radio station manager and DJ, mainly focusing on music writing with a side of other cultural happenings. Having moved to Reykjavík to get more in touch with their half-Icelandic genes, Ish is putting psychology and creative writing degrees to use through freelancing at Grapevine and working at a school.



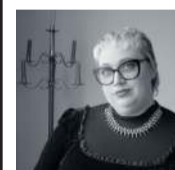
JÓHANNES BJARKI BJARKASON

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.



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.



REX BECKETT

Rex Beckett has been a fixture in the Reykjavík culture scene for over a decade as a longtime music/art writer and as former synthpunk diva Rex Pistols. They are currently working on a series delving into the influence of Garfield on queer millennials.

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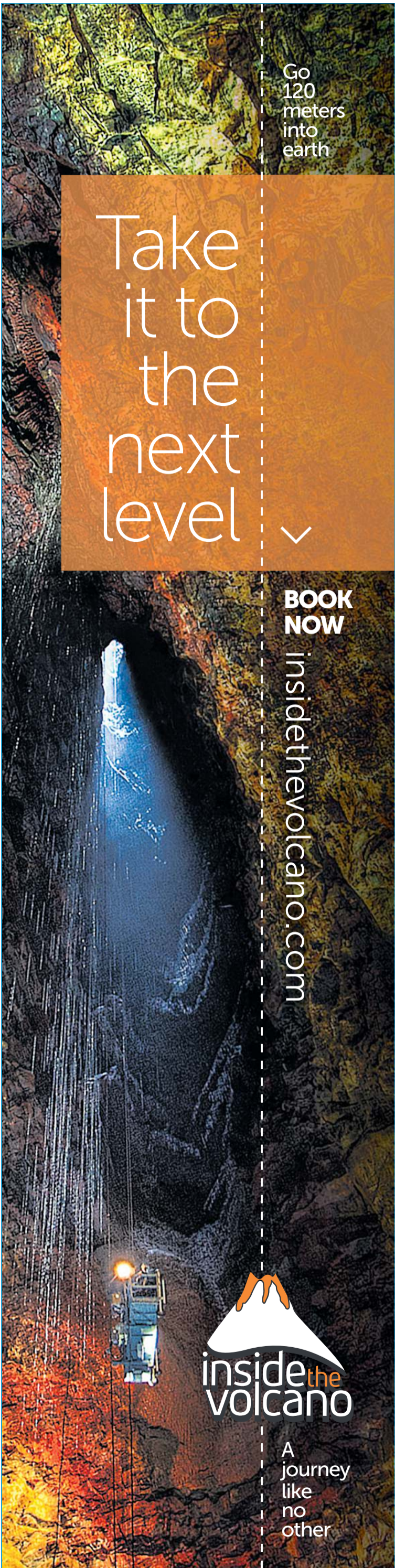


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What The News!?

Seriously? How Is Whaling Still A Thing?

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

WORDS The Reykjavik Grapevine
IMAGE Boris Niehaus /Hard To Port

Minister of Food and Agriculture Bjarkey Olsen Gunnarsdóttir has granted Iceland's sole whaling company Hvalur ehf. a licence for hunting fin whales this summer. The minister announced her decision following a government meeting on June 11. The permit is active for one year, allowing 128 fin whales to be killed.

In a conversation with the media, Bjarkey said that the decision does not reflect her or her party's own opinions. "Regardless, I must follow the laws and rules and this is my conclusion now," the minister said, adding, "I believe we must contemplate, as a country and nation, whether we really want to continue [whaling]."

If a full whaling ban were to be implemented, it would have to be legislated by Alþingi. Until that happens, it is at the discretion of the minister responsible for the file to issue a permit or not.

The decision has been met with animosity from both sides of the issue. Animal welfare activists said Bjarkey's decision showed "a lack of

courage", while Hvalur CEO Kristján Loftsson wrote in his personal blog told daily newspaper Morgunblaðið that he cannot foresee whaling happening this summer on account of the licence being issued without any advance notice. Cue the tiny violins. Hvalur's hunting licence expired at the start of this year.

In June 2023, former agriculture minister Svandís Svavarsdóttir announced a moratorium on whaling following the publication of a grim report by Iceland's Food and Veterinary Authority detailing the animal welfare violations committed on Hvalur ships. Whaling was permitted again on August 31, 2023.

In early January 2024, the Ombudsman for Alþingi published a review of Svandís' whaling ban. The office concluded that Svandís' decision was not in accordance with the law.

AND WE WERE WORRIED ABOUT TASERS

In the last edition of What The News we reported on the police's acquisition of Tasers, but it turns out pepper spray is the more pressing cause for concern. On May 31, protesters gathered outside government offices on Skuggasund were pepper sprayed indiscriminately by police who had had enough of their legally protected right to peaceful protest. According to a spokesperson for the Iceland-Palestine Association, who had organised the demonstration, roughly 100 protesters were on location, chanting and

making noise to call on the government to condemn Israel's ongoing military siege of Gaza, which the International Court of Justice has called a plausible genocide.

"We were just protesting like we've done many times outside the government offices," they told the Grapevine. "When they brought a car around to get one of the ministers, then a few people lay down in front of the car to block its way and just seconds after that [the police] pulled out pepper spray and started spraying not only on people that are laying down, but also on people standing around."

Between 20 and 30 people were exposed to pepper spray; three people were transported to hospital for treatment.

Minister of Social Affairs and Labour Guðmundur Ingi Guðbrandsson (Left-green MP) has since launched a review of police conduct.

CHEMICALS ALL AROUND

If pepper spray flying about willy nilly weren't enough, there's also volcanic smog rolling over the capital area. It was advised on June 11 that children in the capital area be kept indoors — just as summer camps were getting underway. In addition to putting a real damper on the views, the smog was also causing difficulty for those with allergies and respiratory conditions.

Thanks a lot, volcano. ■



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Do Shit Get Out There And Protest

An Útlendingur's ongoing guide to getting shit done

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGE Catharine Fulton

It may still be cold in Iceland, but it sure feels like the world is on fire. Maybe, catalysed by said fire, you're in the mood to join your peers in a little peaceful protest against, say, Israel's ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people. But what are your rights to do so? Sure, you want the Icelandic state to sanction Israel, cut all diplomatic ties with the war criminals leading that nation and affirm its recognition of the Palestinian state, but you also don't want to end up in jail.

Can protesting land you in jail? Do we útlendingurs enjoy the same rights as Icelandic citizens when it comes to engaging in peaceful demonstrations? We took these questions to Oddur Ástráðsson, an attorney and partner at Réttur law firm.

First and foremost, the right to protest is safeguarded by the Icelandic constitution and the European

Convention on Human Rights. "But, of course, there are some outer boundaries and circumstances may arise where the government may interfere with that right," Oddur explains. "But, the onus is on the government to evidence that they rightfully obstructed that right."

Instances in which the government would have the right to quell protest would be if people's safety is threatened or if protesters are engaging in actions that are damaging property. "Essentially, you cannot be acting in a way that could be considered criminal," Oddur says. He explains that police have previously cracked down on protest in Iceland, namely during the so-called Pots and Pans Protests that erupted in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse, when some protesters began throwing objects and attempting to damage public property.

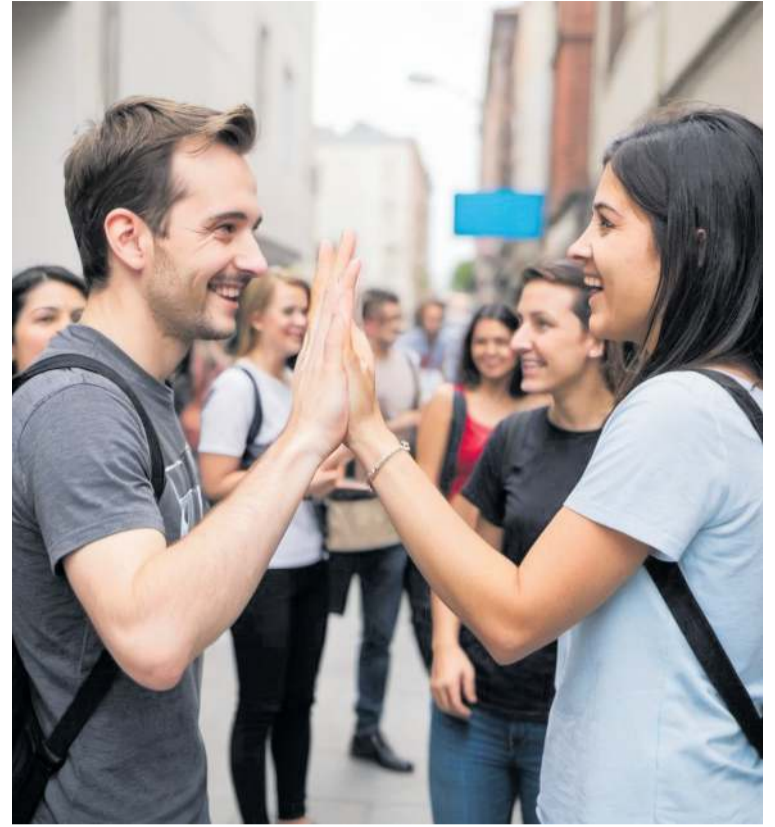
"Regarding the rights of foreign nationals or citizens of other countries to engage in protest, however, it's clear under the Icelandic Constitution and in Iceland's obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights that everybody who lives or stays in Iceland should enjoy the same fundamental human rights," Oddur says. "So from the human rights perspective, it shouldn't matter whether an individual is a citizen of Iceland or a citizen

of another country – the right to engage in and participate in protest is construed in the same manner from a human rights perspective. That's quite clear."

As an immigrant, once you're engaging in activity that can be deemed criminal, however, you risk not only fines and jail time – as anyone would be subject to – but also finding yourself on the wrong side of the Directorate of Immigration, who can decide to initiate expulsion proceedings on its own initiative because of information on criminal records. A criminal record will also preclude you from securing Icelandic citizenship at a later date, if that's something you're interested in.

As Oddur advises, "never engage in any kind of act of violence, never engage in any kind of acts that could be considered to damage property and generally abide by the instructions of police. So, let's say if a police puts up a barricade – be on the right side of that barricade."

When that barricade moves, that's when having a lawyer on your side comes in handy. Oddur is currently exploring a case against the state on behalf of pro-Palestine protesters who were pepper-sprayed by police while peacefully protesting on May 31. ■



Word Of The Issue I Said Good Day, Sir

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

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGE OpenArt AI

Icelanders aren't generally a smiley, friendly, greeting strangers in the streets kind of people, but it's still good to know how to greet people in the event that you do meet someone whose heart hasn't already been entirely petrified by years of solitude, putrefied foods and incessant wind. That's why we're going back to the basics in this issue with a look at the good'ol góðan daginn.

Góðan daginn literally translates to "good day" and it is used to – you guessed it – bid someone a good day. It's pronounced "go-than die-in" and can sound like telling someone to "go on dying." It's not at all morbid, though.

When to whip out a góðan daginn is pretty straightforward: you can say it to a shopkeeper, cashier, barista or other customer-facing individual to pleasantly greet them before getting down to business.

You can say it on the phone when calling to make a doctor's appointment before politely asking to

complete the rest of your exchange in English and being given the run around because the woman answering the phones at your local heilsugæslan is a cold-hearted xenophobe who considers themselves a gatekeeper of medical care despite your taxes funding just as much of the healthcare system as a pure-bred Icelanders' so they actively turn away immigrants from making appointments or find other ways to give them the run-around.

You can say it to a stranger in the street, but don't bank on a friendly "daginn" (the standard reply) to be said back unless the stranger you've said it to is a person over the age of 70, in which case you're far more likely to get a smile and a very warm "góðan dag" in response. It will make both your days.

You can use it any time you'd want to greet someone in a more formal or impersonal way than you'd greet a friend you've made plans to meet up with. In that case, a classic "halló" or "hæ" or "Nei! Hæ sæta! Takk fyrir síðast!" would possibly be more fitting. Actually, I dare you to approach a stranger with an enthusiastic "Nei! Hæ sæta! Takk fyrir síðast!" It'll be fun.

And with that, I bid you góðan daginn. ■



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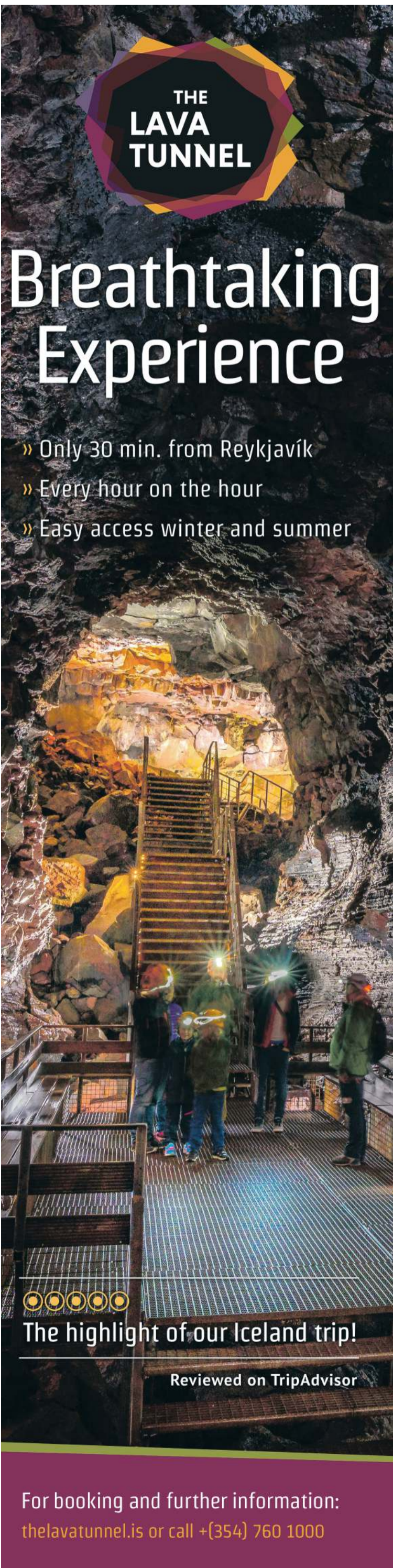


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Hot takes

So, How Do You Like Iceland?

The Grapevine asks the hard-hitting questions you wanted answers to

WORDS: Fernando, Lea & Nolan
 IMAGES: The Reykjavik Grapevine

FERNANDO FROM BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

I'm actually on my way to Vienna for a wedding and, given I've never been to Iceland, I decided to do a stopover on the way to Vienna and again on the way back. So far, the food has been good and the people have been friendly. I just arrived a few hours ago, but I'm an optimist – I don't think my opinion is going to change but, you know, I don't have a lot to go on at this point. But so far I like it.
 I was actually going to go to the Blue Lagoon today but apparently because of the volcano and some wind, it was closed. So that's kind of my plan for when I come back, but otherwise this is more of a food trip.

LEA FROM HONG KONG

We're a group of six from Hong Kong and it's our tenth day in Iceland. We just finished a trip down the southern and eastern part of Iceland. It's a really good experience, but the weather has been pretty unexpected – it's pretty stormy compared to these days in Hong Kong, like the average weather that we encounter in Iceland can be pretty extreme by Hong Kong standard. So that's a really fun thing about Iceland. But I think that the whole environment, the whole landscape here is really, really stunning.

Our friend [points to a travel mate] came here before but had some regrets; there were some places he couldn't go, so he wanted to come a second time. That's why he called the five of us to go with him. So that's why we're here.

NOLAN FROM WASHINGTON, D.C.

I am having a great time in Iceland for the first time ever. We love the scenery. We love the weather, it's really windy – it matches where I went to school in Seattle.

[Proud sister interjecting: And he's a geology major. So he was really excited about seeing all of the like topography of Iceland when we were driving through.]

I was just excited to see another basalt rock even though I've seen like 1000 because it's just everywhere, but it was just exciting.

There was a cliff by the water [on the Reykjanes peninsula] that was a really cool, really windy spot where a bunch of waves were crashing. And we just stepped outside and it almost blew us away a little bit. Yeah, a lot of fun. ■

The Grapevine Presents:

Everyone knows Hraun. This is dark chocolate Hraun! 'Hraun' means 'Lava,' and this bar is shaped as though a chocolate-spouting volcano erupted over a wafer-field of puffed

rice and maize starch (That's probably how it's advertised, anyway). The texture is rough, and bits and pieces of puffed rice pop out like a bits of a lava field.

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On The Fringes

Get That High Fantasy Bling

Émilie Colliar crafts wearable treasure for all your cosplay needs

WORDS Catherine Magnúsdóttir
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

Ever wanted to feel like a wood elf or Westeros royalty while going out for groceries or meeting friends? Boy, do I have good news for you! Something shiny caught my eye on my arduous adventure seeking avant-garde achievements in Reykjavík; precious pieces that would make even a dragon drool. And it's all hand-crafted by Émilie Colliar. I sought her out to learn more about the design and crafting process that goes into her store Blood, Sweat & Týr and how she got into it in the first place.

"My day job is doing logistics for a luxury tour company and by night I make chainmail and jewellery," Émilie explains. "I did mediaeval studies as an undergraduate and so a lot of people in my department were into cosplay. I was working on a student budget but you know what's cheap? Chicken wire!" Thus, from such humble beginnings Émilie began teaching herself how to make basic chainmail, ring by ring, over six months, for a cosplay outfit. "At the end of it I realised I'm actually pretty good at this and enjoy doing it," she says. "There are so many different things to do, from more basic weaves of chainmail to smaller pieces of jewellery. I love learning things like that."

Émilie has been living in Iceland since 2020, which is also when she officially started Blood, Sweat and Týr. She hoped to make it a self-sus-

taining hobby by selling some of her pieces, though she's initially relying on a word of mouth approach. "At a certain point I just kind of had to get my shit together and make a website and Instagram," she says.

Importing the necessary materials to Iceland is, of course, a quest of its own. Time is another factor. "A necklace takes an hour to an hour and a half [to make], depending on how I'm feeling," she explains. "The chainmail took about 50 hours, maybe more, I kind of lost count halfway through. The basic things I can churn out fairly quickly. I worked at Midgard in Reykjavik last year, so I do try to create some stock – necklaces, bracelets, earrings – I can also sell those at a lower price, so it's a bit more accessible, but also easier for me to just have things to sell."

Émilie also takes on commission work, with some of it being shipped

to overseas customers. The commissions are mostly smaller pieces with minor alterations to length, colour, addition or removal of details. "When I'm selling online I usually ask for some measurements," she says. "Often I'll try to find a friend that matches those measurements, so I can see it on a person and make sure it fits well. I also recently invested in some dressmaker mannequins, which also helps me be more size and shape inclusive, which is important to me. I want something for everybody to be able to wear and I want to help facilitate that as a maker as much as I can."

As for the inspiration and visual influences, Émilie cites her love for series like *Lord of the Rings* and *Game of Thrones* but also her academic background. "Because I am a historian by trade – even if that's not what I do for work anymore – I did get a photo of a piece of 16th century armour and that was actu-

ally the basis for my chainmail. It's called a Bishop's Mantle and would have been worn in battle. I made a little Instagram series, detailing how I made that piece. I used my own creative process to see how it could have been made, almost as a piece of experimental archeology."

A lot of her motivation is still based on what Émilie herself would find cool to wear, enabling her to do her work with joy. "My dream job would be to do armour and stuff for Hollywood," she says. "Or just sell stuff on weekends for now at least. I'm also starting to make beginner's chainmail kits – they are in the beta testing phase – for making a bracelet or earrings, something that's not super complicated, but looks cool as hell. Something for people to dip their toe into, to create some accessibility." ■

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Side Hustle **Licensed To Wed**

Erla Sigurlaug Sigurðardóttir can take you on a tour of Iceland and marry along the way

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGE Juliette Rowland

Whether you affiliate with any religion or not, would you agree that the idea of getting married in a church feels a bit last century? What about eloping on the edge of the world – on an empty beach or beside a cascading waterfall, of which Iceland has plenty to offer? Meet Erla Sigurlaug Sigurðardóttir, tour guide by day and wedding officiant by occasion. Through the non-religious organisation Siðmennt, Erla orchestrates wedding ceremonies in the most unique locations of Iceland for couples from all over the world. Her approach is always personal, no matter the weather.

Erla Sigurlaug Sigurðardóttir, 48, a driver guide

I work as a driver guide. That means that I both drive the bus and I guide a group of tourists around Iceland. I take both day tours and multi-day tours – two day tours, three day tours and of course, the Ring Road tours. I work as a contractor for a few different travel operators. I'm driving, guiding and entertaining tourists. My goal is to let the people on my bus have the best experience ever. It's a lot of fun!

I don't know if I can call it a side hustle, because it's not a "hustle," but I also work as a wedding officiant or wedding celebrant for the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Organisation Siðmennt. I marry people. Mostly outside, in nature by a beautiful waterfall on a lava field, black beach or wherever they choose.

CELEBRATING LOVE

I've been officiating weddings for two years now and recently I became a board member of Siðmennt. This side job is primarily driven by the happiness and the humanist aspect from the people that I meet and marry, not really the money. Although, sometimes when I have a wedding, it takes a whole day to drive a long distance to the south coast, do the ceremony and then drive back. It's amazing to get to experience and share the happiness and the adrenaline of happy people eloping in Iceland. It's unique to be part of that.

Sometimes I get the question, "Oh, you're a priest." No, I'm not a priest. I'm a legal wedding officiant. I have a stamp from the district council to make legal weddings on behalf of Siðmennt. What we do is non-religious. We believe in humanist aspects of life.

I do legal ceremonies and symbolic ceremonies, mostly for people from other countries like tourists coming to Iceland to experience Icelandic nature and do something unique for their wedding. Usually they come alone, without guests, but sometimes with a few relatives. Of course, I also officiate for Icelanders. They are getting to know about this option more and more often.

BETWEEN TOURS AND VOWS

Since I work as a driver guide, I contract for different companies and I can choose my own schedule – I'm in control of my calendar. I can move tours around and when I have a wedding, I just keep that day free. There's a lot of freedom for me to be able to control my work life like that. I always say yes to people that want me to marry them. If I'm in the country, I just move my main job around.

The best thing about my job is that I work with and talk to happy people who are in love. For me, that's very rewarding. I get to be part of their emotions, part of their most significant moment – getting married – and get to know people from other countries.

First, we always have an interview online. We talk about their story, how

they met their love, why they really want to get married to each other. It's really personal. I write a ceremony for each couple with a personal angle. During the ceremony, the best thing is when you bring out tears of joy and laughter. It's supposed to be fun and also beautiful and emotional. I want to make each ceremony perfect for that couple.

I DO, RAIN OR SNOW

The couples that I marry mainly want to be outside, but Icelandic nature and weather can be challenging. Sometimes, due to the weather, we must move from, for example, a black beach into some shelter, find some forest or even go inside. But usually, people go with it and just wing it, no matter the weather. They know that Icelandic weather is uncertain and they are ready for everything.

It's common for gay couples to get married in Iceland. Sometimes it's very special for them as sometimes the family doesn't even know. These are very emotional moments. No couple is the same – each story is personal and different. I try my best to contribute to their big moment to make it unique every time.

To stand on top of Dyrhólaey in the beginning of July at 11:00 o'clock in

the evening and marry a couple with a backdrop of a sunset in unique, perfect light for Icelandic summer is very memorable.

Once I was officiating a wedding by Þórufoss in Hvalfjörður in October. The weather was just crazy. So bad. It was raining and the wind was blowing so hard we barely could get out of the car. I thought the photographer would cancel and try to find some other place, but no, we fought our way down to the waterfall. Everybody was soaking wet. The bride was wearing white, no jacket, nothing. It was freezing cold. My script was all wet. I couldn't see anything, so I had to improvise. I had to scream for the couple to hear me because my words would blow out with the wind. But they got married in this awful weather, smiling and laughing. They were not cold because of the adrenaline. The photographer got these amazing photos and everything was perfect. I was so proud and happy that I managed to make the ceremony fun and personal, despite these horrible conditions. I think at one point I said a wrong name for the groom. But it didn't matter. ■

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Eye On Grindavík

The Town That Nature Clos

Exploring the impact of ongoing volcanic activity on Grindavík and its displaced residents

WORDS Elías Þórsson
IMAGES Axel Sigurðarson

To live in Iceland is to be at the mercy of nature. Throughout the nation's 1000 year history countless natural disasters have precipitated the loss of lives and homes. Most recently, the people of Grindavík, a village on the southern coast of the Reykjanes peninsula, have been forced from their homes and livelihoods by significant seismic and volcanic activity, culminating in a series of dramatic eruptions in late 2023 that are ongoing today.

That all changed on the evening of November 10, when an earthquake swarm that had been ongoing for weeks increased in intensity as a magma intrusion burrowed beneath the village. Just before midnight, as the ground shook violently, the government ordered the town to evacuate, forcing residents to leave their homes and possessions behind. Five eruptions have since taken place around Grindavík, with the latest starting on May 29, which as of print is still ongoing.

a new apartment and because we have no children we didn't need to worry about finding new schools or kindergartens," says Fannar. "But not everyone from Grindavík is as lucky as we are; many people have struggled to find housing, which is hardly surprising considering the town housed 1% of the nation."

Fannar took office in 2017, but seven years later he has been forced into a job he never expected to do. He has a stoic manner, but there is a clear sense that the burden of leading

growing community with one of the best fishing industries in the country and almost no unemployment. We estimate that a majority would want to return, but we know there is a sizeable group of people who will not."

As Fannar points out, a municipality can not deal with a situation like this on its own, and he claims that Alþingi has done a great job in assisting the municipal government and standing by the people of Grindavík, considering the challenges. He claims there is a continuous dialog and that authorities have been responsive to their criticisms. However, he has nothing but praise for how his fellow countrymen and how society at large has reached out to the people of Grindavík.

"There is immense togetherness among Icelanders. Take, for instance, the other municipalities, they have done amazingly in receiving our children in their schools and kindergartens. We are immensely grateful for how society has assisted us, without that assistance we would be much worse off," says Fannar.

It is togetherness that is needed for a community to overcome such a dire, unprecedented reality. The town may be effectively closed, but its residents have picked up their lives outside its borders.

"Grindavík has always been a tight-knit community where people stand together when facing adversity and tragedy," says Fannar. "What people miss so much is the community we had, our family, friends and coworkers, who now live across the country. My impression is that, in general, people are optimistic that we'll be

able to return to Grindavík in the near future."

NO BUSINESS

Not everyone is as cautiously optimistic about Grindavík's future as Fannar. Dagmar Valsdóttir is a former resident of Grindavík and the owner of a guesthouse — a business she founded to fund her future — that will stay closed for the unforeseeable future.

She has taken the option of selling her single family home to Þórkátla, the state-run fund created this spring to help residents restart their lives elsewhere. By early May, around 600 homeowners had signed onto the fund to sell their properties, with many more expected to follow suit. Everyone who sells will hold a three-year buyback option. Dagmar now resides with her husband and sons in Kópavogur.

"Since November, I have just been rocking up and down, mostly down, but there is also a fighting spirit that is with you," Dagmar says of her emotional state amid the turmoil. "I thank God I never had any mental problems before this and that I don't drink, so I haven't, like many, hit the bottle harder than before. Despite that, I can't put into words how difficult this has been."

Dagmar describes her family's life in Grindavík as "perfect" and that she never wanted to live anywhere else.

"Everyone I know has sold their homes to Þórkátla, I think it's probably only older people who don't know where to go that won't sell," says Dagmar. "There are those who

We expected to be able to return and at least spend Christmas at home, but things turned out differently.

"I, like the rest of the town, had to leave my home on November 10 in the wake of the extraordinary events that were taking place," says Grindavík Mayor Fannar Jónsson. "We expected to be able to return and at least spend Christmas at home, but things turned out differently."

Fannar's office is now located far from Grindavík town hall. He presides over town business from downtown Reykjavík's Tollhúsið, the old customs house overlooking the harbour. An entire floor of the building has been taken over by municipal officials, who go about governing what is essentially a ghost town. Most of the businesses have closed and homes stand abandoned, many still full of their owners' possessions. "My wife and I don't need to complain as we were able to quickly find

a town in crisis weighs heavily on him. However, seven months after the evacuation, he remains optimistic his town will regroup — but how long that will take and how many will choose to return remains to be seen.

"I am confident that Grindavík will be rebuilt, but how long it takes, that could take years. Take Vestmannaeyjar as an example, over 50 years later the inhabitants there are still fewer than they were before the eruption," he says, drawing a comparison to the Westman Islands, which were evacuated when residents of Heimaey were awakened by an eruption at 1:55 a.m. on January 23, 1976. The island was swiftly evacuated by the local fishing fleet. "We know it will take a long time, but before the eruption Grindavík was a

About a 40-minute drive from Reykjavík, just a stone's throw from the glamorous Blue Lagoon and a short drive from the Keflavik international airport, lies Grindavík, a small, peaceful town that was built up around its ideal, natural harbour. Since Iceland was first settled in the 9th century, people have resided there in relative peace and quiet.



sed

are determined to go back when it becomes possible, but I don't see Grindavík becoming a normal town again. I can picture it being turned into a geopark where tourists can come and see this former town, but I find it highly unlikely that people will live there."

Dagmar has been very critical of the Icelandic government for its response to the situation in Grindavík, which she feels has been sluggish and lacking transparency.

stance that no similar scheme was planned for businesses. This means that small business owners like Dagmar are stuck paying off property loans for a business she is unable to operate, she is currently actively campaigning against the government's handling of the situation.

"I am suing the government because of how differently small business owners like myself are being treated compared to businesses like the Blue Lagoon. I am not allowed to stay open and the support I get

ed in a settlement in Iceland and that was the 1973 Heimaeyjargos in Vestmannaeyjar. The eruption led to the evacuation of the island, mass property damage and the death of one man. However, there are key differences between then and now; The Heimaey eruption was a singular event, while we still don't know how many more eruptions will occur in the area around Grindavík, whether an eruption will begin within the town limits, or for how long the current activity will persist.

"This has all been one big roller coaster ride, you are working on a project and then another gets thrown in your lap. You build up your expectations and then they break down, but you always hope," says Vilhjálmur Árnason, an Independence Party MP from Grindavík. "The hardest thing is probably to see our society shatter as people spread across the country. There is sorrow as people lose their homes, businesses and daily routines."

It is not just the funds needed to relocate residents that are enormous, in late December the government allocated close to 6 billion ISK for the construction of a protective barrier around the town. Barriers — massive berms formed by bulldozing lava rock — were erected to protect Grindavík, but also the vital power plant in Svartsengi and the Blue Lagoon.

Vilhjálmur says that more residents and business owners give up with each new eruption — and for the government the challenges keep ballooning. But, a true politician, he claims that as long as the barrier holds, Grindavík remains one of the

best locations for businesses in Iceland.

"The town is close to Reykjavík, to the Keflavik airport, has a good harbour and easy access to energy," he says. "Of course not all businesses can remain and I have complete sympathy for those who choose to leave. In Iceland we've always had to live with unpredictable nature and deal with avalanches, earthquakes, dangerous waves, etc. So we always need to estimate what is acceptable and what is unacceptable risk."

been monumental," he says. "I feel the government has done well to stand with us, but that is not to say some things shouldn't have been done faster and that the flow of information couldn't, at times, have been better."

OUR COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

Collective trauma refers to the psychological, emotional and social impact experienced by a community or large group of people following a shared traumatic event, such as

What people miss so much is the community we had, our family, friends and coworkers, who now live across the country. My impression is that, in general, people are optimistic that we'll be able to return to Grindavík in the near future.

"Everything the government has done, they have done poorly or not at all," says Dagmar. "Take, for example, the support they said they'd give to renters. They didn't tell us how much we'd get, but people were in a panic to find a place to stay and then it turns out [the support] won't be for the whole amount — but we are still paying off our housing loans in Grindavík."

The government is currently buying private homes from citizens, but earlier in the spring, it reiterated its

compared to them, due to our size, is much less," says Dagmar. "I also think it is only fair that my business gets bought out, like my home."

A NATIONAL CHALLENGE

It's not just for the municipal government that the eruptions in Grindavík pose a unique and unprecedented challenge. The national government has had to improvise a response, while drawing on what examples there exist from recent history. Only once before has an eruption start-

I am suing the government because of how differently small business owners like myself are being treated compared to businesses like the Blue Lagoon.

The situation in Grindavík has been a baptism by fire for the government. Unlike many other issues on the government's agenda, it needs to be tackled *now* — nature won't just be left to die in a committee or made to wait for a more convenient time. It has remained top of the agenda since December and that's where it will likely remain for the unforeseeable future. Overall, Vilhjálmur says the government has done well to assist his constituents, but as it learns on the fly, things can always improve.

"This is an unprecedented situation and the tasks and challenges have

a natural disaster. Unlike individual trauma, which affects a single person, collective trauma affects the fabric of a community, influencing how people interact with each other and perceive their environment and their futures.

In 1995, a series of avalanches in the Westfjords devastated the local community. 14 lost their lives in the village of Súðavík and 20 in Flateyri. Icelandic authorities and society were quick to come together to help the survivors rebuild their homes and businesses, but what was given less consideration was the collective trauma such events inflicted on communities. 30 years ago was a



very different time when it comes to psychology and the treatment of PTSD and the collective trauma such events bring about.

“Everyone in Grindavik is going through trauma these days,” says Elinborg Gísladóttir, the National Church priest for the Grindavik parish. “Natural disaster trauma is nothing I have experienced before and

hopes the congregation can gather in the Grindavik church again when it’s possible.

An emergency centre was put up by the Red Cross in Tollhúsið where residents of Grindavik could meet with trauma counsellors. Mayor Fannar is thankful for the mental health assistance that has been offered to the people of Grindavik by the public

tant now is for people to take stock, reflect and focus on selfcare. “We need to be patient because the trauma is still taking hold. We need to slow down, rest and prioritise our mental wellbeing. For now, the chapter on the town of Grindavik is closed,” says Elinborg.

NATURE’S UNCERTAINTY

Professor of geophysics at the University of Iceland Magnús Tumi Guðmundsson is one of the country’s foremost experts on volcanoes and since last November he has been busy taking questions from the local and international media.

“The current eruption is not showing any signs of coming to an end and, even when it does, we need to be prepared for a lot more eruptions,” says Magnús. “It is very understandable that the latest one was the final straw for many residents.”

The last time the Reykjanes peninsula was an active volcanic site was eight centuries ago and that period lasted from around the year 900 into the 13th century. However, that is not to say that there were constant eruptions in that 300 year period, rather the volcanic systems erupted sporadically, with the Earth opening and lava rushing forth. That is hardly

comforting for the people of Grindavik, but according to Magnús it is equally likely that the current activity could suddenly end.

“There remains much uncertainty about Grindavik, but chances are good that if the eruptions continue as they have, then we will be able to protect the town and considering the billions that are at stake, I’d say doing everything we can to do so is worth it.”

He points out that when the eruption started in Vestmannaeyjar, critics had said that trying to protect the town from the onrushing lava was a waste of time, effort and money.

“Nobody would claim that now, but at the time, there were those that maintained that erecting barriers and pumping water on the lava was futile. However, the town was saved, people returned and, in the end, the lava created an even better natural harbour than before.”

The worst case scenario for Grindavik is that the eruptive fissures move closer to the town, possibly bypassing the protective barrier. According to Magnús, it is highly unlikely that an eruption could start directly under the town, but that everything is possible.

“We can’t rule out that an eruption could take place within Grindavik, but it is unlikely,” he says. “Never in history has a fissure gone that far south and reached the ocean.”

Even for a geophysicist, nature can seem to bring about more questions than answers, but what is equally important for scientists and Icelandic society alike is to learn how best to adapt and deal with the challenges that arise. The volcanos that brought Iceland up from the bottom of the Atlantic aren’t going anywhere.

“There is much to be learned from this and there is always something happening that surprises you. Nature is always teaching us new things and as soon as we think we have the truth, something new comes along,” says Magnús.

It is impossible to predict how things will continue to develop below the surface, but above ground the daily lives of the townspeople of Grindavik continue in their new homes across the country. Just as it happened eight centuries ago, volcanic activities could suddenly end in the coming months or years and residents might return, but it will never be the same Grindavik the townsfolk had to flee on November 10. ■

We can’t rule out that an eruption could take place within Grindavik, but it is unlikely

people are dealing with it in different ways, but it is always difficult.”

Elinborg and her family have decided to sell their house to the Þórkatla fund and, on July 2, will have to hand over their home to the government. Despite that, she continues to serve the people of Grindavik out of her office in Tollhúsið, just down the hall from major Fannar. There her parishioners get together and continue the work of a community that might presently not exist in a geographical sense, but remains very much alive and active. From next year, the Grindavik parish will relocate to nearby Vogar á Vatnsleysuströnd, but she

and private sector, but as he points out as with the rebuilding of the town, this is a long term project.

“Experts tell us we’ll need to continue offering psychological assistance to people, because trauma can resurface and it is necessary to care for the residents,” says Fannar.

30 years later, the people of the Westfjords are still dealing with the collective trauma caused by the avalanches, just as the events that have taken place in the past seven months will be with the people of Grindavik for generations to come. Elinborg claims that what is impor-



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17. Júní Round-up

THE MAIN STAGE AT
HLJÓMSKÁLAGARÐUR
14:00 - 17:00
Hljómskálagarður
Free

What's 17. júní without some sweet tunes to keep the party going? The main stage in Hljómskálagarður will be as bouncy as the surrounding castles this year, with the likes of Teitur Magnússon, Celebs, Una Torfa and Páll Óskar bringing their sweet sounds and good vibes to the park. Do your stretches, remember to hydrate, and then dance that kid next to you into oblivion. It's not doomsday dancing, it's independence day, baby! CF

OPEN HOUSE AT THE
REYKJAVÍK SCHOOL OF
HOME ECONOMICS
11:30 - 14:00
Sólvallagata 12
Free

Have you heard of The Reykjavík School of Home Economics? The Hússtjórnarskóli Reykjavíkur offers courses on such need-to-know topics as laundry and cleaning, embroidery, nutrition, knitting and crochet, and more. Everything you need to know to keep your household spic and span and running like a well-oiled machine. If you haven't studied there yourself, now's your chance to peek behind the curtain and get a better feeling for what goes on in the beautiful old house at Sólvallagata 12. Pop by between 11:30 and 14:00 for a look around and bring your own handicrafts to sit and work on in the company of others. Those sporting national costumes will also get free coffee and cake. Marvellous! CF

CREATIVE SUMMER
GROUPS & STREET
THEATRE OF HITT HÚSIÐ
14:00 - 17:00
Around Town
Free

A legitimate highlight of summertime in Reykjavík is seeing the creative kids from Hitt Húsið bring their projects to the people by way of impromptu street performances. Whether it's a group of young people dressed and painted head-to-toe in white, walking eerily slowly down the road before randomly turning to confront onlookers or street theatre beckoning the throngs of people to take pause and appreciate a moment of creativity, it's always a treat. The Creative Summer Groups & The Street Theatre of Hitt Húsið bring that magic to 17. júní this year, performing all over downtown Reykjavík for you to stumble upon and enjoy. CF



Hæ hó jibbí jei!

Iceland Turns 80

Independence Day Celebrations Abound!

WORDS Rex Beckett
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

Every year on June 17, Iceland marks its Independence Day – simply called 17. júní – which falls on the birthday of Jón Sigurðsson, the leader of Iceland's independence movement. This year's a big one, because our little baby nation is all grown up and turning 80, having gained its independence from those meanies in Denmark way back in 1944 when the Danes were (ahem) occupied with other matters. All around the country, Icelanders young and old, blood-related or adopted, will wave the flag and raise a glass for this enduring republic.

Here in Reykjavík, the official celebrations will kick off, as they do each year, in Austurvöllur, where outgoing President Guðni Th. Jóhannesson will lay a wreath in front of the statue of Jón Sigurðsson that keeps watch over parliament. The pomp and circumstance continues with speeches by the Prime Minister and this year's Fjallkonan (Lady of the

Mountain), who is meant to be the physical incarnation of Iceland. The identity of the fjallkonan is always kept secret until the time of her speech, so show up if you want to catch that first glimpse.

Festivities carry on throughout the day all over town. The Independence Day Parade gets underway from Hallgrímskirkja at 13:00. Local Scouts troops will lead the procession from the church and through the city streets before ending off at Hljómskálagarður where the bulk of Reykjavík's good times will be contained. Reykjavík's central park has served as the hub of June 17 festivities for the past few years, becoming absolutely packed with a concert stage, bouncy castles, food trucks and roaming performers. Not to mention screaming children, people who thought it was a good idea to bring their dog into a crowd, and confused tourists.

Those who prefer to kick it on the east side of town can instead make their way to Klambatún park for family fun, entertainment and wholesome party vibes. The full programme of Reykjavík-sanctioned 17. júní activities can be found on reykjavik.is.

There will, of course, be plenty more activities and parties outside of the official programme and all over the country. If you'd rather celebrate freedom through embracing the nightlife, look no further than the listings section of this very magazine for the scoop on the long-week-end madness, including parties like Libertyfest happening over at Radar.

As the nation erupts in cheers of "hæ hó og jibbí jei!" for our independence day, hopefully these cheers will extend as wishes for the freedom for all from occupation and colonialism. ■

Break out your fanciest lopa-peysa and make room for some candy floss – it's time to celebrate Iceland's birthday!

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Festival Central

Fringe Bangs Again

Gird your loins for a wild week at the 2024 RVK Fringe Festival

WORDS John Rogers
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

a beautiful aerial performance, an '80s-themed hypnotist show and an all-female improv group. Ari Eldjárn will perform comedy, MSEA will perform music. There's the Austin Powers Shagadelic Variety Hour, and we've got drag, burlesque and a horror show — there's so much to see!" With over 50 different shows on offer, Andrew is certain the festival has something for everyone. "I'm looking forward to introducing it all to the Icelandic audience, which I find to be so interested and receptive." He grins. "And they're weird. I love the weirdness of this country."

All of this experience has made Andrew something of a Fringe Festival historian. "The first ever Edinburgh International Arts Festival was in 1947," he says, warming to the subject. "It was a response to the time after the Second World War. They were trying to boost morale after losing so many people. There were actually 20 theatre companies that wanted to be part of it — but they only invited four."

The snubbed majority decided to set up a festival of their own and the concept of the Fringe Festival was

The Fringe is for the freaks, the weirdos and the outcasts.

THE ROOTS OF FRINGE

Andrew's exuberance comes from his passion for Fringe culture. A working comedian since the age of 17, he spent 10 years in Edinburgh, learning the ropes and immersing himself in the world-famous Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

"I did performing, directing, street team, front of house — all of it," he says. "I lived and breathed Fringe. Then I came to Iceland six years ago for a comedy festival called Scotch on Ice — it was all Scottish and Icelandic comedians — and I just kept coming back, until I had a whole life here."

INNOVATION STATION

Times have changed since then, and the RVK Fringe works closely with the Reykjavik Arts Festival to avoid clashes in programming. But it still carries that same counter-cultural outsider spirit.

"The Fringe is for the weirdos, the freaks, and the outcasts," says Andrew, "We're sometimes described as lowbrow entertainment — but

There's something creeping up on Reykjavik's cultural scene this week. It lurks on the edges of the city's nightlife, getting ready to explode into the bars and basements, clubs and theatres, nightspots and goth bars.

It is, of course, the RVK Fringe: a wild and weird carnival of experimental music and dance, bawdy burlesque and curious cabaret; clown and comedy, and much more besides.

Andrew Sim is the festival's director and he radiates enthusiasm as he runs through the programme. "We have some of the best international Fringe performers from all around the world this year," he says. "There's



everything is accepted. We think about how innovative every performance is. We're always looking for

"There's a sharing of education and training," says Andrew. "One of the performers, Elf Lyons, did a clown

take part in the Icelandic Independence Day parade on June 17, ahead of the opening night party.

We're always looking for the innovators of the next generation.

originals — the innovators of the next generation."

The festival is inclusive by nature, and operates a policy of keeping spaces safe for everyone, while not holding performers back. "For me, 'safe space' means the audience feels safe—and so do the performers," Andrew explains. "We are trying to allow space for innovation, so it can't be too restrictive."

Andrew also prides the festival on booking LGBTQIA+ performers of all stripes. "We have a lot of trans, queer, and nonbinary performers," says Andrew. "I'm bisexual myself, so there's an openness and a will to be as diverse as possible. We're trying to push forward the idea that any voice can be accepted."

PLAYING THE BOUFFON

Bringing such a wide variety of acclaimed international performers to Reykjavík also helps to nourish and nurture the local scene.

workshop here earlier in the year. It went down really well and she'll be doing a workshop in *bouffon* (a French style of comic performance). So it's also about helping the performers here on the island to learn and grow."

I guarantee you'll find something that'll just blow you away.

The festival also brings opportunities for local performers to connect with their international peers. "Iceland-based performers make friends and gain contacts in major cities around the world," says Andrew. "So if they go to London, they have a contact. If they go to New York, they have a contact. It's a way of being able to network, right on your doorstep."

A MOVEABLE FEAST

There are lots of opportunities for curious Reykvikingar to dip a toe in the water. The Fringe performers will

It will also operate a "moveable hub." "We have a double decker bus that will be driving around town," Andrew says with a smile. "It'll be down by Tjarnarbíó most of the time, but also rocking up and parking in different spots."

Another way to see what's on offer is the free Preview Night at Tjarnarbíó on June 18 — a kind of speed-dating variety show for the performers and the festival crowd. "Everyone gets exactly two minutes to pitch their

show to the audience," says Andrew. "So people can go and get a taste of what's on and choose what they want to go and see. It doesn't matter where you're from, or how you got here — you'll find something that you're intrigued by."

"You might also see something you hate," he laughs. "That's also part of Fringe. But I can guarantee you'll find something that'll just blow you away." ■

RVK Fringe happens June 17-23. Events are ticketed individually and advanced booking is advised. Find the programme at rvkfringe.is.

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Film Feature **Tracing The Sources Of Creativity**

A poetic road trip film around Iceland tries to uncover whether there's one key ingredient to its thriving culture

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGES Supplied

The concept of Iceland being a secret utopia that breeds creativity is not new. On the one hand, Icelanders themselves like to fuel headlines such as “The Biggest Number Of Books Published/Read/ Gifted For Christmas, Per Capita.” On the other hand, given the country’s small size, Iceland’s creative output is quite remarkable when you really consider the impressive statistics of its annual cultural events, bands and projects – including world-famous exports and niche grassroots artists – as well as its writers, creators and storytellers.

Is there something about Iceland that nurtures this pervasive creativity, whether on a global or per capita level? Does the stark yet breathtaking nature, dark winters and bright summers correlate with the never-ending stream of films, music and literature produced? French documentary filmmakers Arthur

Shelton and Nancy Tixier explore this intriguing phenomenon in *Their Icelands (Leurs Islandes)*.

DECODING ICELAND'S CREATIVE DNA

“Nancy and I wanted to question the arts or the cultural practices in Iceland, compared to what we know in France,” says co-director Arthur as he joins me on a call from France. “We were very attracted to the beauty and the mystery of this country. There are so many artists, so many people writing books, so many people interested in music and many other forms of art. We wanted to know why.”

The duo has been collaborating on short films and music videos for at least 15 years and had an idea to dive deeper into outlining the source of Icelandic creativity since Iceland was the country in focus at a festival in their hometown Caen in Normandy. Fast forward a few years and the project resulted in a 54-minute documentary.

Featuring interviews with artists, scholars and writers, including Ásgeir Trausti, Eliza Reid, Jóhannes Birgir Pálmason, Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, Örvar Þóreyjarsón Smárason, Shoplifter, Torfi H. Tulinius and Unnur María Máney Bergsveinsdóttir, *Their Icelands* gives a comprehensive

outline of different standpoints. That was the idea, Arthur explains. “We were asking people to make us discover their country from their point of view. We wanted to see the country through their eyes or through their practices,” he says. “We met quite many people and every one of them gave us a little bit

HOW TO MAKE A MOVIE IN 10 DAYS

The pocket-sized team of Arthur and Nancy knew they would be in charge

There are so many artists, so many people writing books, so many people interested in music and many other forms of art. We wanted to know why.

of their Iceland. This is where the name comes from.”

of the technical aspects of the film, but they were lacking a narrator. “I was handling the camera and Nancy took care of the sounds,” Arthur explains. For this reason, the directors wanted to bring a third person – someone they could follow with a camera and someone who would interact with the interviewees. That

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task fell on Juliette Jouan. “We were looking for someone like her,” Arthur says. “Someone who is young, who is in the arts, too – she’s a musician and actress – and we wanted her to get involved personally.” He adds that the film provided a platform for Juliette to reflect on her own up-

too. We had three or four meetings every day and drove a lot, trying to fit in as much filming as we could in 10 days.”

The film was produced in collaboration with Les Boréales film festival and was scheduled to screen less than a month after the crew returned

together in the end – a true embodiment of the Icelandic “þetta red-dast” [it will all work out] mentality.

LE PAYS DES POLYGLOTTES

Their Icelands is a film made by a French crew, primarily intended for a French audience. While the narrative being predominantly in French is unsurprising, the amount of Icelandic interviewees fluent in French came as an unexpected delight. Arthur explains this was not intentionally planned.

“We were very surprised by the amount of people who speak English. Well, everybody speaks English. It’s not the case in France at all,” he says. “But we were also very surprised by the amount of people who could speak other languages and especially French.” From professors to museum curators, Icelanders seemed eager to showcase their French-speaking abilities, and they did so remarkably well. Arthur smiles, revealing that even more

interviewees could have spoken French, but opted to be interviewed in English or Icelandic.

SHIFTING HYPOTHESES

Ahead of filming in Iceland, the directors only did only basic research. “We were a bit naive at first,” Arthur admits. “We wanted to try out our own hypotheses and ideas. That was the point of the movie – to start with our opinions and then meet people and dig a little bit deeper.”

He stresses that discovering Iceland not only through tourists’ eyes was highly important. “We wanted to see the beautiful landscapes and experience that uniqueness in terms of scenery,” he elaborates. “But what was most interesting for us was to discover the Icelandic ways of thinking, the practices and the bonds between people.”

Since it was their first time in Iceland, the collaborators were learning about the country while making the

film. “Our first hypothesis was that the country itself and the countryside, the landscapes and colours, were the first thing that would fuel people’s creativity,” he shares. “For us, it was one of the main reasons why Icelandic people would be more inclined to write or to make music or whatever it was because of these scenery and landscapes.”

“When we went there, we discovered it was maybe a part of it, but it was not the only reason,” he concludes. The insularity of the small, close-knit population, education, freedom – these emerged as popular rationales from the interviewees, though perspectives differed, with some suggesting nature played no role at all. “It’s a bunch of things,” Arthur smiles. ■

Their Icelands is screening now at Bíó Paradís.

We met quite many people and every one of them gave us a little bit of their Iceland.

bringing and career path, potentially re-evaluating certain experiences through a fresh perspective.

With an extremely tight budget leaving the crew unpaid, Arthur, Nancy and Juliet embarked on an intense 10-day trip to Iceland at the beginning of September 2023. As Arthur recounts, “It was just the three of us in a car, driving from place to place. It was quite thrilling, yet nerve-wracking and intense,

from Iceland. Arthur and Nancy worked tirelessly to prepare the first edit for the festival screening, then spent additional time reworking the edits ahead of the French premiere. Initially, the filmmakers were apprehensive that the laid-back Icelandic approach might interfere with their tight filming timeline. Arthur admits that when the trio arrived in Iceland, most of the people they reached out for interviews didn’t get back to them. However, everything came





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Gaming

Enter The Bunkhouse

A new contender emerges in the Icelandic video game scene

WORDS John Rogers
IMAGES Joana Fontinha & Supplied Stills

In a colourful wooden house on a Hafnarfjörður side-street, something exciting is brewing for the Icelandic video game scene. It's the home of Bunkhouse, a new studio that started up in February of this year.

The studio was born from the ashes of Arctic Theory, as studio director and co-founder Ólöf Svala Magnúsdóttir explains. "That's where I stumbled upon Matti in 2020," Ólöf,

referring to Bunkhouse co-founder Matthías Guðmundsson. "They'd just founded Arctic Theory and I was the first employee. We were working on a very ambitious MMO [massively multiplayer online] game at the time, called 'Pioneers of New Dawn.'"

But the New Dawn never came, with Arctic Theory cancelling the game almost four years into development. "We realised we either had to put five more years into it and get 100 more people – or move on and do something new," says Ólöf. "It was hard to let it go. It was our baby! But we learned a lot."

FRIENDLY FIRE FUN

One of the big takeaways from Pioneers of New Dawn was effectively managing scope, which shows in Bunkhouse's first project. Currently codenamed Project Dolly, it swaps the grand MMO concept for something more intimate. It's a four player

co-op game in which teams work together to battle computer-controlled enemies and work their way past obstacles to complete each level.

"I'm really inspired by games where you party up with your friends, like Left 4 Dead, Lethal Company, and Helldivers 2," says Ólöf. "But we didn't want to make yet another zombie shooter. So we tried out some new ideas. Like, what if you could only throw things? And what if you could break things in the scenery, so everything can be a weapon?"

This idea opened the door for the kind of shareable moments and funny friendly fire incidents that has made Helldivers 2 one of 2024's viral hit games. "You start with no weapon – just a default shove – but the throwing means you can use anything, really," says Ólöf. "It could be a trash can, or a lamp post



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you've just broken down. The focus is making it really silly. You can mess up your friends, but it's not like, 'God, we lost, that sucks!'. It's more like 'That was funny, let's go again.'

TOSSING THE CABER

With the gameplay outline in place, the team moved on to another important factor: the setting. "We were thinking about who these characters are and where they are and what they're fighting," says Ólöf. "With throwing being the main element of combat, we started playing around with it being in Scotland and instead of zombies, you're fighting sheep."

Using Scotland's Highland Games as a source of inspiration, the initial idea was for each team member to have a unique ability and weapon, like a hammer or caber. "But we realised that it was starting to feel like a hero shooter," says Ólöf, "and we wanted to make something more

chaotic and dynamic. So every time you play through one of the levels, you might try something new or find a different approach. Like, if your friend breaks the bridge by throwing something, the whole team has to find a new way around."

FIRST PLAYABLE

The current goal for the Bunkhouse team is to make the first playable level. After the New Dawn experience, Ólöf is keen on getting this creation to its intended players as soon as possible — both for genuine player feedback and to start building a community around the game.

"I think players are getting super into being a part of the process," she says. "Getting to know what actually goes into development and getting to know the studio behind the game. So I really want us to have an open approach. Because it's a co-op game, I think it's especially

important to involve the players, get lots of feedback and make sure people like it."

Ólöf has also been heading out to festivals to pitch the concept to publishers and venture capital firms — and getting some positive initial feedback in the process. With the core concept in place and the team coming together, she's optimistic about the future and the prospect of Bunkhouse putting together a playable level by August.

"It's our first product and we're a pretty well-set studio," says Ólöf. "We're funded and so we have a buffer to, you know... go and make this game! I really want to keep moving and not get stuck in upping the scale constantly. I want to show the game — even if it's the simplest first version — and get it out there as soon as possible." ■

Find out more at bunkhouse.games.



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C

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 flatkókur. Flatkókur 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 specializes 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 VÍNSTÚKAN 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 VESTURBÆJARLAUG
Hofsvallagata
Opening hours: 6:30-22:00 Mon.-Fri., 9:00-21:00 Sat.-Sun.
One of the many public swimming pools found in the capital area, Vesturbæjarlaug' reputation is one of affluence, as many of Icelandic society's jet-setters are based in and around the Vesturbær neighbourhood. Be prepared to literally rub shoulders with actors, politicians, and Björk. JB

18 EINARGARÐUR
Laufásvegur 79
This little green space nestled into the curving juncture of Laufásvegur and Gamla Hringbraut is an oasis in the city. Exposed to full sun seemingly all the time, it's a peaceful spot to stroll through, climb trees, luxuriate on the grass or toss the ball for your four-legged friend. Don't do that last thing, though. It's not allowed. CF

Be Warned

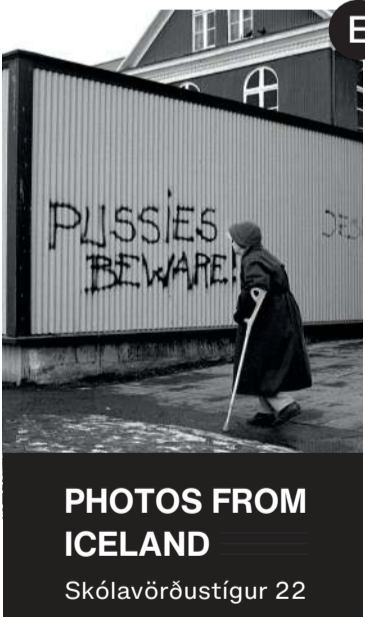
19 101 BISTRO
Austurstræti 3
The bistro on the corner of Ingólfs-torg and Austurstræti that has a plaque outside saying, "Come in and try the worst [insert popular food



D



15



E



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 SBARRO
Austurstræti 17 & Vatnsmýrarvegur 10
"What is this shit?" is how Greil Marcus famously opened his review of Bob Dylan's 1970 album in Rolling Stone. It is appropriate here. It looks like pizza, it is sold as pizza, it's priced like foie gras, but it tastes like salted shit. Avoid. RG

21 REYKJAVÍK FISH RESTAURANT
Tryggvagata 8
Our beef with this place has to do with their "plokari" (Traditional Icelandic Fish Stew). Taste wise, there is nothing wrong with how Reykjavik Fish makes their "plokari", the problem is that the volume you get for the price is unacceptable; a tiny cast iron pan of fish stew for 2.690 ISK. An outrage. RG ■



A



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New In Town **Fish House**

HAFNARSTRÆTI 9, 101 REYKJAVÍK

Over the past year, the good folks of Grindavík have been displaced by a slew of earthquakes and eruptions that has shrouded the village's future in uncertainty. Among them were the restaurateurs of Fish House, a seafood mainstay of the fishing town since 2016. Now they have picked up right where they left off – going from Hafnargata in their hometown to Hafnarstræti in their new digs – serving up the same high standard of delicious marine cuisine. They have even recreated a surprisingly close facsimile of their original shoreline-chic décor on a much smaller scale. Fish House is proof that no eruption can keep the folks of Grindavík down. **RX** ■

OPENING HOURS:
Monday – Thursday 11:00 – 22:00
Friday 11:00 – 22:30
Saturday – Sunday 14:00 – 22:00



B

FOOD HALL & BAR

PÓSTHÚS

PÓSTHÚSSTRÆTI | 101 REYKJAVÍK

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HAPPY HOUR 16:00 - 18:00

Art Exhibitions

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

Opening

GALLERY KANNSKI
Victoria Ahrens – Vestiges of the Unearthed.
 Objects in the exhibition are shaded by the pigments of three abandoned industrial sites, locations that are tangible remains of our often hidden violent extractivist history.
 Opens June 15
 Runs until June 23

ICELANDIC PRINTMAKERS ASSOCIATION
Elin Helena Evertsdóttir – Regn
 Visual artist Elin Helena Evertsdóttir invites visitors to step into a sound installation where water droplets of all shapes and sizes sound chaotic or mechanical.
 Opens June 15
 Runs until June 30

LISTVAL
Jón B.K. Ransu – Parergon: The absence that defines the painting
 The term "parergon" applies to something that accompanies a produced work without being the thing itself. This concept influences this new collection of paintings by Jón B.K. Ransu.
 Opens June 15
 Runs until June 29

Sigurros G. Björnsdóttir – Millibil
 Need description
 Opens June 15
 Runs until June 29

SÍM GALLERY
Juha Vehmaanperä – DIVIDEDby2
 By dissecting garments and exposing their inner workings,

DIVIDEDby2 gives a glimpse into the artist's ongoing research on imagining formalwear outside of the gender binary.
 Opens June 20
 Runs until June 29

SÍM HLÖÐULOFTIÐ KORPÚLFSSTAÐIR
Shipwreck
 In this collaboration between UKAI Projects and SÍM Residency, six North American artists and six Icelandic artists explore art as something to be lived in and among.
 Opens June 16
 Runs until June 25

Ongoing

Á MILLI
Martyna Pietrowiak & Tomasz Bukowski – Phases of Uncertainty
 Mixed media, installation
 Runs until June 16

ÁSMUNDARSAFN (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)
At Hand
 Sculpture
 Runs until September 1

BERG CONTEMPORARY
Haraldur Jónsson – Measures
 Paintings, mixed media
 Runs until July 6

THE EINAR JÓNSSON SCULPTURE MUSEUM
Brynja Baldursdóttir & Einar Jónsson – Be-coming
 Sculpture, mixed media
 Runs until August 25

GALLERY FOLD
Daði Guðbjörnsson – A Lightness of Spirit
 Paintings
 Runs until June 22

GALLERY GRÓTTA
Cizia Macchi – The Night Enlightened
 Paintings
 Runs until June 21

GALLERY PORT
Sumargleðin
 Group exhibition, mixed media
 Runs until June 22

GALLERY SKILTI
Sirra Sigrún Sigurðardóttir – Misseri
 Installation
 Runs until June 15

GALLERY UNDERPASS
Sirra Sigrún Sigurðardóttir – WE ARE HERE
 Graphic design
 Runs until July 15

GERÐARSAFN (KÓPAVOGUR ART MUSEUM)
Here Is My Home
 Video installation
 Runs until June 16

Sóley Ragnarsdóttir – Queen of Hearts
 Mixed media, installation
 Runs until July 21

Þór Vigfússon – Numbers, places
 Site-specific installation
 Runs until July 28

HAFNARBORG CENTER OF CULTURE & FINE ART
Guðný Guðmundsdóttir – Cassiopeia

Mixed media
 Runs until August 18
Time and Time Again
 Group exhibition, installations
 Runs until August 18

HAFNARHÚS (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)
Jónsi – FLÓÐ (Flood)
 Installation, mixed media
 Runs until September 22

Murmur
 Group exhibition, mixed media
 Runs until September 22

18 GALLERY
Margrét H. Blöndal – Do not go roughly into that good night
 Oil and paper works
 Runs until July 6

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

KJARVALSSTAÐIR (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)
Kjarval and the 20th Century: When Modernity Anchored
 Paintings, drawings
 Runs until December 2024

KLING & BANG
Guðrún Marta Jónsdóttir – Silfurgjá
 Photography, mixed media
 Runs until July 21

Magnús Sigurðarson – HAPPY TALES OF DEATH and MELANCHOLY
 Mixed media
 Runs until July 21

THE LIVING ART MUSEUM
Course
 Group exhibition, sound-based works
 Runs until August 4

Rereading
 Bookwork group exhibition
 Runs until August 4

LITLA GALLERY
Íris Ásmundar & Nicolas Ipiña – Amidst
 Photography
 Runs until June 17

MUSEUM OF DESIGN AND APPLIED ARTS
FIREFLOWERS: When Dance Becomes Product Design
 Mixed media, design
 Runs until June 17

Straws and Branches
 Design and textile works
 Runs until August 25

Guðrún Pétursdóttir – Basketweaver
 Design residency
 Runs until September 1

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

At Home in the Design Museum
 Over 200 examples of Icelandic design from 1900 to the present
 Runs until March 2026

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ICELAND
Anna Rún Tryggvadóttir – Multipolar
 Sculpture, installation
 Runs until September 15

Steina – Borealis
 Sound & video installation
 Runs until September 15

Þóra Sigurðardóttir – Iron, Flax, Coal, and Chalk
 Paintings, drawings
 Runs until September 15

Tumi Magnússon – Loop
 Video installation, retrospective
 Runs until September 22

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

NORDIC HOUSE (Post)
 Group exhibition, mixed media
 Runs until September 8

PORTFOLIO GALLERY
Ýmir Grönvold – SOLACE
 Paintings
 Runs until June 29

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

REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Hlynur Pálmason – Lament for a Horse
 Photography
 Runs until September 22

THE SCULPTURE ASSOCIATION GARDEN
Agnes Ársælsdóttir – Potentially Garden
 Vegetation installation
 Runs until June 30

SIGURJÓN ÓLAFSSON MUSEUM
The Gift of Children
 Reliefs and Portraits
 Runs until September 24

From Various Sources
 Sculpture, mixed media
 Runs until September 24

SÍM GALLERY
Gerður Guðmundsdóttir – From One to Another
 Mixed media, installation
 Runs until June 16

SLIPPBARINN
Heba – Light & Shadow
 Paintings
 Runs until June 20

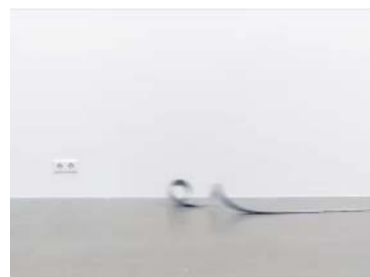
PULA
Davíð Örn Halldórsson – Typisch
 Gluggaveður
 Paintings
 Runs until June 30

Art Picks



Victoria Ahrens – Vestiges of the Unearthed
 June 15 – 23
 Gallery Kannsk

What goes on behind the scenes of industrial processing that goes into creating images is what most would consider unsightly. Using the pigments left as waste at abandoned industrial sites in the U.K., Portugal and Chile, artist Victoria Ahrens repurposes the grotesque violence of extractivism to reveal the hope and potential that still dwells in poisoned landscapes. From ruin comes beauty and revelation. RX




Course
 Runs until August 4
 The Living Art Museum

It's a tricky thing to display sound-based art. The very expression presents a paradox, that a display requires sight and – unless you are synaestheliac or tripping balls – you can't see sound. This new group exhibition takes on the task of appealing to the auditory senses by leaning into the paradox and turning it into a type of game. In letting the sound be what it is, it shows you all you need to see. RX



Shipwreck
 June 16 – 25
 SÍM Hlöðuloftið, Korpúlfstaðir


If you found yourself shipwrecked and washed ashore, what three things would you most wish to have with you? How would you make a new home where you beached? In this partnered exhibition by SÍM Residency and UKAI Projects, six artists based in Iceland use the remnants brought by six Canadian artists to create new homes and meanings. This durational piece invites audiences to bring their own ruins to make themselves at home as well. RX



SÝNIR SJÓN

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Events 14.06–27.06.24

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Saturday June 15

Godchilla, Celestine, Ultra Magnus & Skuld
20:00 Gaukurinn
Eva Luna & Karen
23:00 Kaffibarinn
DJ KGB
20:00 Kex Hostel
Libertyfest
21:00 Radar
DJ Mellí
22:00 Röntgen

Sunday June 16

Spacestation Album Release Show
18:30 12 Tónar
Rebecca Clarke Tribute Show
20:00 Hannesarholt
Jacob Collier (US)
20:00 Harpa (Eldborg)
Friðrik Dór
20:00 Háskólabíó
Not Your Everyday DJs
16:00 Iðnó
Humar Sumar
17:00 Kaffibarinn
GÓSS
19:00 & 21:00 Kaffi Flóra
Libertyfest
21:00 Radar
DJ Tæson
22:00 Röntgen

Monday June 17

RVK Fringe Opening Party
20:00 Gaukurinn
Karlmarsambandið
20:00 Kaffibarinn

Tuesday June 18

RVK Fringe Karaoke
20:00 Gaukurinn
DJ Júllala
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Ari Eldjárn: One Night Only!
18:00 Tjarnarbíó
RVK Fringe Preview Night
20:00 Tjarnarbíó

Wednesday June 19

An Evening with Friðrik Valur
19:15 Dubliner
Pernille Haaland: Not Related
20:30 Dubliner
Accordion Ryan's Pop Bangers
20:00 Gaukurinn
The Gender Benders
23:00 Gaukurinn
DJ Ómar E

21:00 Kaffibarinn
Una Stef & Stefán S. Stefánsson
20:00 Múlinn Jazzclub
Storm Dunder: Welcome Home
18:00 National Theatre Cellar
Purrlesque Charity Cabaret
21:00 National Theatre Cellar
Hypnotist Matt Hale: Top Fun!
19:00 Tjarnarbíó
Vinyl Wednesday: Bjarnason
21:00 Röntgen

Thursday June 20

Pineapple Daddy
21:00 Dubliner
DJ Shadow (US)
20:00 Gamla Bíó
Twitche Love: Who Am I?
21:30 Gaukurinn
Steindór Grétar
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Rúnar Þórisson & Hjörvar Hjörleifson
21:00 Kex Hostel
Storm Dunder: Welcome Home
18:00 National Theatre Cellar
Radar & Friends
21:00 Radar
DJ Melerito De Jeré
21:00 Röntgen
Ingibjörg Turchi & Band
17:00 Salurinn
Davíð Þór Jónsson & Eypór Gunnarsson
21:00 Salurinn

Friday June 21

Chicago! Party Screening: Fjadrakok & Lindy Ravers
18:30 Bíó Paradís
Pernille Haaland: Not Related
20:30 Dubliner
Accordion Ryan's Pop Bangers
18:30 Gaukurinn
Chris Turner: Childish
21:30 Gaukurinn
RVK Fringe Karaoke
00:00 Gaukurinn
Briet & Birnir Album Release Show
21:00 Harpa (Silfurberg)
JóiPé X Króli
21:00 Háskólabíó
DJ Óli Dóri
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Julian Civilian, Sameheads & Inland Shrines
20:00 Kex Hostel
The Nerdlesque Revue
21:00 National Theatre Cellar
StripLab: Red Light Special
22:15 National Theatre Cellar

Friday June 14

Sir Bladimir II: DJ of the Roundtable
21:00 12 Tónar
Vögel, Ultra Magnus & Úlfúð
20:00 Gaukurinn
Á inniskónum: Bjarni Daniel & Magnús Jóhann
20:00 Hannesarholt
DRIF
20:00 Iðnó
Fusion Groove
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Taugadeildin, Xiupill & Guðir Hins Nýja Tíma
20:00 Kex Hostel (Gym & Tonic)
Libertyfest
21:00 Radar
Simon fknhdsm
22:00 Röntgen

Event Picks



Berndsen
June 27
Iðnó – 3.900 ISK

Since his bombshell 2009 debut single "Supertime" and its enduringly psychotic music video, synth-pop crooner Berndsen has been an absolute favourite of ours. Having made a name for himself not only for delivering delightful and beautiful electro-new-wavey pop tunes, he's been an avid producer, a man behind the curtain if you will, of so much great music. However there is nothing like getting to see the man play live, rounded out by his amazing band that includes Hermigervill and Hrafnkell Gauti Sigurðsson. It will be sweaty, it will be wild, it will be romantic and hot. It will be a super time. RX



DJ Shadow (US)
Thursday June 20, 20:00
Gamla Bíó – 7.400 ISK

"DJ Shadow is coming? Are you serious!?" This is what one member of Team Grapevine exclaimed when learning of the upcoming show by the superstar DJ and record producer. We fool you not – DJ Shadow is coming! Since blowing up in 1996 with his Guinness World Record winning album *Endtroducing.....*, his 30-plus year career has had him on every festival bill, working with countless big names and has kept people moving to his distinct sound. This has all the markings of one that will have people asking "were you there?" Here we go! RX



Mánakvöld: Björk & Friends
Saturday June 22, 17:00
Smekkleysa – Free

Since last August, the de facto queen of Iceland Björk has emerged each full moon to regale the city with a much-needed party. She knows her people can't go long without being graced by her presence. In each event, she handpicks the lineup from her up-and-coming local faves and brought international friends with beloved cult followings to join the party. On this strawberry moon night, she brings over experimental pop artist Mica Levi (aka Micachu) and some yet to be revealed pals. Go dance and bask in the glory of our musical monarch. Even if you can't see the moon, she's there. RX



National Gallery of Iceland
Fríkirkjuvegur 7
The House of Collections
Hverfisgata 15



Tumi Magnússon Hringrás Loop

Listasafn Íslands
National Gallery
of Iceland

8.6.–
22.9.2024

01.06.–22.09.2024

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Reykjavík Arts Festival
1.–10. júní 2024

Photo: Rúnar Steindór

Events

14.06-27.06.24

Concerts, comedy, movies and other happenings that defy categorisation

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

DRIF

- 22:00 Radar
- DJ Karítas
- 22:00 Röntgen
- Hypnotist Matt Hale: Top Fun!
- 18:30 Tjarnarbíó
- House of Heart: A Drag Saga
- 20:30 Tjarnarbí

Saturday June 22

- LICKS: KISS Tribute Band
- 21:00 Dillon
- Lagaffe Tales
- 23:00 Kaffibarinn
- Miðsumar: DJ Karítas & Aron (Club-Dub)
- 16:00 Kaffi Flóra
- Rúnar Þórisson & Band
- 21:00 LEMMY
- Chooc Ly (UK) & Apex Anima
- 20:00 Radar
- Benni B-Ruff
- 22:00 Röntgen
- Mánakvöld: Björk & Friends
- 17:00 Smekkleysa
- Seiðr's Most Wanted
- 20:30 Tjarnarbíó

Sunday June 23

- Room For Everyone: Pride Flag Stand-Up
- 17:15 Gaukurinn
- RVK Fringe Awards Ceremony & Closing Party
- 21:30 Gaukurinn
- Vinyl Sunday
- 21:00 Kaffibarinn
- PIKKNIKK: Possimiste
- 15:00 Nordic House
- Sunday Club
- 20:00 Ra

Monday June 24

- Jeff Mailfert (FR)
- 20:00 Gaukurinn

Wednesday June 26

- Álfbeat
- 21:00 Kaffibarinn
- Guðjón Steinn Skúlaason Quartet
- 20:00 Múlinn Jazzclub
- Open Decks
- 21:00 Radar
- Vinyl Wednesday: Berndsen
- 21:00 Röntgen

Thursday June 27

- K.Óla Album Release Listening Party
- 20:00 12 Tónar
- Björgvin Halldórsson
- 20:00 Bæjarbíó
- Múr, Spiritual Reflections & Ballados
- 20:00 Gaukurinn
- Anna Gréta
- 20:00 Hannesarholt
- Anal Grenade, Social Suicide, Nöp & Impazzive
- 18:00 Hitt Húsið
- Jazz í Djúpinu: Silverscope
- 20:30 Hornið
- Berndsen
- 20:00 Iðnó
- Ivan Medved
- 21:00 Kaffibarinn
- Cocody Bombay
- 21:00 Röntgen
- MOVE, Óskar Guðjónsson Quartet
- 17:00 Salurinn



Featured Happy Hour

Gaukurinn

TRYGGVAGATA 22

As the annual RVK Fringe rages over the last two weeks of the month, at the very heart of it is the downtown stalwart Gaukurinn. The ongoing iteration of one of Reykjavik's oldest bars – posted up on this corner since 1983 – it's a home for weirdos and queerdos, punks and metalheads, goths and emos, and anyone who loves a crazy good time and hates bigoted bullshit. A perfect mix of subculture dive bar and friendly welcoming haunt, come for the happy hour and stay for the Fringe festivities. You won't regret it. RX

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Appy Listings

Some Of The Happiest Hours In Town

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

101 HOTEL
Wednesday to Saturday from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 1.390 ISK, Wine 1.590 ISK

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

AMERICAN BAR
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 1.100 ISK, Wine 1.300 ISK

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

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

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

THE BEER GARDEN
Monday to Friday from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 950 ISK, Wine 1.100 ISK

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

BRAVÓ
Every day from 16:00 to 1:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

BREWDOG
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00 & 22:00 to 00:00
Beer 1.290 ISK, Wine 1.490 ISK

BRÚT BAR
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 1.160 ISK

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

FJALLKONAN
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.190 ISK, Wine 1.390 ISK

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

FORSETINN CAFÉ
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 990 ISK, Wine 990 ISK

FREYJA PUB
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

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

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

HOTEL HOLT BAR
Wednesday to Saturday from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.350 ISK

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

JÖRGENSEN KITCHEN & BAR
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 950 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

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

KAFFI LÆKUR
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00 & 22:00-23:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

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

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

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

LITLI BARINN
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 990 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

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

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

PETERSEN SVÍTAN
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

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

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

SÆTA SVÍNIÐ
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.090 ISK, Wine 1.390 ISK

SATT RESTAURANT
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

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

SLIPPBARINN
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00, late happy Monday to Thursdays from 21:30 to 23:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

SPILAKAFFI
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, no wine

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

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

UPPSALIR BAR
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 850 ISK, Wine 850 ISK

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

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

VOX BRASSERIE & BAR
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

* We do our best to keep these prices current, but prices are constantly changing. Inflation, amirite!?

Cheap Eats

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

APÓTEK
Soup of the Day
1.990 ISK all day, every day

ARABIAN TASTE
Falafel Roll
1.790 all day, every day

BÆJARINS BEZTU
Hotdog and soda
990 ISK all day, every day

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

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

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

ISLENSKI BARINN
Soup of the Day
1.950 ISK all day, every day

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

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

NAPOLI PIZZA
Lunch Offer: choice of menu pizza or sandwich
1.890 ISK every day from 11:30 - 15:00

PÍTUBARINN
Veggie pita sandwich
2.090 ISK all day, every day

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

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

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

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

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Music News



Another Round Of Innipúkinn Music Festival

Longstanding Reykjavík-based music festival Innipúkinn will be back for its 21st iteration this summer. Happening over the Verslunarmannahelgi national holiday weekend on August 2-4, the weekend is one of Iceland's busiest travel periods, with festivals happening in almost every town, hamlet and city. Innipúkinn translates to "indoor imp" and, as its name suggests, is the place for those who can't be bothered leaving

town. Innipúkinn spans two venues, Gamla Bíó and Röntgen, with 16 artists confirmed on the bill. The artists performing are Páll Óskar, Bjartar Sveiflur, ex.girls, Hasar, Hatari, Hipsumhaps, Hekla, Hermigervill, Inspector Spacetime, Kött Grá Þjé & Fonetik Símbol, Lúpína, Skrattar, Una Torfa, Úlfur Úlfur, Volruptus and Vök. More artists and DJs will be announced as the event approaches. JB



Reykjavík Record Shop For Sale

Would you like to embark on a new career path selling music? Well, now's your chance! Beloved vinyl purveyor – and repeat winner of the Grapevine's Best Record Store award – Reykjavík Record Shop is for sale. The owners of the Klapparstígur spot made the announcement on Facebook that they're seeking a passionate audiophile to take over the shop. Reykjavík Record

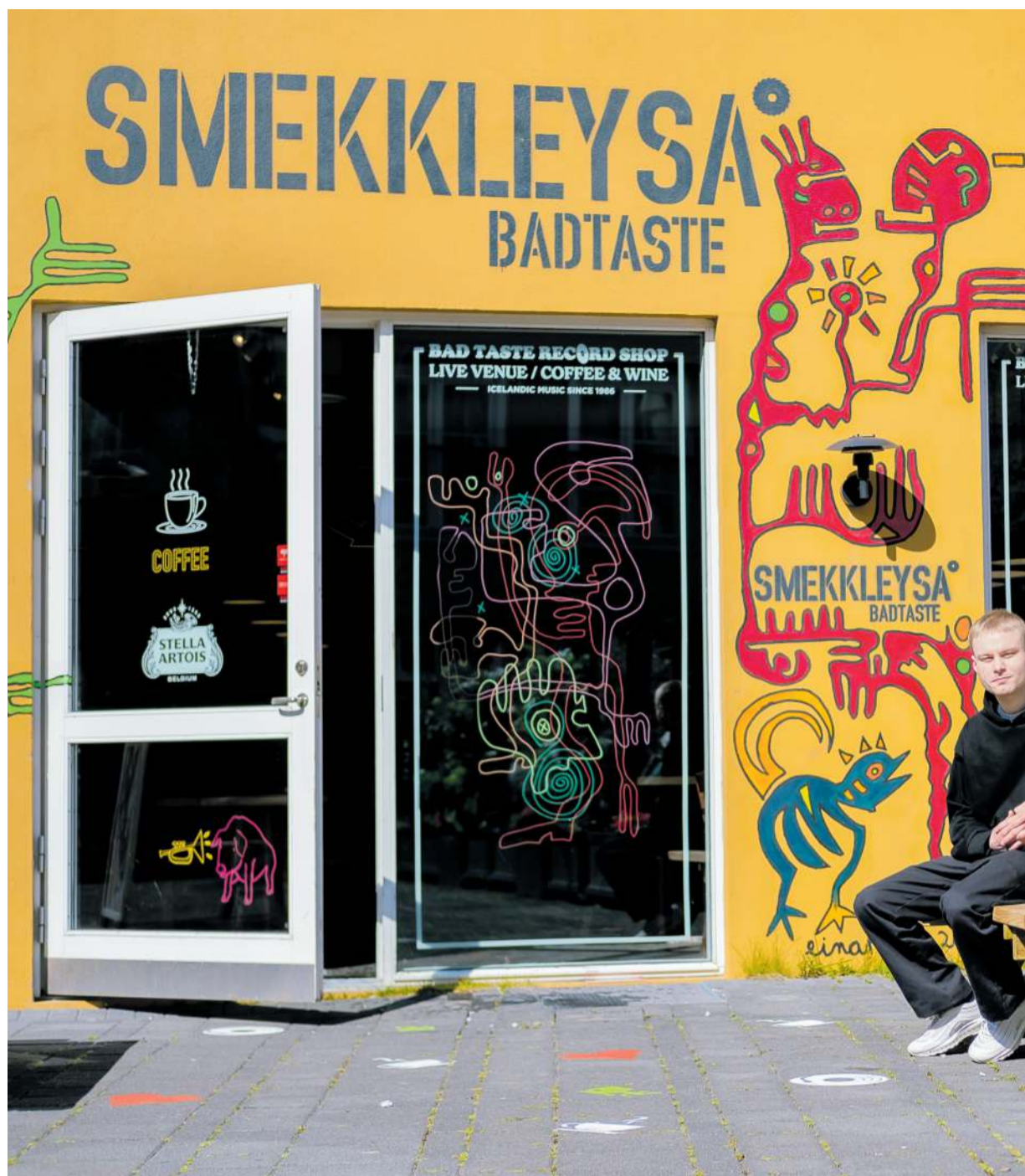
Shop opened in 2014, branching out into music publishing with the eponymous label. The business is for sale with all of its vinyl records and equipment. According to the real estate advertisement, the business is open for offers, meaning you could snag yourself a hefty amount of vinyls for the right price – if you're good at negotiating. JB



Laufey And Hugi Guðmundsson Nominated By The Nordic Council

The Nordic Council, an inter-parliamentary cooperation of the Nordic countries, has nominated artists Laufey and Hugi Guðmundsson for their 2024 Nordic Council Music Prize. The award considers jazz and folk albums and film scores, as well as classical symphonies and concerts. Twelve works from every participating country (except Green-

land) are on the shortlist. Among the nominated works is Laufey's 2023 album *Bewitched* and composer Hugi Guðmundsson's oratorio *The Gospel of Mary*. Winners will be announced on October 22 with the recipients invited to the Nordic Council's meeting in Reykjavík that same month. JB



Music City

Where's The Party?

Grasping the current state of live music venues in Reykjavík

WORDS Ish Sveinsson Houle
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

shop moved into this new space in 2021. Now, the downstairs record shop area has been transformed into a place that can convert more easily into a venue space. And the Smekkleysa team has been quick to put it to use.

re-spanning music on their label and booking genre-spanning shows bodes well for the music performed at Smekkleysa. In the past few months alone, the space has hosted everything from folksy performances fundraising for this summer's

I just hope that the city recognises the lack of venues for smaller bands and artists. That they do something about it.

We've all been talking about it: the live venue scene of Reykjavík is in flux. It's easy to feel pessimistic as you see your favourite places reducing their hours, moving, or shutting down altogether. But, in an effort to inspire some optimism, let's talk about those who are doing something about it.

Smekkleysa, for one, is stepping up. Their Hjartatorg shopfront wears many hats: record store, coffee house, bar, art gallery and live music venue. Prolific and integral to the Icelandic music scene, the independent record label is ubiquitous in the story of the last 50 years of Icelandic music – long before the

NO GENRES, NO LIMITS

"There's no music genre [that Smekkleysa limits itself to]" explains Smekkleysa employee and musician Örylgur Steinar Arnalds, when asked about the company's criteria for booking artists. "We just keep it in the same tradition it has always been, a lot of more grassroots stuff, more experimental stuff, but then there's also whatever. We're open for whatever." The parallel ethos of releasing gen-

Hátíðni and a pop-up show from American comedian and musician Reggie Watts, to Skrattar who self-describe as the "most dangerous pop band in Iceland."

WHAT'RE YOU UP TO THE NEXT FULL MOON?

Another big attraction of Smekkleysa is the Mánakvöld ("Moon Night") events. Whether be a Snjótungl ("snow moon"), Ormatungl ("worm moon"), or a Úlfatungl ("wolf moon"), most months Björk and a variety of



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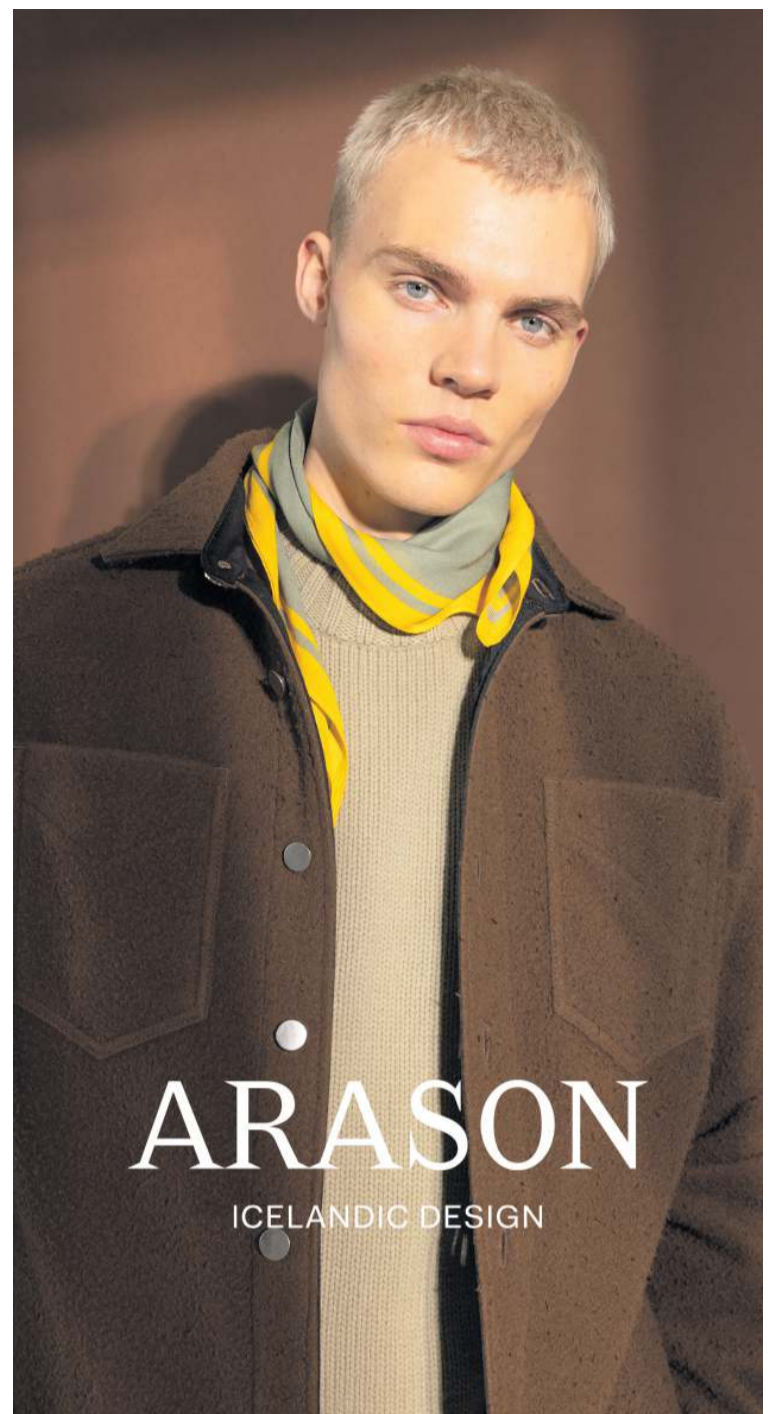
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her friends host a night of live performances and DJ sets.

"It's really amazing. Iceland is really lucky to see these artists for free. It's kind of ridiculous," Örylgur says with a laugh, to which I completely agree. In the past year, a smattering of Iceland-based artists and DJs have joined Björk on stage, as have international artists such as sega bodega and Arca.

The attendance is, frankly, always insane. It packs not just the record shop, but concertgoers are also cramming the staircase and the bar, and spilling out onto the street. Not only have I met Björk superfans who have flown into Iceland for these nights, but you can usually find most artists of the young experimental music scene in attendance.

Over the course of its 40-years, a throughline in the history of the label is the continued participation of co-founder Einar Örn Benediktsson (Kukl, Sugarcubes, Purrkur Pillnikk). As Smekkleysa recently made room for a gallery space, the exhibition Örn&Örn opened on May 16; a collaboration between Einar Örn and artist Davíð Örn Halldórsson.

"A lot of the Smekkleysa people are also visual artists, so it just made sense as something to do in the space," Örylgur says. In a similar style to some of the works in the exhibition, the murals adorning both entrances are also painted by Einar Örn.

AROUND TOWN

Our conversation shifts from the present to the future as I ask Örylgur how he feels about the current state

of Reykjavík venues. "I just hope that the city recognises the lack of venues for smaller bands and artists — that they do something about it because it's getting to a quite dire situation now," he remarks.

Smekkleysa isn't alone in taking steps to change the situation. As the Grapevine reported recently, Iðnó is also making an effort to book more experimental shows, while LEMMY hosts events to give musicians and bands a platform for their first performances. Both spaces are booked by Agnes Hlynisdóttir. As if underscoring the importance of Iðnó and Smekkleysa's approach, electronic group *ex.girls* played two release concerts for their album *Verk* in April — one at each venue.

It shows people want weirder, more exciting music. There is some hope.

Another institution continuing the pattern of record shops offering a lot more is 12 Tónar. With consistent vinyl DJ sets, the store is also moving towards more live music events.

"Since we opened the bar, we have been having live shows on a more regular basis," explains 12 Tónar's Einar Þór Kristjánsson. "But the ideology has been the same from the start — to keep on hosting legendary concerts with all kinds of different bands, new and old, and all kinds of music genres. We think it's not about the genres or where you come from, but about the music."

CLOSING TIME? ALREADY?

A tough limitation for Smekkleysa and others is their hours. On weekends, Smekkleysa isn't open past 9 p.m., while Iðnó closes around 11 p.m., and 12 Tónar locks up at 1 a.m. Reykjavík — and by extension, the concertgoers — has lost a lot of those spaces that stay open until the early morning hours.

In the space of legendary venues of Reykjavík past is Radar, housed in what used to be Húrra. The electronica-forward club proudly maintains a 5 a.m.-ish closing time. Shortly after Radar opened, their basement branched out as a separate venue booked by DRIF founder and electronic artist Jamesendir.

Though small, the cave-like space is the perfect spot for techno and is reminiscent of spaces outside of Iceland that Jamesendir and the Radar staff hope to emulate. Especially on these nights in the basement, Örylgur notes that they're packed. "It shows people want weirder, more exciting music," he ruminates. "There is some hope." ■

Björk's next Moon Night takes place on June 22 at Smekkleysa, with special guest Mica Levi. Keep informed about what Smekkleysa is up to on smekkleysa.net, Iðnó on idno.is, 12 Tónar @12_tonar, Lemmy @lemmy_rvk, Radar @radar.reykjavik.



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DUCK & ROSE

Track By
Track

Swedish Summers And Close Collaborations

KUSK's *RAMMAR* captures feelings of freedom and adolescence

WORDS Kolbrún Óskarsdóttir
IMAGE Supplied by KUSK

Released on May 24, *RAMMAR* is artist KUSK's sophomore album. Rising through the ranks as the 2022 Músiktilraunir winner, KUSK's latest output layers filters of hazy summers and feelings of adolescent freedom within the frame of bedroom-pop.

HEIM

"Heim" is the first track of the album and its core inspiration. I was finding it difficult to write new songs until I listened to Djo's album *DECIDE*. As soon as I heard the first track, I realised how much I wanted to write again and wrote a love letter to that song.

1000

"1000" was born out of "Heim." I made a demo but immediately hit a wall. So I went to Hrannar Máni (known artistically as Óviti), and he helped me. During the session, I fell asleep on the couch while Hrannar worked. When I woke up, he'd written a whole song. The track almost wrote itself afterwards.

SÍÐAN SÍÐAST

"Síðan síðast" was a challenge I made myself. I wanted to write a song where I'd play every instrument. I started the process with a beat. Then I allowed the song to lay itself out as it pleased.

LOKA AUGUNUM, FEAT. ÓVITI

This is one of the album's oldest songs, developed from an idea I presented to Hrannar. I think a lot of my music wouldn't be like it is today if not for Hrannar. What's so fun working with him is that there's no plan — the music just gets made. The songs inch forward and we spitball lyrics until we're satisfied with the outcome, which is exactly what happened here.

SOMMAR

"Sommar" is entirely written as a love letter to the Swedish summer. I was raised in Sweden most of my life and had a very Swedish childhood. I travelled back after some time away during the summer of

2023 and found I'd forgotten that Swedish summer feeling. I felt like I was experiencing summer for the first time. I decided to capture it with words and a bossa-nova arrangement.

HOLD ME

"Hold Me" was created from a choir recording I found that I thought was very beautiful. I wanted to write a song specifically for this particular recording, which is played at the end.

GRÓFAR ÚTLÍNUR

"Grófar útlínur" is inspired by Amber Mark's "What it is." I was enamoured by its drum beat, which inspired this song. Later, singer Birgitta Ólafsdóttir got involved, creating this groovy track. It's about painting the world around you as you want it. It's also the longest track on the album and has a long outro — like the song is travelling into the distance.

FER Í HNÚT

This track has a fun story. I wrote it three times in three different languages; English, Swedish, and Icelandic. It was nice to watch how the lyrics and the meaning of the song changed between languages.

LEIÐIR LIGGJA SAMAN

"Leiðir liggja saman" is what I call the album's transformation song as it cuts into two parts in the middle. This song is still under some development and I'm looking forward to seeing its possibilities during live shows.

ALLT

Originally written as a reprise to "1000," "Allt" is the song I care most about on the album. Hrannar and I had a piano version but the song went in another direction when I decided to feature my little sister, Hildur Óskarsdóttir. The song revolves around this connection between sisters, which follows you throughout life — wanting to tell your sister everything.

HALTU Í MIG

The last track and the oldest one. I felt like I needed an end that would tie everything together. I started looking at old demos and found a track called "Ást." I kept the lyrics and melody but decided to rework the backing track. My music has developed a lot since that demo. ■



Going West

Ísafjörður Calling

New York composer Ellis Ludwig-Leone returns to the Við Djúpið Music Festival

WORDS Irina Shtreis
IMAGE Supplied by artist

This year's edition of the Ísafjörður-based Við Djúpið Music Festival sees the return of composer Ellis Ludwig-Leone. Building off his long standing relationship with the festival, the American artist ventures north again to perform his latest composition *False We Hope*.

In 2012, Yale graduate Ellis Ludwig-Leone visited Iceland for the first time to attend the classical music festival Við Djúpið. There, in Iceland's rugged Westfjords, the classically trained musician took part in the New Composers' Project, initiated by conductor Daníel Bjarnason, and met future creative collaborator Halldór Smásson. "Halldór and I have a long history of collaboration," says Ellis. "When we met each other, we recognised that we are similar in many ways."

The link to Iceland was made through fellow American composer Nico Muhly, a member of the Bedroom Community label. "At that time, I was working as an assistant for Nico," Ellis recalls. "One of the reasons I went to Við Djúpið the first time was that Nico's record label was based there. He talked so glowingly of Iceland."

PARALLEL LIVES

Similarly to Nico, who easily navigates between the contemporary classical and popular music galaxies, Ellis finds multiple realms equally fascinating. Solo career aside, the composer founded the chamber pop band San Fermin in 2011. Coming from an artistic family, Ellis' all-embracing open-mindedness seems to be hereditary.

"Pretty early on, I started taking piano lessons with one of the professors at the school where my dad taught," says Ellis. "I got really into playing classical music. Separately in high school, I started playing in a rock band. I had these two separate lives that came simultaneously but never talked to each other. Then when I got to Yale, I started taking the classical side more seriously, not

I had these two separate lives that came simultaneously but never talked to each other.

as a pianist but more as a composer. It was very natural to me to understand how these pieces actually function, what are the nuts and bolts behind them."

During his senior year, the composer put out a concert that involved both components — the neoclassical pieces in the first part and the set with San Fermin in the second half. "It was the first time I saw these things juxtaposed with each other — they were in dialogue with each other in my own brain."

THE RETURN

At Við Djúpið this year, Ellis will perform his latest album *False We Hope*, a sequence of haunting pieces featuring the Attacca Quartet and vocalist Eliza Bagg (formerly of the art-pop collective Pavo Pavo).

With the libretto written by Pulitzer finalist Karen Russell and poet Carey McHugh, *False We Hope* is cathartic as it is therapeutic. Recorded during the covid-era lockdown, the album is a meditation on connection inspired by Biblical tales ("Prodigal Daughter") and personal takes on the pandemic ("How To Resurrect A Loved One's Voice").

"This album became about isolation and connection and trying to create rituals that make us feel together but also acknowledging the impos-

sibility of being together. A lot of music on this album took a form of seance. It's about someone who is missing, it's about trying to connect with the memory of someone. This dealing with absence was really the inspiration behind the album". ■

Við Djúpið happens in Ísafjörður from June 17-22. Ellis Ludwig-Leone performs on June 19, accompanied by Eliza Bagg and a host of musicians. Listen to *False We Hope* on available streaming platforms.



Music

Death Of An Ego

Biggi Maus battles the mind and music on his latest album *Litli dauði / Stóri hvellur*

WORDS Jóhannes Bjarkason
IMAGE Kristín Anna Kristjánsdóttir

Birgir Örn Steinarrsson's music career has mostly been synonymous with the alternative-rock band Maus. Coming to prominence in 1994, the indelible act rode the wave of grunge and noise rock sweeping most of the Western hemisphere.

Birgir's foundational years in Maus have never left him, with the band becoming so intimately entwined with him that the musician ultimately took on a solo moniker which directly references his band.

The most recent solo output of Biggi Maus, *Litli Dauði / Stóri Hvellur* (Little death / Big Bang) is not the artists' first foray on his own two feet. Having previously explored the possibilities of a solo career, most notably as Bigital and Króna, Biggi Maus now finds himself starting anew.

ME, MYSELF, AND THE PRESENT

As his previous solo projects did not necessarily focus on new material – rather reworkings of older music he had lying around – Birgir was adamant this time around about writing music which wouldn't resemble his old band. According to him, that mindset is behind him.

"I realised later that Maus, this idea of worrying that the songs would turn out too close to Maus, was ridiculous," he says, continuing, "Because when I wrote for Maus I wasn't thinking they should sound any particular way."

This time around, Birgir focuses on all-new material. "It's the first time where I'm presenting new songs. Most of these songs are written around the time of recording. So it's not me and my old past, but myself and the present," he explains.

DEATH OF ROCK / BIRTH OF POP

Litli dauði / Stóri Hvellur portrays an interesting amalgamation of influences, most notably 80s era new-wave and neo-romanticism. Focusing on lush synthesiser arpeggios and pouncing basslines, the album steers away from being boxed within

a specific frame, delivering a listening experience full of surprises.

"Gleymdu mér" starts out with a programmed drum beat diving into a bout of post-punk nihilism until waves of all-encompassing electric guitars muddy the track. In "Óargardýr," Biggi sings about making peace with the beast-like facet of human nature under the accompaniment of a tender piano. These two tracks are notable outliers on an album which embraces the artist's vulnerability.

"I'm 40-something years old and I'm a pop fan deep inside. I experienced a lot more freedom to allow each and every song to take its own necessary direction. I allowed myself to follow the flow of creation, instead of playing into pre-planned ideas," Biggi smiles, commenting on "Óargardýr," "I didn't intend to write a piano song – it just happened."

While the album's intention was never to project an overt conceptual idea, Biggi later decided to maintain philosophical ties with his debut solo album, *id* from 2006. Being very interested in psychology from a young age – Biggi later trained to become a psychiatrist – the musician was especially fascinated by Sigmund Freud's teachings on the id, ego and superego.

"My first album is a direct reference to Freud. It was always the plan that my next album would be called Ego," he starts to clarify, "But what happened in the meantime – if anything has happened with me is that I managed to put the ego aside. I wouldn't say the death of an ego, but close to it."

Litli dauði / Stóri hvellur references the French expression *la petit mort* – a sudden weakening of the consciousness post-coitus – and conceptualises the battle taking place within the mind. "In French, *Litli dauði / Stóri hvellur* can mean 'Orgasm / Boom'. Alternatively, it can mean 'Death of an ego / Enlightenment,'" Biggi says grinning as he weaves in his psychology expertise.

A SERENDIPITOUS CREATION

Biggi Maus' re-entry into the world of music was not on his five-year plan. Having established himself as a clinical psychiatrist in Reykjavík, the artist moved to Akureyri in 2021 to open a new branch of the the suicide-prevention association *Pieta*.

In fact, the album came together quite serendipitously. With the help from and through the close collaboration with producer Þorgils Gíslason (Toggi), the album started taking

shape. "If you'd asked me a year ago, I wouldn't have known I'd be releasing this album," Biggi admits.

Having worked together on Biggi's singles "Má ég snúsa meir?" and "Ekki vera að eyða mínum tíma" in early 2023, the pair clicked. "The idea came after Toggi and I had worked on these songs. And we just had this great atmosphere between us, good flow and understanding of each other."

Ultimately, it was Toggi who picked out the album tracks from Biggi's enormous catalogue of demos. Following the reunion of Maus at Gamla Bíó in 2023, Biggi was determined to finish the album. "I recorded the vocal tracks two days after that show. It was one of the most rockstar weeks of my life," Biggi jokes. "I'd sort of regained my mojo." Celebrating rave reviews, Biggi plans to bring the album to life in September. ■

Litli dauði / Stóri hvellur is out on available streaming platforms. The physical edition features two bonus tracks and will be distributed to stores in early July.

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Musical Representation

There's Space For Everyone In Greenhouse

Litla Gróðurhúsa Familia and the Pikknikk concert series provide a platform

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

Though José Luis' contributions to the scene are evident in their own musical endeavours under the moniker Andervel and through their curation of the hafnar.haus concert series at Mengi earlier this year, they have even more irons on the fire.

representation and including people from other places."

That eye on representation is something that carries through to another project José Luis has been operating out of the same greenhouse: Litla Gróðurhúsa Familia.

In collaboration with the Nordic House, José Luis is once again sporting their curator hat to bring to life the fourth iteration of the Pikknikk summer concert series. Over the course of six Sundays, the idyllic greenhouse behind the Nordic House will be transformed into an intimate venue for music lovers of all ages to come together and bask in sweet sounds and (hopefully) sunlight. It all gets underway this year with Estonian musician Possimiste performing on June 23. She'll be followed in subsequent weeks by Sápmi performing arts collective Kompani Bárrogiera, Iranian/French composer Soheil Peyghambari, Icelandic outfit Los bomboneros, and more.

"With Litla Gróðurhúsa Familia we are focusing on offering a platform to balance the representation in mainstream Icelandic media," José Luis says of the video podcast initiative that launched in April and is in the process of releasing its six-episode debut season. "Basically, what we do is invite an artist or an art practitioner to talk and perform. We want to provide a space for them to tell us about what they do, to showcase their work. It's a space to talk freely about what the artist wants to talk about. So we discuss topics such as immigration, diversity, how it is to frame oneself in the Icelandic cultural scene, and so on."

It's no secret that Reykjavík is a creative place. While the once gritty DIY aesthetic of the downtown core has been polished up and sterilised for the tourists in recent years, and we currently find ourselves in another cycle of lamentation over the loss of live venues and spaces for burgeoning artists to share their talents with the world, the creativity remains. Luckily for Reykjavík, there are people like José Luis Anderson and their team of collaborators working to provide platforms for creativity to thrive.

"With the Pikknikk series we are always trying to give space to artists that haven't played before in the series," José Luis says of this year's round of performances. "It has been curated keeping in mind gender

With inclusion being a key focus of the Litla Gróðurhúsa Familia series, many of the artists featured are, like José Luis, immigrants who have chosen to make their home in Iceland. "We talk about that as well," José Luis explains, "how it's been



Everyone In The

n for all

to come to Iceland, how welcoming it's been and how it's been to try to make a career here and to try to contribute to society."

BUILDING A FAMILY

The concept for Litla Gróðurhúsa Familia was kicking around for some time, but it was after taking over the curation of the Pikknikk concert series in 2023 that José Luis began taking steps to make it a reality. "Several artists were approaching us wanting to do more, wanting to find the space to play," José Luis recalls. "So that's one of the things that motivated me to start Litla Gróðurhúsa Familia – to try and offer a platform to contribute to Reykjavík's cultural scene and try to strengthen it."

It's within another hub of creativity – the hafnar.haus creative space – that José Luis found his Litla Gróðurhúsa Familia family. They are cinematographer Martyna Karolina Daniel, set designer Sigrún Hanna Ómarsdóttir Löve, visual designer Agnar Freyr Stefánsson, sound engineer Snorri Beck Magnússon, and videographer Patrik Ontkovic.

"It has been tricky to do this project, because we are not currently receiv-

ing any salary," José Luis explains, though he's quick to shout out Góði hirðirinn for supplying decor and 66 North for clothing. "So it's very much a project that we all decided to do because we love this place. And we want to contribute and to show that it's very nice when there is space for everybody and there is an audience for everybody."

So far in its first season, Litla Gróðurhúsa Familia has welcomed the likes of Jelena Ciric, Sóley, Elham Fakouri, and Daria Testo and Khairkhan. "We thought that it would be very nice to bridge these two projects [at the Nordic House]," José Luis says. "So some of the artists that are going to take part in Pikknikk have also been part of the Litla Gróðurhúsa familia."

LAYING OUT THE WELCOME MAT

"It is very crucial in the project that everybody is welcome," José emphasizes. "In my experience since I came to Iceland, it's been sometimes a little bit hard to find spaces in certain platforms or to be granted space to talk about your music or your art – especially when you are not Icelandic or when you are not

one of the popular Icelandic artists. So what we want is to offer an alternative that makes no distinction between 'you were born in Iceland and you have this many followers,' versus someone coming to Iceland who really wants to contribute. So there is no 'versus.' We want to show that we are all in this together. There's space for everybody."

While in the future José Luis would like to see Litla Gróðurhúsa familia grow into a larger series of events or even a festival to bring the community together, for now their hope is just that people will tune in and open their minds to the various types of creativity that is blossoming here in Reykjavík.

"Find us online and just be kind to each other and try to give a helping hand to each other," they say. "I think we can always benefit from that no matter where in society you are or whatever you do." ■

The Pikknikk summer concert series kicks off its six-week run in the Nordic House's greenhouse on June 23 at 15:00. Stream season 1 of the Litla Gróðurhúsa familia podcast series on YouTube @LitlaGrodurhusa.

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French Fever Sweeps R

Amber & Astra banks on Central European fare bucking worrying industry t

WORDS Shruthi Basappa
IMAGES Joana Fontinha & Supplied

in the last decade, where stability has been somewhat of a norm and we now only review restaurants that make it to the one year mark.

This year, however, has been showing outward signs of distress since pandemic relief measures that once mollified establishments have now ballooned in interest rates. Reduced tourist footfall is not helping the matter.

At Hverfisgata 20, in the space where the restaurant Punk was brought down by changing conditions, Amber & Astra has risen. In less than three months, an entirely new operation, new concept, new investors and new interiors have come together. While a speedy turn-around might welcome doubters, when I heard that it was chef Carl Kristian Frederiksen – formerly of Dill, Nostra (oh, how I miss this restaurant) and Estela restaurant in New York – at the helm, I sat up alert.

FRENCH REYKJAVÍK

Carl clearly nurses a soft spot for French cuisine, peppering our conversation with French enunciations of *salad lyonnaise* and *pomme gratin*. Yet when pushed to define Amber, he is firm: “We are not a French

restaurant,” he insists, “We are just a restaurant.”

He runs off to grab a menu to better illustrate his point, drawing attention to the burrata with shaved frozen peaches and the scallops Rockefeller, outliers in what is otherwise, a very very French menu (sorry, Carl) replete with tartare a la Parisienne, Foie Gras terrine, ratatouille and a thoroughly French salad selection.

Be that as it may, it's not hard to understand the pull of the practical or the familiar in these times. Despite assurances from the powers that be, the economy is struggling. Pandemic relief loans are coming due and many restaurants are closing doors, changing kennitalas and names, or scaling down their working hours and menus to meet the demands of a reality that is set to squeeze the life out of many, even as a few fatten up.

In Carl's case, however, this is personal in more ways than one. A Danish chef, he has lived and worked in the United States and Iceland, at establishments that are considered cultural icons. Iceland is now home and his focus at Amber seems to reflect his own personal journey. “I wasn't in here from the conception,” he clarifies. “That was Viggo (investor),” he says.

Blink-and-you'll-miss-it used to be the perfect adage for Reykjavik restaurants. Eateries seemed to open and close at frequencies I hadn't encountered before moving here. In fact, in the early days of restaurant reviews at the Grapevine, practically any restaurant that opened qualified for a review lest we'd miss the opportunity. Not so

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Reykjavík Once Again

trends

tor Viggó Vigfússon) and Siggí (Sigurður Laufdal from Oto). But I'd been in touch with Siggí, we are friends. When I heard about this, I'd offered to help any way I could. Then a week later he calls me, and says 'what do you think about being head chef at Amber?'"

"What inspired me to be a chef was food from Central Europe," Carl explains. "It has this shine of luxury... it's the only place I know in gastronomy that can have this basic everyday food as well as haute cuisine at the same time. And Siggí and Viggo had this concept of a central European kinda place. So it all fell into place."

"I wanted a place where you could have steak or fish, but you can also have foie gras. And it was the only way I could figure out how to put that in the same place." The menu at Amber has all that and reflects Carl's own stints in his favourite cities. Expect a moving feast that can change with "preference, seasons and expectations."

FROM FINE DINING TO CROWD PLEASERS

Amber is a stark departure from Nostra. From a chef-led concept restaurant that received Miche-

lin nods and was well on its way to being a starred establishment, to a casual spot, Carl is clear this is where he sees himself for the time being.

"Nostra was a set affair where everything was guided. Guests didn't have a choice. I wanted to get away from that. Give people more freedom. Let people have more of a say. We are not trying to teach people new things, which is why there are more classical dishes that people would recognise. I want people to come here and have a good time," he says softly. "We want to take the stiffness out of the dining experience, something I learned at Dill," he reflects. "People recognise French cooking here, which is what I am comfortable with, what I grew up with, what I studied."

Choices are aplenty at Amber. Don't let the French names or French prep lull you into thinking this would be an European affair. Expect to pair sides, sauces and steaks separately, American steakhouse style. You'll see charcoal grilled steaks and fish in a variety of cuts ranging from 6.200 ISK for whole fish, to 14.900 ISK for a kilo of Tomahawk; sauces and sides are to be tacked on as an aside (890 to 1990 ISK), "a little Rubik's cube style".

Besides that, there are salads that I can see becoming firm favourites for a crowd that has for far too long been deprived of a proper Caesar (2.990/3.990). Where bottled mayo and Reykjavík's anything goes attitude has ruled the roost, here is a delicately dressed, cut to perfect fork-bite sizes of crisp Romaine, generously dusted with parmesan. The out of step nod is the anchovies, which are Spanish style boquerones, rather than anchovies whisked into the dressing. "It's more to do with allergies, than being pretentious," Carl confesses.

Small plates like the Foie Gras terrine (4.990 ISK) deliver big on flavour. At the time of writing it was a punchy, fruity mostarda-ish affair with figs and espelette providing the punch in place of mustard. With a crisp, dry champagne, this would make for a perfect date night bite. Or you could drop by for lunch, and grab yourself a burger. Or be properly Icelandic and try the brunch. A sleeper hit at our table we didn't see coming was the French Toast (2.690 ISK). An old school pain perdu, made with brioche, but with a crackling crust of *brúléed* sugar — this was the kind of quiet, unexpected detail that I associate with Carl's cooking and hope to see more of on the menu.

For those with a sweet tooth, desserts are where you might find Carl in his element. There are spicy sorbets that dance on the edge of savoury and sweet. We tried an especially tingly raspberry-black pepper number. The pavlova is a delicate dome of meringue that reveals creme chantilly inside. A little quenelle of fresh strawberry sorbet is its crowning glory, the crystals of salt, a delightful note.

Wine selection for now steers clear of natural wines — which is honestly a relief considering the near-identical offerings in many other Reykjavík spots. Whether it is a cremant by the glass, or a magnum of premier champagne, or juicy reds and crisp whites, there is bound to be something for the price point you seek. If a full meal at Amber isn't what you are after, then sister bar Astra will whip up some tasty cocktails. I happened to try a coconut cream clarified La Pina (3.290 ISK) that, despite being a touch sweet for my palate, made an impression with its tepache-mezcal adjacent smokiness. The bar snacks are playful, with plenty of carbs to cushion those drinks. I've been eyeing the truffle toast (2.190 ISK) and the anchovies on grilled bread (2.790 ISK) to return to.

Most, if not all, new restaurants are chasing the success story of Snaps Bistro when they first opened some 20 years ago. The troubling truth, however, is that we are now witnessing the slow death of the restaurant industry, aided and abetted by indifferent policy makers, and an economical yo-yoing that has made restaurant overheads so high they'd put monarchies to shame. This is a vacuum being filled by a particular kind of investor. One who seems keen on innovation, but is happy to let copywriting do the job rather than have the kitchen deliver the promised creative goods. I fervently hope that Amber doesn't fall prey to this trap.

Carl is hopeful, too. "We have classically peasant food, served the right way. You can drop by for lunch and get something that isn't on the dinner menu. You can sit at the bar Astra for a quiet drink. You can come in with your family and get anything on the menu (except the steaks) at half portion sizes for children," he explains. "Amber is more of a restaurant that is an everyday celebratory place." ■

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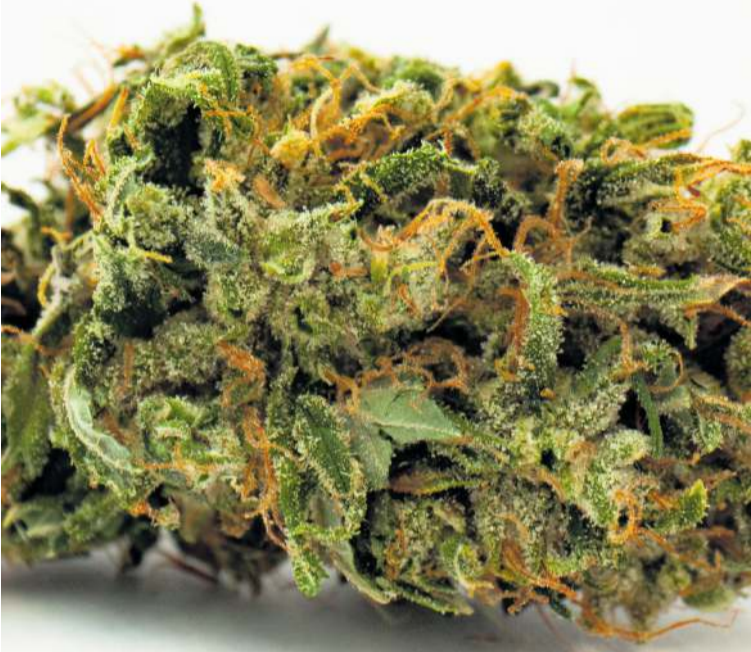
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Eat Local

From Farm To Plate

Akureyri's Rækta Microfarm values local produce over imports

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGE Art Bicnick

Once a new business pops up in the country – especially far from Reykjavík – it's always exciting. It's doubly exciting if that new venture is food-related – then it actually gives us hope.

Could the half-rotted imported greens at my local Bónus soon be swapped for fresh, crunchy, locally-sourced varieties? Can delicacies like mushrooms be grown indoors? Can a fine dining restaurant build a menu almost exclusively around produce grown nearby, rather than succumbing to the allure of “best of French/Mexican/insert your option cuisine”? With these curiosities in mind, on a trip to Akureyri a few months ago, I paid a visit to Rækta Microfarm.

WELCOME TO RÆKTA

Rækta Microfarm is run by an Italian couple who made their home in Akureyri more than a decade ago. Giacomo Montanelli had been working at Urban Farm, a high-tech greenhouse on the premises of Hotel Akureyri, for several years. Last year, when the hotel broke ground for an expansion and decided to close Urban Farm, Giacomo was offered the chance to take over the business. “I only took the microgreens,” Giacomo explains. His partner, Serena Pedrana, joined in to help with marketing and customer service.

While Giacomo didn't come from a horticulture background, his time at Urban Farm ignited a passion that now fuels every aspect of Rækta. “I love it. I'm just passionate about it,” he says. His partner chimes in to add that his passion extends beyond the microgreen farm, “We can't even see from the window, because he's growing tomatoes and there are tomato plants everywhere.”

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broccoli microgreens are 40 times more nutrient-dense than fully grown broccoli.

Walking around Rækta's lush indoor garden, I'm curious which of the microgreens is the most unique. “Basil,” answers Giacomo without hesitation. “Basil?” I'm confused as the herb seems to be one of the easiest crops to grow or find in shops – tiny basil plants are available in almost every supermarket in Reykjavík. “It wasn't a joke,” Giacomo clarifies

I'm Italian and I love basil. There are so many varieties of basil and it was so hard to find a variety that goes well on a pizza.

whose DNA hasn't been genetically altered. The farm offers over 20 varieties of microgreens, including coriander, cress, nasturtium, sorrel, broccoli, radish, spicy mustard and more. Contrary to the common perception that microgreens are easy to grow, they are actually a delicate and demanding crop. Successful microgreen production requires careful management of several key factors – consistent lighting, temperature control and regular watering. Once these basic processes are secured, it takes five to eight days for most microgreens to be ready for harvest, 10 days for cabbage or peas, and around three weeks for basil and sorrel.

Microgreens are gaining popularity not only for their convenience in indoor cultivation, even during Akureyri's harsh winters, but also for their nutrient density. For instance,

upon seeing my puzzled expression. “I'm Italian and I love basil. There are so many varieties of basil and it was so hard to find a variety that goes well on a pizza.” Luckily, his quest was successful and Rækta's basil has been receiving positive feedback from customers.

CIRCULAR PRACTISES

Rækta's operations primarily cater to restaurants in the Akureyri area, with a gradual expansion into the northeastern region underway. Recently, they began deliveries to Mývatn. The farm also offers a rotating weekly selection of microgreens for individual consumers through a subscription model.

Giacomo outlines that since making a zero-waste product is highly important to him and Serena, collaborating with restaurants has been



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the easier route – they've already established a process where restaurants return trays every week in exchange for a fresh tray of microgreens. As interest from individual consumers grows, Rækta has let customers either borrow trays or bring their own containers. Individual orders, priced at 2.790 ISK per tray, are available for pickup every Thursday afternoon.

Local supermarkets have also expressed interest in selling Rækta's microgreens, but since the plants need to be watered regularly and the only available packaging is disposable plastic, the team has decided to put such plans on hold until a greener, no-waste solution is available.

Since Rækta opened its doors last year, the business has been taking off slowly but surely. "We started in October and that's a slow season for restaurants. It's not the same as in Reykjavík here," Serena explains. "Business really goes down a lot." The farm began the winter by contacting restaurants and growing their client base. They even managed to secure a few grants.

"I think this summer I'm going to start paying myself a salary," Giacomo laughs.

MUSHROOM MOVEMENT

In addition to microgreens, Rækta has quickly added mushrooms and hemp to its roster. With a grant from the association of municipalities of Northeast Iceland, they're collaborating with North, a venture by chef Gunnar Karl Gíslason of Reykjavík's Michelin-starred Dill. Rækta produces mushrooms and executive chef Rafn Svansson incorporates them into North's menu, introducing

restaurant-goers to the incredible culinary versatility of fungi.

"There's a big demand from individuals, too," says Serena. "We sell out as soon as we post about mushrooms."

To source mushroom growing kits and learn more about the process, Rækta connected with Cristina Isabelle Cotofana from Sveppasmíðja in Borgarnes. Currently, they grow shiitake, Lion's Mane and oyster mushrooms.

My attention is particularly drawn to the Lion's Mane, which has enjoyed some social media hype recently. Lion's Mane supplements are readily available in health stores and said to improve memory and cognition, while Instagram chefs are turning

distinguishing itself with its focus on carefully sourcing each ingredient. They name every farmer, fisherman, or producer involved – a commitment rarely found elsewhere in the dining industry.

As Art Bicnick and I have the opportunity to secure limited seating at North for a late dinner, I'm thrilled to spot Rækta's name on the menu. Chef Rafn was incredibly accommodating during our visit, and although the experience typically caters to omnivores, a vegetarian menu can be requested.

Rækta's microgreens accompany most of North's savoury dishes – nasturtium, marigold and cress sprouts add bursts of vibrant green, making you forget it's the dead of winter.

I think this summer I'm going to start paying myself a salary.

them into steaks and emphasizing that they can reduce depression and anxiety. Giacomo agrees this one has been a real hit among Akureyringsurs.

Giacomo and Serena emphasise that one of their goals is to reduce the amount of imported produce in Iceland, both microgreens and mushrooms, and introduce local restaurants to products grown right next door.

LOCAL DELIGHTS

Local produce is important, not only for the founders of Rækta, but also for the chefs behind North. The restaurant tucked inside Hotel Akureyri transforms quality produce into an exceptional dining experience,

"Next course – mushrooms," chef Rafn, brings the new plates to our table. "Magic?" Art tries to make a joke, but Rafn shakes his head in denial, "I'm a seasonal restaurant."

In front of me is a dish of grilled leek purée, organic barley from East Iceland and a mix of grilled mushroom stems from Rækta. It's garnished with fermented red cabbage and Icelandic Tindur cheese – a combination that may seem unconventional, but the fact that it's all locally sourced adds to its excitement. As a snowstorm rages outside, I savour mushrooms grown in the north of Iceland. What a treat! ■

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The Edda Or Whatever

Better Safe Than Snorri

Meet the rich old dude who re-wrote the Edda, doomed Iceland to 682 years

WORDS Grayson Del Faro
IMAGES The Internet

appreciate: if it weren't for the Edda, we wouldn't have Thor movies. Considering that the ones directed by Taika Waititi are two of maybe four vaguely watchable excretions from the seemingly endless intestinal tract of the Marvel Shit-ematic Universe, we have the Edda to thank.

So let's just say Snorri did us a solid. He read all those poems (and also some poems that are no longer with us, RIP poems) and squeezed them all into a prose version that is a bit easier to read. Like those For Dummies books that nobody ever bought but somehow continue to be published. This is like my version of

This is like my version of The Edda for Dummies of Snorri's version of The Edda for Dummies, which will obviously be extra dumb and with extra focus on the dicks.

Okay, okay, okay. I've already explained – in my half-assed-but-hopefully-hilarious way – the Poetic Edda. If you don't remember or are just too lazy to Google it (both are fair, tbh), it's a collection of poems from Medieval Northern Europe that tells us most of what we know today about the unhinged antics of the Norse gods and heroes.

But wait, there's more! There exists another Edda – a new and improved Edda, some might say – known as the Prose Edda. While the Poetic Edda was written by a bunch of anonymous poets over several centuries, the Prose Edda was written by one rich dude in the 1200s. I wouldn't usually consider any part of that a good thing, but it does offer some clarity. As a poetry stan myself, I am loath to give this one to the haters. Still, I have to be honest, prose is usually simpler to understand.

The Edda for Dummies of Snorri's version of The Edda for Dummies, which will obviously be extra dumb and with extra focus on the dicks.

So let's start off with the dick of the day, Snorri Sturluson himself. I'm sorry if you've heard this one before, but it bears repeating: in Sweden, snorre is slang for a penis.

This is obviously only important to scholars, nerds and Nordic people, but let me explain it in terms you can

Snorri Sturluson was born in 1179 into the bougiest family in Iceland and received the kind of education



ri

rs of oppression

only rich fucks can still get today. I mean, he was taught by a famous priest, so, like, not great, but at least he learned to read and write.

It turns out literacy is a good thing, because his poetry was totally lit. Aside from the masterpiece of the Edda, it was mostly sipping the Norwegian monarchy, but that was totally trending in the 13th century. He was also elected twice as Law-speaker of the Parliament, which was like the Prime Minister. Poetry for President 1222!

So while poetry and politics have Snorri best known for his brain, I promised some dick. Of course Snorri was putting his snorre to good use, too. Over his lifetime, he fathered six to eight children, depending on the source, and had two step-children, all with five different women. This lifestyle remains in practice in Iceland to this day, although it has been halved for efficiency's sake. I would estimate that the average Icelander today only has three to four children and one step-child with 2.5 different partners. You know, to keep it simple.

The problem with being a monarchic bootlicker is that while you might make some powerful friends, you also make some salty enemies. It is my job to spare you the boring legal

details, but somewhere between Snorri's spicy family feud and his being besties with the Scandinavian aristocracy, he got his ass cooked. He ended up being murdered in his own cellar by a bunch of goons in an inheritance dispute. Wow, it must suck to have intergenerational wealth, right?

The problem with being a monarchic bootlicker is that while you might make some powerful friends, you also make some salty enemies.

This is just the tip of the iceberg of dramaaaa that is known in Iceland as the Age of the Sturlungs. It's kinda maybe the reason that Iceland came crawling back to the crown of Norway with its tail between its legs in 1262. Iceland would remain Scandinavia's bitch from then until they eked out independence in 1944. By then, Iceland's custody had shifted from Norway to Denmark and seeing that Denmark was literally occupied by Nazis, Iceland was like, "We see you're busy. We declare ourselves a republic, okay byeeeeee." So, some

people like to thank our favorite dick for 682 years of oppression.

So, that makes Snorri Sturluson one of Iceland's most famous authors, most famous politicians, most famous philanderers and most famous sell-outs. He was Iceland's Shakespeare, Iceland's John F. Ken-

nedy, Iceland's Don Juan and Iceland's Helen of Troy all wrapped into one. You've gotta give the guy credit for his legacy, because he basically topped the charts in every category.

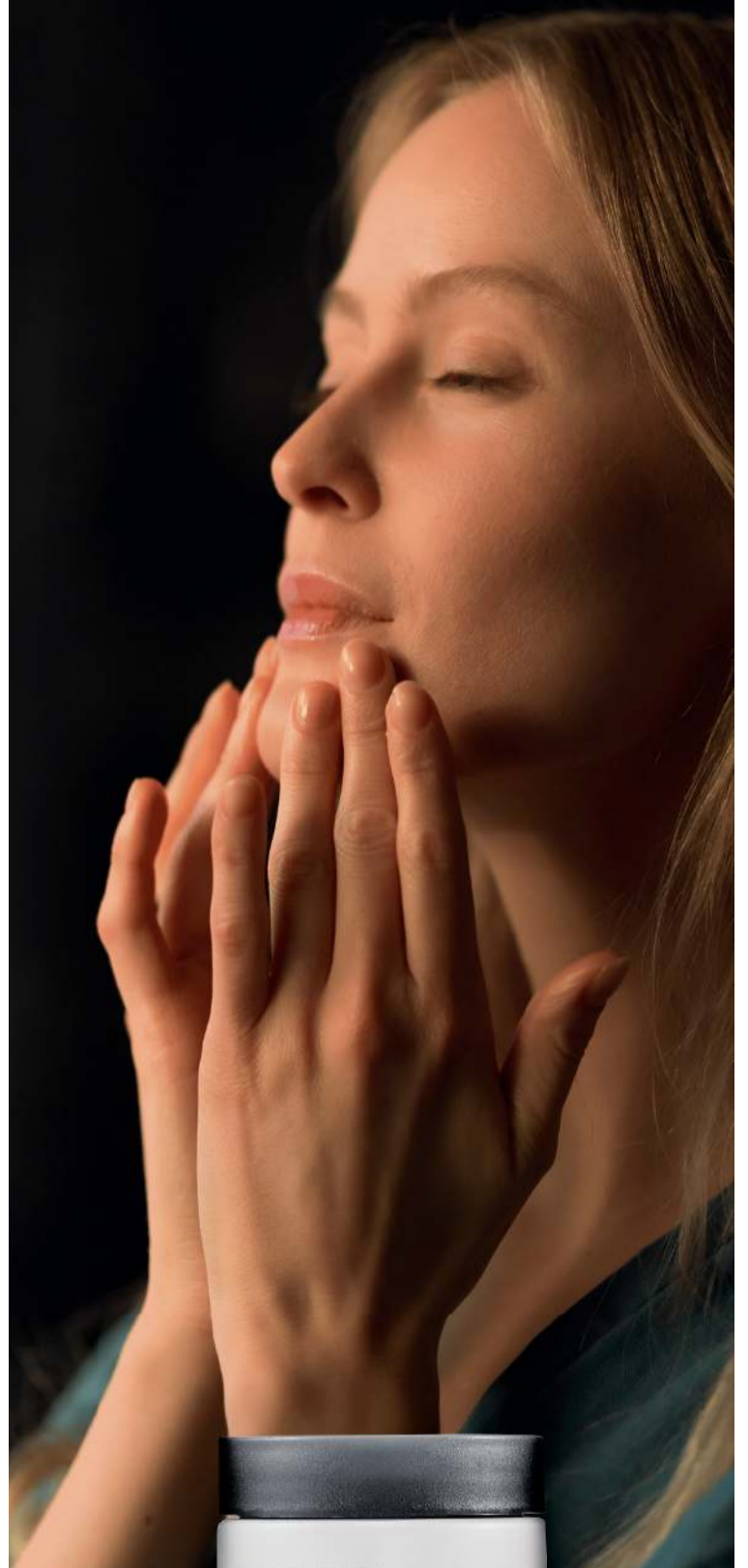
Now that you've had a taste of Snorri and his snorre, make sure you save room for the Edda. We'll whip it out in the next issue.

Morals of the story:

1. Marvel, please, for the love of the art of cinema, just fucking stop.
2. Keep it simple. Kill the rich. ■

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Islanders

Fermenting For Change

Julia and Björk are unlocking the potential of organic waste with their startup, Melta

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGES Joana Fontinha
Hákon Broder Lund

“I love talking about soil and getting other people interested in soil,” says soil scientist Julia Brenner as we sit outside, enjoying the rare moment of Reykjavik sunshine. Together with Björk Brynjarsdóttir, Julia is developing Melta — an innovative circular economy waste management solution that transforms organic waste into a sustainable, nutrient-rich fertiliser. How did these two become interested in working with waste? And what could their work mean for Iceland and rural communities around the world?

Originally from the U.S., Julia pursued her Master’s in organic fertilisers for restoring eroding soils in Iceland before returning to America to work at a national lab on soil research for climate models. “At that time I was doing a lot of science for science’s sake and I kind of missed doing something that was a little more hands on,” she shares.

It was during her studies at Kaospilot, a social design and experience school in Denmark, that Björk discovered bokashi composting — a fermentation-based decomposition method. Intrigued by this approach, she reached out to Julia to learn more about soil. Soon enough, Julia found herself on a flight back to Iceland to work for Jarðgerðarfélagið (The Composting Company), which would later become Melta. This collaboration began exactly five years ago.

“Together with some friends, we had gotten to know the bokashi method and started importing bokashi buckets and teaching people how to do this,” shares Björk. “From the beginning, we wanted to do it in a very community-focused way — people order buckets beforehand and when they arrive, they sign up for a workshop. This way, they learn how to do it in a space with a lot of other people that are learning how to do it, so it never feels like a lonely act or something that only you’re doing.”

The workshops quickly gained pop-

ularity, demonstrating the community’s eagerness to embrace sustainable solutions. “The people were so willing to do something, but there was no infrastructure for it,” says Björk. “Hosting this workshop again and again and again, it was so good to give these tools to citizens. But it was the responsibility of municipalities to enact good circulatory systems for organic waste.” She

INTENTIONAL INNOVATION

thought, “How about we design this for a whole municipality?” Julia, with her background in soil science and climate research, saw the potential for broader impact. She got involved in driving a system for “infrastructural change, rather than an individual deciding to take on a better solution.”

The project started in Reykjavik, but soon the team realised that they can bring way more benefit to rural areas. “We remixed this fermenta-

tion process a little bit so that it fit a larger scale,” Björk shares. “With the system that we’ve designed, we’re able to reduce collection frequency, which is a lot of cost reduction for rural municipalities. In [the countryside], they pay 90 to 255% more for waste management than the city does and most of that part is linked to collection, because homes are far away from each other.”

Julia and Björk’s innovative approach not only reduces collection needs by kickstarting fermentation and eliminating bad smells, but also allows for local fertiliser production. Melta is still in the development phase, testing an MVP as the team prepares to start fundraising for a microbrewery to increase efficiency. “Until now, it’s been just the two of us with pitchforks and shovels,” smiles Björk, adding that the future microbrewery would serve as a showroom where Melta could bring municipal leaders to showcase how the system works.

Julia adds: “This process doesn’t exist on paper anywhere. There’s no regulation for it.” The duo has to forge their own path, collaborating with MAST (Iceland’s Food and Veterinary Authority) to ensure safety and compliance every step of the way.

While Melta’s development might seem slow-paced, Julia and Björk agree it’s an intentional approach to avoid risks. “It hasn’t been like ‘move fast and break things,’” says Björk. “It has been very much [a consideration of] how do we make sure that we’re doing things properly at

Until now it’s been just the two of us with pitchforks and shovels.



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every step, so that we don't involve residents into a system where we say that it's supposed to be circular and then they would find out that it actually didn't work."

SCALING SOLUTIONS

As Melta focuses on larger-scale systemic changes, it no longer offers workshops on the bokashi method. But Julia and Björk remain willing to answer people's questions, share guides, and exchange ideas and feedback through a Facebook group. "It's just two such different scales to be operating. The difference between doing home pickling and running a pickling facility," Julia explains.

For their small team of two, splitting efforts between helping individuals and working with municipalities would be an arduous task. "If we want to see any big changes in society we really need it to be a larger system change," she adds.

"We know that this is a solution that is going to solve so many problems, because for the food system to be resilient, it needs to be regional and local," says Björk. Melta provides just that – it supports a more regen-

erative food system and contributes to climate change mitigation.

HOPE FROM THE GROUND UP

Björk shares that after experiencing intense climate anxiety in 2018-2019, her collaboration with Julia brought a renewed sense of optimism. "When I started talking to Julia about soil, it was like an injection of hope. There's a whole world below our feet we can't see but we can do so much good there," she says.

For the food system to be resilient, it needs to be regional and local.

Iceland's unique landscape, with 40% of its soils being barren desert, makes it the perfect testing ground for Melta. These soils can't hold carbon, leading to the use of synthetic fertilisers, which not only have a horrible production chain but also add nutrients to the plants, not the soil. "Producing nitrogen for synthetic fertiliser is globally 2% of greenhouse gas emissions," Julia

provides alarming statistics.

What Melta offers, in contrast, is an end product that is nutrient-dense with an ideal carbon-to-nitrogen ratio, averaging around 17. The fermentation process introduces beneficial microbes, similar to probiotics, which unlock nutrients, retain moisture and promote soil health.

Julia and Björk agree that if Iceland could eventually sustain itself without importing synthetic fertilisers and produce, it would be a significant achievement. This would not

only contribute to food security on the island but also make farming more cost-effective, potentially revitalising rural communities.

MELTA OASIS

Since much of Melta's work is conceptualising behind the scenes, reaping the physical benefits of the team's efforts is especially reward-

ing, the co-founders agree.

For DesignMarch this year, Melta collaborated with Krónan to produce Moldamín, a soil supplement made from fermented fruits and vegetables that would otherwise be discarded as organic waste. "It was the first time we had something to show – a little taste of what we're doing," shares Julia. Developed in just a month and a half, the product was sold at Krónan Grandi and received positive feedback. "People who have used it, have been asking when we're gonna make more?" she says, highlighting this as a success.

While Moldamín showcases Melta's potential in the consumer market, the team's true pride lies in a more unconventional demonstration of their work: a thriving oasis near the Rangárvallasýsla waste facility in Hella.

Two years ago, as part of an experiment, Julia and Björk raked a piece of sandy gravel, applied some of their fertiliser and left it for a year. "We didn't add seeds, we didn't do anything," Julia explains. "We tried to be really good and not check on it because I've studied these soils when I did my master's the-

sis – these soils are tough. It takes forever to see any change. Nothing happens quickly."

When, after a year, the duo returned to the deserted land and saw a lush green oasis, they at first couldn't believe it was theirs and had to double-check the GPS coordinates. "It really gave us a boost," says Julia.

The team has been expanding the oasis ever since and is once again eagerly anticipating the arrival of the Icelandic summer to see the results in bloom.

"Every now and again I look at the photo of the oasis and I think "Yes, that's why we're doing it. It works,"" says Julia.

Björk adds: "So much of the way that we talk about ourselves as humans is that we are a plague on this planet. We are not. We've just designed systems that are not sustainable for us or the planet."

Melta is on the way to change that. ■

Follow along news and updates from Melta on Instagram: @melta__melta

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Shopping

The Grapevine's Sorta Summer Shopping Bag

Stocking up without supporting genocide

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGES The Internet

Summer is *trying* to make itself felt here in the world's northernmost capital. But it's been failing for the most part. But instead of continuing to sob while buttoning up our wool jacket in mid-June, we've been doing some shopping. Here is our latest shopping bag of goods we're coveting this issue, all from retailers that have cut ties with Rapyd. Happy shopping!



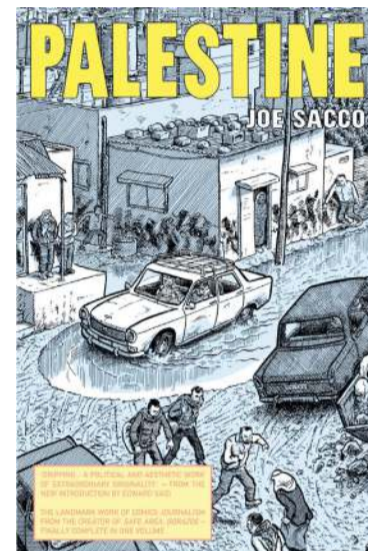
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(Musings)

A Heist Worth a Million Fjall-króna

Charlie has a scheme so crazy, it might just work

WORDS Charlie Winters
IMAGE Wikimedia Commons

Every year, the Lady of the Mountain walks out onto stage decked out in the most expensive costume this island has to offer. Surrounded by tight security, adoring fans, a secret selection process and an ironclad schedule, it'll be a tough nut to crack. If I'm gonna pull off this heist and get away with the Fjallkonan's costume, I'm going to need a squad.

Hi, Charlie here, if you're not entirely sure what I'm talking about, it's 17. júni soon, which is Þjóðhátíðardagur or Icelandic National Day. A day full of nationalism celebrating Iceland's independence from Denmark.

It's got food, fancy costumes and, most importantly for my purposes, a speech from Reykjavík's Lady of the Mountain or Fjallkonan, as she is known. Every year, they choose a prominent feminine figure to read a poem in front of parliament. It's quite a big deal and there's quite a bit of planning involved, meaning stealing her garb will be all the more worth it. If I want to get away with it, I'm gonna need some more info.

I was able to talk with Fjallkonan expert Anna Karen Unnsteins to learn more about the mysterious Mountain Woman. "The Fjallkonan originates in the 19th century when Icelanders were starting to fight for our independence," she tells me. "People start writing poems in which they use the word 'Fjallkonan' for Iceland, so in that regard the Fjallkonan is just Iceland as a whole. Then she became humanised in 1924 in Canada." So emigrant Icelanders in Canada embody a sense of the homeland in the shape of the Mountain Woman. "Her name was Sigrun Lyndar and she was the first woman to become a Fjallkonan, not just as a picture or a word in a poem."

Marvellous, so when did the tradition move over to Iceland? "In 1944 on June 17, when we actually got our independence, there was supposed to be a Fjallkonan at Þingvellir, but she never arrived on stage," Anna Karen tells me. "Then there's Alma Möller, she was the first Fjallkonan in Reykjavík and she was the first as we know her today wearing Skautbúningur."

Now we're talking, history is great and all but I'm in it for the money. Tell me about the clothes. "The costume that she wears in Reykjavík is usually the same one worn since 1974" Anything else? "That specific costume has a lot of fancy jewellery," Fancy, you say? "The belt is really, really luxurious. We call it víravirki. It's this specific type of gold working — I think it's probably silver that is gold coated."

Anna Karen also tells me about how, in the early 2000s after one of her speeches, the Fjallkonan was hit in the head with an anti-Falun Gong protest sign because Icelanders were protesting the Chinese cult, but that is a topic I am not ready to unpack. ■

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Horotropes

Give'Em The Old Razzle Dazzle This Month

And a 5, 6, 7, 8... will you hit your mark or fall flat?

WORDS Charlie Winters & Catherine Magnúsdóttir
IMAGE Adobe Stock

The curtain rises. The stage is set. Adler, Fosse, Sondheim, they roll in their graves. I don't see this production going smoothly. Musical fans are rabid, not even the fates can protect you now. Let's see what's in store for your big debut.



CAPRICORN
(December 22 – January 19)

Get thee to a nunnery Capricorn, it's time to jam. This month, we'll get to see if this *Sister* can Act...2 (And Whoopi Goldberg is gonna be there...2)



AQUARIUS
(January 20 – Feb 18)

Do you hear the people sing, singing the song of angsty men? God, everyone is so damn *Misérables* but you've always had a revolutionary side. Keep that fire burning, Aquarius, until all of parliament is nothing but ashes.



PISCES
(February 19 – March 20)

You're always in tune with others' emotions, but this month you'll discover more about yourself. Looks like the *Cats* out of the bag, Pisces. Welcome to the furry fandom, we've been waiting for you. Meeeeeoow.



ARIES
(March 21 – April 19)

Mamma Mia, here you go again! With *Summer on the way*, you'll spend a lovely time on a lavish Greek island enjoying the company of three young bachelors. Take a chance, Aries!



TAURUS
(April 20 – May 20)

They know your name from Reykjavik to Broadway to *Chicago*, baby. Being Prima Donna is really all that jazz. But people are always vying for your top spot so you best watch your back, darling. You aren't the only one reaching for that gun.



GEMINI
(May 21 – June 20)

Alright, little orphan, let's see if we can make you profitable. It's a hard knock life, Gemini, and I'm here to make some fucking money. So sing, dammit sing! Keep dancing!



CANCER
(June 21 – July 22)

Cancer, listen to me, the human world it's a mess, life under the sea is better than anything they got up there! The seaweed is [REDACTED AS PER CLAUSE 3-2 OF THE CEASE AND DESIST LETTER].



LEO
(July 23 – August 22)

Leo, this month, don't let the *Phantoms* of your past lead you astray in these dark halls. Take me to your sewer dungeon, ghost of my father, and mind that chandelier.



VIRGO
(August 23 – September 22)

Ah Virgo, God made many poor people, if only you were a rich man, you'd be as happy as a *Fiddler on a RUV*. Just look at Bjarni, he seems happy in all that dough.



LIBRA
(September 23 – October 22)

This was going to be like a cheeky Hamilton reference, but we couldn't get tickets. Sorry Libra, we were not in the room where it happened. We still have to wait for it. **GEORGE WASHINGTON!**



SCORPIO
(October 23 – November 21)

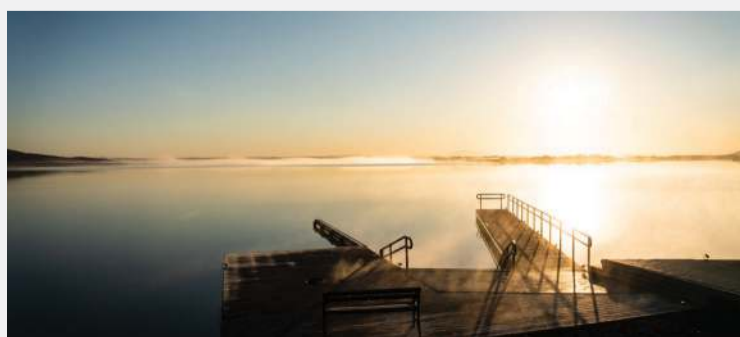
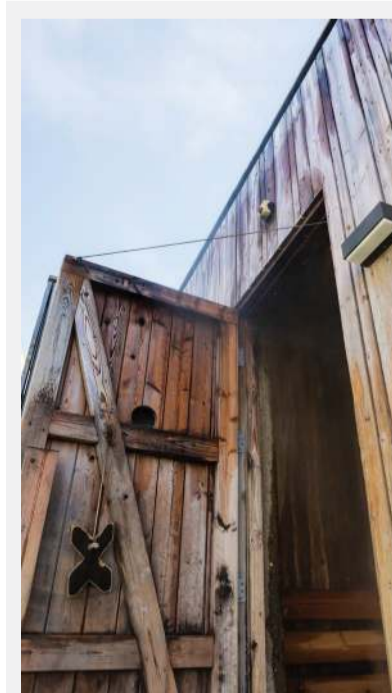
It's not fair that Taurus gets all the good roles, but as understudy there are a few ways to climb that ladder. You've been planning something for a while Scorpio, something *Wicked* (maybe a little Sapphic...what?)



SAGITTARIUS
(November 22 – December 21)
SHOW CANCELLED

NO REFUNDS

Well, so much for the encore. The curtain falls, you're handed a cheap plastic bouquet. Exeunt stage left, your career ends here. I'm sure you'll get by with children's birthday parties. Some of the moms might even recognize you. ■



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Potent Quotables

I think at one point I said a wrong name for the groom. But it didn't matter.

Officiating weddings is a lucrative side hustle on page 12

We expected to be able to return and at least spend Christmas at home, but things turned out differently.

Grindavík residents have forced to evacuate their homes following a series of volcanic eruptions. Read more on pages 14-16

Fringe is for the freaks, the weirdos and the outcasts.

Get your freak on at the Reykjavík Fringe Festival on pages 18-19

If you'd asked me a year ago, I wouldn't have known I'd be releasing this album.

Maus frontman Biggi Maus restarts his solo career on page 33

The problem with being a monarchic bootlicker is that while you might make some powerful friends, you also make some salty enemies.

Find out how the author of the Poetic Edda Snorri Sturluson sold out on pages 40-41

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