

The Reykjavík Grapevine



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Volume 21

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Best before September 5

Reykjavík Is No Fucking Fun

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On The Cover

A handful of musicians put Iceland on the map, building up its image as a creative wonderland worth visiting. Then so many people visited that the venues that would incubate the next breakout musician were shuttered in favour of opening more hotels, hostels, guesthouses and Airbnbs. So where is the next big thing meant to get their start? The feature on Pages 14 - 16 asks that very question.

COVER PHOTO:
Joana Fontinha

Editorial Too Little, Too Late

WORDS Catharine Fulton
Editor in Chief

Few things rankle me more than public officials endlessly talking around an issue rather than taking concerted steps to address it before said issue morphs into a problem and, eventually, a full blown crisis.

Protecting culture in Reykjavík has been a perennial issue for roughly 12 years now, ever since it first became apparent to residents of the city centre that local amenities, independent shops, beloved public squares and small music venues were suddenly vanishing one by one, to be replaced by more and more hotels and puffin shops.

It's hard, more than a decade later, to distinguish the puffin shops and hotels from anything else in downtown Reykjavík. Then again, there are significantly fewer residents of 101 to keep vigil and raise a fuss over the decimation of the cultural scene in our beloved neighbourhood – the average Icelander was long ago priced out of the city.

The loss of cultural hubs, like the small bars and clubs where emergent musicians could take their first steps out onto a public stage, has accelerated from the slow death of NASA a decade ago, to the loss of almost everything else in short succession. It feels like, after the public furor over NASA's demise went ignored people saw little point in continuing to fight.

But now Reykjavík is losing another venue that has long platformed up and coming musicians. Those who are active in the local music scene see that this is a major blow. Those in the position to lobby the government to act and to take real steps to protect culture say things like "We don't want to end up with a downtown that is nothing but hotels."

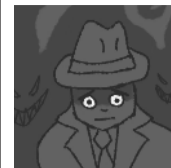
But we're already there. Where once there were independent shops, pop-up happenings, live music and LIFE there is now a soulless expanse of hotels, guesthouses, overpriced restaurants and little else.

The people calling the shots were wildly successful in marketing Reykjavík as a lively and vibrant city, but they forgot along the way to safeguard that vibrancy.

Reykjavík is no fun and I'm not banking on anyone in a position of power to put cultural preservation ahead of unfettered growth in the tourism industry anytime soon.

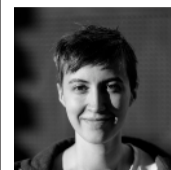
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Contributors



CHARLIE WINTERS

Ever since escaping his enclosure in the U.K., Charlie has been on the loose in Reykjavík. Idea spouter, drag queen, comedian, retail worker, English teacher and short story writer, he is single handedly ruining the job market. In his free time he skitters along the fine line between delusion and fantasy through tabletop roleplaying games.



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.



IRYNA ZUBENKO

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



JOANA FONTINHA

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



JOHN ROGERS

John is a long-time Grapeviner with a particular focus on art, gaming, culture, and travelling to Iceland's far corners to poke around and see what's there. He also podcasts, photographs, makes art, and does a bunch of other stuff, which is perhaps indicative of a low attention spa



REX BECKETT

Rex 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.



SHRUTHI BASAPPA

Shruthi traded the warmth of Indian summers for Arctic winds of Iceland. She's a food enthusiast masquerading as an architect at Sei Studio and loves obsessive attention to detail. When not leading our Best of Reykjavík food panel, Shruthi can be found trying to become a Michelin restaurant inspector.

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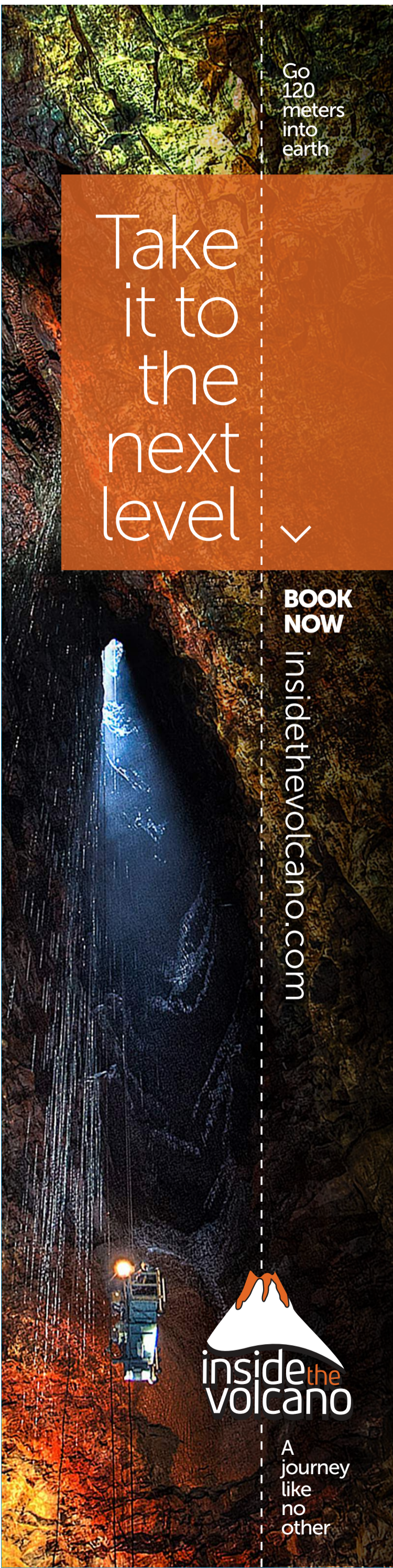


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What The News!?

It's Not Getting Hot In Here

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

WORDS The Reykjavik Grapevine
IMAGE Art Bicknick

FEELING COLD

One third of the population of Iceland was without hot water August 19 to 21 to allow for major work to be done on the so-called "southern line" of the system. The outage affected hot water supply to Hafnarfjörður, Garðabær, Kópavogur, Breiðholt, Norðlingaholt and Álftanes.

Sólrún Kristjánsdóttir, CEO of the utility company Veitur, explains the necessity of increasing water transport capacity. "We're serving a growing community with more users on the system. We need to increase capacity not only for current residents but also to ensure quality of life for future generations. That's why we're doubling the southern line, and this shutdown marks the beginning of that project."

This maintenance affects an unprecedented number of people. "I believe this is the largest area we've ever had to shut down, impacting about 120,000 people," Sólrún notes.

While the powers that be were satisfactory in their outreach to inform people about the upcoming outage, the conversation on social media was tinged with frustration as people struggled to pinpoint when, exactly, the hot water supply would return. Luckily, the pool in Reykjanesbær kindly invited the unbathed masses of Reykjavik to shower and swim for free during the shut down.

GETTING WARMER

Seismic activity around the Sundhnúkar Crater Row has continued in recent weeks, with the Icelandic Meteorological Office reporting that it is now similar to what was being measured in the days leading up to the last eruption in the region, which began on May 29. Meanwhile, model calculations indicate that the volume of magma under Svartsengi is now estimated to be greater than it was before the last eruption.

It's about time we got another eruption. Things have been too dull lately. Plus, that orange glow will really brighten up these darker nights.

SPENDING LESS

The grocery store Prís opened on August 17 in Kópavogur, with the store's CEO promising lower prices than competitors across all product categories. To offer lower prices, Prís operates exclusively with self-checkout. The store is also selling some products at a loss to ensure the lowest prices.

According to ASÍ's first price survey of over 200 products, Prís is consistently cheaper than Bónus and Krónan, often by five to ten percent.

Cheaper groceries are a welcome arrival to the country, seeing as the Central Bank is hell bent on keeping interest rates high even as households accumulate a worrying amount of debt.

A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson announced earlier in August that new regulations are being finalised to require public toilets to be labelled according to the facilities they provide, rather than the gender they serve. The regulation mandates that gender-neutral toilets must be provided wherever separate women's and men's toilets are available. The move was celebrated by Trans Iceland. ■



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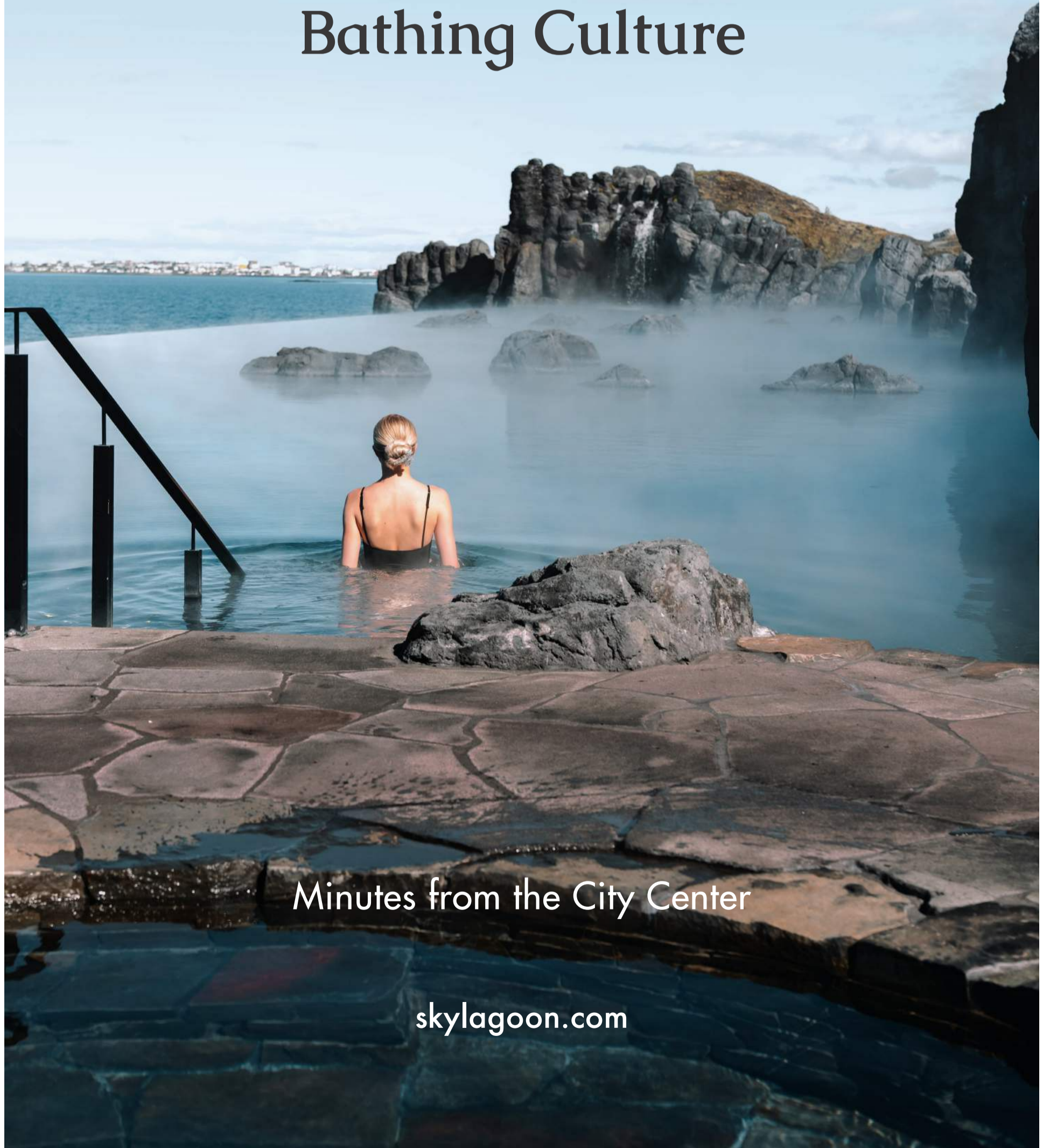
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Word On The Street

The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year!

The Grapevine gauges kids' excitement to go back to school

WORDS Reykjavik Kids
IMAGES Joana Fontinha

It's the day that parents across the country have been waiting for since elementary schools adjourned for the summer back in late May – the kids are finally going back to school! But how do the kids feel about it? We crashed their first day to find out.

EMILIE
Starting Grade 7

On a scale of one to 10, I'm a 10. It's fun to go to school, I think everything is fun about going to school. My favourite subject is art.



SÓLEY, ESJA & HARRIET
Starting Grade 6

E: We're finally in sixth grade!
H: I'm excited and not excited. I'm excited to see everybody.
E: I'm excited to start sixth grade because now I feel like I'm actually one of the bigger kids. But also, I kinda don't want school to start.
H: I'm not excited about náttúrufræði (natural sciences).
S: I'm excited to meet the new teacher, but I'm not excited about math.
E: Math was so hard in fifth grade and I know it's gonna get harder in sixth grade, so I'm not excited for it.



ARROW, RÓSKA, APRIL & FREYJA
Starting Grade 9

All: Friends! (when asked what they're most excited about this school year)
F: It's a good time to meet with them, because otherwise there's so much else to do. But when it's specifically school time, it's nice to have time with your friends.
A: It's a good vibe.
R: And also the fun teachers.
F: I'm also excited for some of the classes, because we do baking and embroidery.
R: I'm not excited about having to go to philosophy.
A: Yeah, and stressing about assignments – and going back to philosophy again because I heard it's just the same thing over and over again.
F: I'm just excited for everything!
A: (in a joking, cartoonish voice) You just gotta have a positive mindset for life! I love school! ■



Word Of The Issue

A Travelling Tune

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

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGE Art Bicnick

thing) "eigum við að fara í ferð?" to invite them on a trip with you. Lag, meanwhile, translates to "song". So ferðalag literally translates to "trip song".

Summer is coming to an end, and while many Icelanders high-tailed it for warmer climes during the high season in July, the best time to get out of dodge is actually the autumn and winter when those nasty storms really start rolling in and your body can't stand to be out in the bone-chilling wind one more moment.

I don't know where I'm going with this one, but there's something about ferðalag that evokes hitting the road or exploring a new place with that special song in your heart that is cued up only when you're in full vacation mode. I wonder what song is in the heads and hearts of visitors to Reykjavik when they walk around town in their hiking boots and parkas in August.

That's the time to take a ferðalag – a journey, a trip, a voyage. But, being an Icelandic word, ferðalag is cuter than the sum of its parts.

Is the evocation of nostalgic soundtrack to travel by the intention behind the word ferðalag? Probably not. But will this random story help you remember the word the next time you're stuck trying to describe your travel plans in Icelandic? I hope so.

Ferð translates to "trip", so you could ask your friend, lover or brand new acquaintance (if that's your

I could really use a ferðalag right about now. ■



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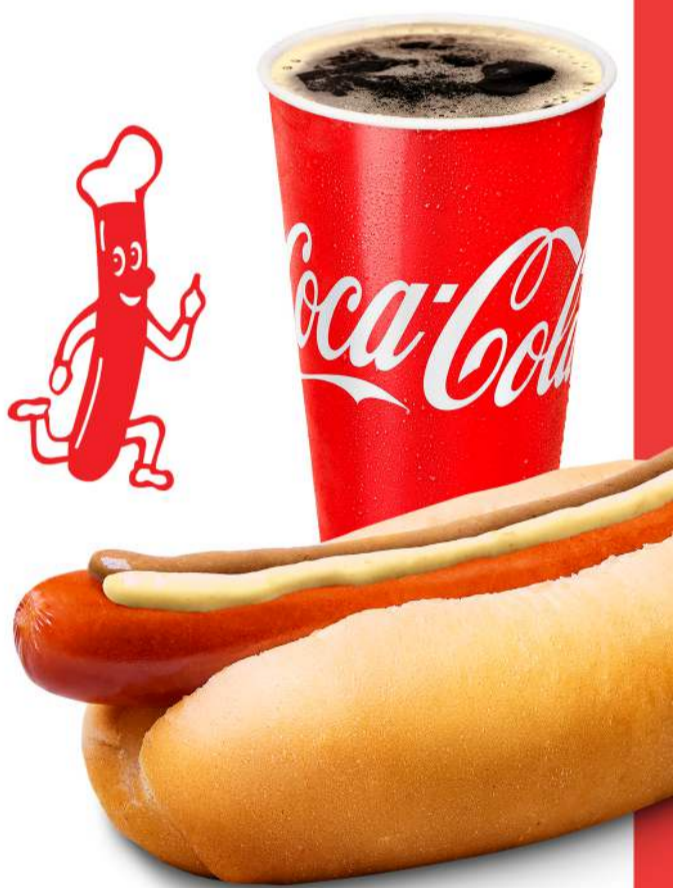
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Do Shit

Go Get Yours – Housing Benefits Edition

An Útlendingur's ongoing guide to getting shit done

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGE Adobe Stock

We immigrants get a bad rap sometimes. Despite the fact that moving to another country, learning a new language, integrating into a new culture, and basically starting life from scratch far from the place you were born is a hell of a lot of work – signalling not only personal strength and bravery, but also a strong work ethic (navigating bureaucracy is no walk in the park) – there are people out there just waiting to catch us cheating, leeching or taking advantage of our adopted home to fit their (usually racist) narrative.

Some of these people salivating for an anti-immigrant gotcha moment are even elected officials – I know, shocking.

Independence Party MP Dilljá Mist Einarsdóttir saw her gotcha get got at Alþingi this month when she made a request for data on the benefits being paid out to foreign nationals living in Iceland. It surely broke poor Dilljá's heart to learn that the average Icelandic national takes significantly more from the system by way of housing benefits, child benefits, unemployment benefits and other payments from various

social services than the average immigrant. Wait... so us Útlendingurs are just going to work (at jobs we are largely overqualified for, according to some other recently released data) and paying taxes so that a bunch of Icelandic welfare queens can sit at home eating Dominos and listening to Útvarp Saga? Gasp.

No, no, no, we won't judge Íslendingar for benefitting from a system that is there to provide social support. But, we sure are going to tell you about some of the benefits potentially available to you and point you in the direction of applying for them. If you're living and working in Iceland, you are paying into the social welfare system. As I'm sure Dilljá Mist agrees, immigrants have just as much right to claim benefits as someone born and raised here.

Let's get the party started with housing benefits because (all together now) the rent is too damn high. We'll cover child benefits and unemployment in the next two issues, so keep your eyes peeled.

Housing benefits are legislated under the Housing Benefit Act, No. 75/2016, to give a bit of relief to the housing costs of renters.

There are a few conditions a tenant must meet to be eligible for benefits: they must be a resident of the property they're renting; they must have a rental agreement valid for at least three months; they must be at least 18 years old and authorise the Housing and Construction Authority (HMS) to process their information; and their rental unit must include at least one bedroom, kitchen facilities, a private toilet and a bathroom.

To apply, pop over to hms.is, toggle to English if you so desire, and find "Housing Benefits" under the

"Loans and benefits" menu. This is where you can also calculate how much sweet rent relief you may be eligible for. Following the breadcrumbs toward applying online, you'll be prompted to log in with your handy dandy rafræn skilríki to continue the process. Once logged in, you have the option of toggling between Icelandic, English, Polish and Spanish. HMS, you spoil us!

From there, you'll fill out your application. That'll involve reading and signing off on a bunch of legal disclaimers and filling in the "fasteignanúmer" (property number) of the place you're renting, and then filling out details about yourself, your household members and your household income, and submitting a copy of your lease.

ABOUT THAT LANDLORD OF YOURS

Is your landlord being a dick about you applying for housing benefits? That likely means they've been pulling a fast one on the tax office. But don't let their lack of scruples get in the way of you getting what's yours. Apply for benefits anyways. Your landlord having to pay taxes on their rental income is a them problem.

The Rent Act, No. 36/1994, states that rental agreements are to be made in writing. As the tenant, you need a signed and valid lease to register your legal domicile and apply for benefits, so be sure to push for a written lease right off the bat and register it with HMS. If your landlord won't provide you a written lease – again, that's a massive red flag – you still have rights. But you don't have the right to housing benefits.

So get that lease and get that money, friend. ■

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On The Fringes

Fight Like A Knight

Exploring Historical European Martial Arts in Reykjavík

WORDS Catherine Magnúsdóttir
IMAGE Steinar Smári Hrólfsson

About three times a week, the clang of heavy blades fills the halls of Laugardalsvöllur as the local knights of Reykjavík, also known as HEMA club members, don their fencing gear and train to fight with longswords, rapiers, sabres and more. Readers rejoice, for I have once more delved into the fanciful field of fascination to find the fiercest forms of fun for your free time! This time I have spoken to Rúnar Páll Benediktsson, the head coach of the Reykjavík HEMA club.

“HEMA is the study and practice of swords, sword fighting and a lot of historically adjacent sports,” Rúnar explains. “There are specific time periods, styles and ideas but the range is anything from around the 1300s up to military sabres from the 1900s or even early Olympic sabre stuff. We mostly focus on fifteenth century long-swords.”

The structure is fairly simple: one of the old fencing masters and his writing is selected, such as Johannes Liechtenauer of 14th century German fencing fame. Going off the translated manuscripts, the old training techniques can be read, interpreted and practised. They are often added to, re-interpreted and critiqued by other masters and authors over the centuries, such as Joachim Meyer and Peter von

Danzig. As a result, HEMA today has multiple variations of common sources. Thankfully the training gear has also been updated over time for added comfort and protection.

As for an actual training session, there is a direct line from theory to practical application.

“Danzig breaks fencing down into 12 grounding principles and I often decide which principle we focus on for a practice session,” Rúnar says. “I explain it, we run through it, we can do a lot of theory crafting or just drill it out and see how it looks. Then I like to step it up to heavy drilling, testing the technique with a bit more resistance and pressure testing it by sparring in full gear.”

In terms of the appeal of the sport, Rúnar’s initial answer is quite simple: “It’s fucking swords, man.” But upon further elaboration, we end up

discussing the multi-faceted allure of HEMA.

“It is more than playing with swords, of course. We are creating a martial art, we are creating a sport here in Iceland,” Rúnar explains. “There is so much content, there is so much stuff to explore. I have never found myself in a sport until I really discovered HEMA because it has something that tickles everything. It’s got nerd stuff (swords), but it’s also an intense workout, while having a lot of thinking involved. There’s a lot of reading involved, and so many ways to find your own expression.”

The club as it stands today came together in 2019, initially bouncing around locations until eventually finding itself in the fencing centre in Laugardalsvöllur, and growing ever since. As Rúnar tells me, “Our official main weapons are longsword and rapier but I have also started training

up a coach in sabre and another in Italian fencing with her main focus on sidesword. We dabble in basically everything HEMA has to offer.”

The HEMA scene itself is also rather widespread with large events and tournaments all over the world, from Finland and Slovakia to Canada and China. The Icelandic HEMA scene provides a small but heartfelt contribution to the playing field – and it’s expanding every year, with one offshoot already taking root in Akureyri.

“We’ve really enjoyed how far we’ve come as a club and we continue to grow to this day,” Rúnar says. “We have a whole bunch of events here and there, we’ve started a kids programme, we even started hosting our own annual tournaments. I also want to do workshop events in the future – anything to let this little club grow.” ■



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Side Hustle

Brynhildur's Blend: Physics And Oenology

A research engineer's wine waitressing side gig

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

Research engineer Brynhildur Þorbjarnardóttir enjoys the best of two worlds – a stable corporate job and a fun side hustle that allows her to fulfil personal interests. Fridays can get busy when Brynhildur heads from Controlant straight to Vínstúkan, but she wouldn't change a thing.

love with the vibe and just learning about wines in general. Then I was offered a job at Controlant. I started that job after I had begun working at Vínstúkan, but it just never felt right to give up that aspect of my life – to be able to goof off and serve people wine on the weekends, even though I work all week. It's kind of like I get paid for my hobby and I'm very lucky that my hobby pays. But also, since I am trying to save for an apartment, it's definitely not a bad thing.

LONG DAYS, LATE NIGHTS

I try to work two weekends a month, either Friday, Friday and Saturday, or just Saturday. I'm careful not to work too many days a month in both jobs to avoid burning myself out in either one.

On Fridays, I try my best to have a really good breakfast. I have my getting ready routine down to around 20 minutes, which includes taking a shower and doing my makeup. Living close to Vínstúkan is very convenient. The people that work with me there are very considerate. If something happens at my office job, for example, if I need to go to a meeting or finish a report, I can always call Vínstúkan and explain. My colleagues understand that my main focus is my main job.

Physics and wine are very different fields, but both of them are science. The biggest similarity between the two jobs is the constant need to communicate with people. It helps me with my presentations and my confidence at Controlant. I goof off a little bit more at Vínstúkan, but how I tackle meetings where I have to present something is very similar to how I tackle presenting a bottle of wine. I know that I know a lot about what I'm presenting, but I'm always ready for input if somebody thinks I'm wrong or something. Physically, the jobs are completely different – I'm on my feet all day at Vínstúkan, while at Controlant I sit at a desk.

My least favourite aspect of this side gig is that it sometimes drags out a little bit late. During the week, I wake up between 7:00-8:00 and on Fridays, I work at Controlant until around 16:00, and then I get to Vínstúkan from around 17:00, and I work until it closes around 2:00. Those are pretty long days.

THE 150.000 ISK MYSTERY

There's a word "sjomli" in Icelandic, which is a slang for "gamli," meaning an old man. We have these types of customers every weekend. It's basically the finance bro or the older banker who comes in after

having dinner at Sumac or some other fancy restaurant, just wanting a really nice glass of wine. They always come up to the bar and say, "I want the Burgundy Pinot Noir." But we don't serve Burgundy Pinot Noirs by the glass, because they have to be very good for us to buy them, and consequently, they're expensive. Burgundy is a very expensive region.

One of my most memorable moments was when we got a box of wine from one of our producers in Italy, and the label was not on. There were three or four different wines that we thought it might be, but we had no idea which one it was. One Saturday, during a quiet midday when nobody was in Vínstúkan, I was just goofing around. I took one of the sharpies you can write on glass with and wrote "Mystery bottle, 150.000 ISK" on the unlabelled bottle that was probably worth a tenth of that price.

One night, a quarter before closing, there was a table of sjomlar – those older gentlemen always in their suits. I told them I had this wonderful bottle, especially for them. I had no idea what was in it, and they would probably not like it, but I knew they'd be intrigued. I almost sold them a bottle for 150.000 ISK but one of them said, "No, let's just go to Apéro

and get a bottle of Pinot Noir." We still have that mystery bottle on our shelf. No one has bought it, and we still have no idea what it is.

STUDYING, SIPPING AND SERVING

I've been studying oenology and wines for a while now. Last year, Vínstúkan paid for me to attend a small four-day course for level two qualification in wines taught at the WSET School in London. The plan is to do level three as well because then you can call yourself a sommelier, but it's a little bit harder and fail rates are higher, so I want to be 100% ready. I do a lot of reading and try to gather information on my own.

Also, I recently started a small wine company with my friend Heiðrún, who works at Hressó. We offer wine tastings as a service, where we'll come to our clients and host a tasting for them. We just launched last week and have already done one tasting, which is a great start. We visited a law firm and held a small tasting for them – it was a lot of fun. We're trying to get this ball rolling on the side – it's my third job! ■

Check out @Vínvisar on Instagram to book a wine tasting with Brynhildur and Heiðrún.

Brynhildur Þorbjarnardóttir, 26, a research engineer

My main job is as a research engineer for Controlant, a tech company that supplies the farmer supply chain with temperature and location loggers. For my side gig, I work as a wine waitress at Vínstúkan Tíu Sopar.

This is definitely not about money. I started working at Vínstúkan when I was finishing my studies at the University of Iceland. I completely fell in

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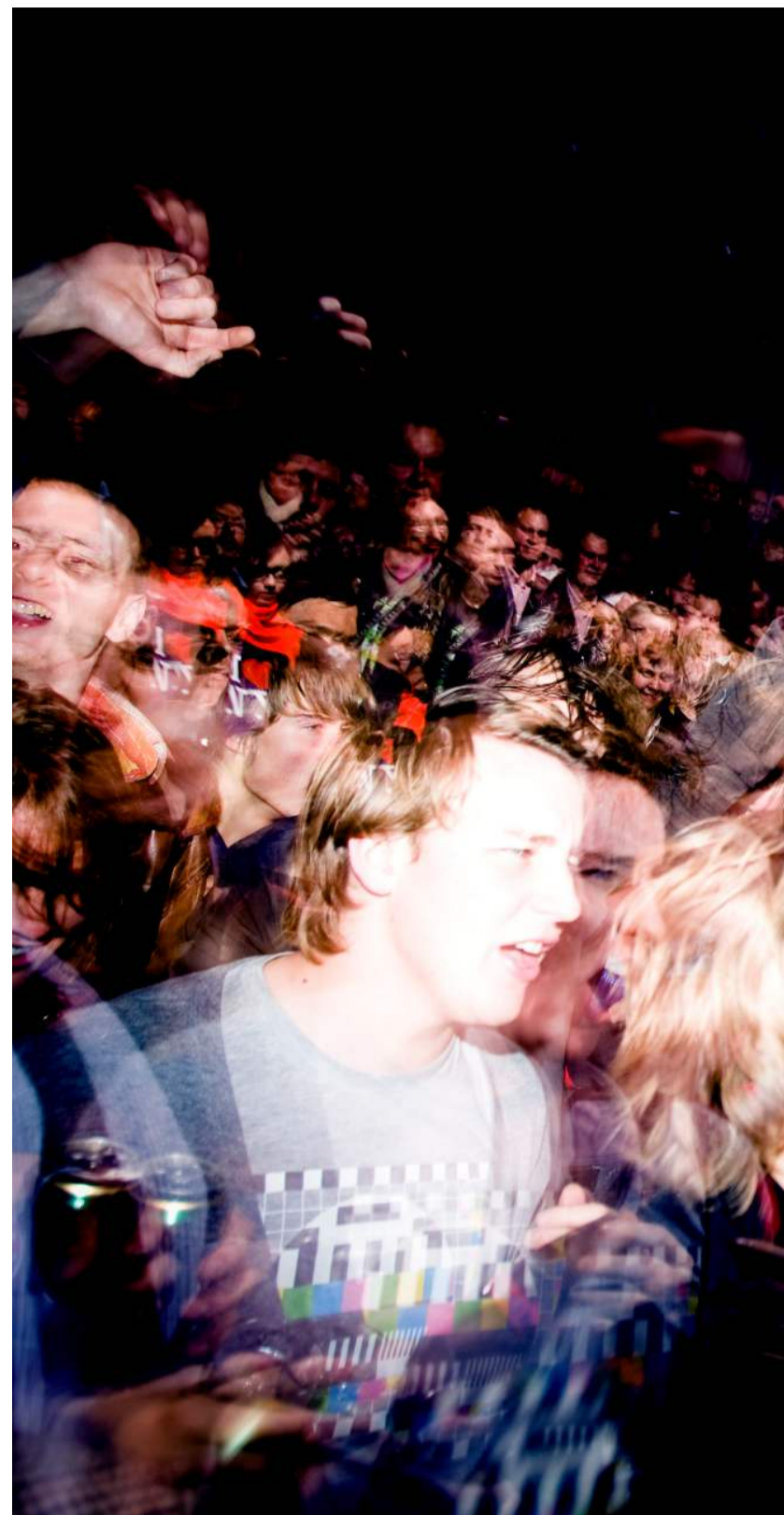
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Feature

A Scene Under Siege

The neverending loss of Reykjavík's live venues

WORDS Elías Þórsson
IMAGES Joana Fontinha
& The Reykjavik
Grapevine Archives

A debate has long been raging in Reykjavík about the diminishing number of small and medium sized concert venues. With rising real estate prices and a booming tourism industry hungry for space, it is becoming harder to maintain the city's vibrant music scene. It's not a new phenomenon, per se. Lamenting the loss of beloved venues is a cyclical pastime of music lovers in Reykjavík. The latest victim in this reincarnation of the onslaught against live music is the popular venue KEX.

"Just yesterday (August 14), we were hosting a concert here at Prikíð with a young and upcoming Icelandic band. Great atmosphere, amazing party and a perfect band for us. Then at little before midnight the police came knocking. We have a permit to 01:00, but they had received a noise complaint from the tourists staying in the Center Hotel luxury apartments next door. We are in the part of Reykjavík where there is music and partying, which creates the magic of Reykjavík."

After interrupting a concert at a bar that has been operating at the same location since the 1950s to check its permits, the police left and the music was allowed to continue. But that is not the case everywhere in the downtown core. In the past 20 years, the city has lost many of its small and medium sized concert venues, with the tourism-driven gentrification of the past 10 years being a major factor in driving up rents and turning spaces that previously catered to local culture into hotels, souvenir shops and other enterprises that service the tourism industry.

"I'm becoming radicalised, you can quote me on that! I'm not opposed to tourists, but the tourists who come here and think about Reykjavík as some amusement park or

a zoo deserve no warm welcome." says Geoff. "The real estate prices have become so ridiculously high that everything is being turned into spaces for those types of tourists, and what happens then is that places like us get noise complaints, because the tourists who chose to stay on Laugavegur can't go to sleep."

As with other cities around the world, hotels and tourists want to stay downtown – in the middle of life, restaurants and culture. But increasingly places like Prikíð are getting mired in an argument with an industry that sells comfort and quiet to foreign visitors staying in what has historically been the centre of Reykjavík's notoriously raucous nightlife. The situation is not helped by the city's rigid permitting regulations, which make it all but impossible to operate late night bars and clubs outside of the city's central 101 postcode.

GOODBYE KEX

The latest victim of the tourism gold rush is KEX Hostel on Skúlagata. For years, it has been a mainstay for up and coming artists and those who play more non-mainstream kinds of music. On September 1, KEX will be no more and the packed concert programme, which often featured two concerts a week, will end. The stages and the soundsystem will

make way for beds, bathrooms and whatever else the average tourist needs.

The reason for this is simple: management's Excel sheet shows hotel rooms create more profit than music.

"It's been going really well and we've always had good attendance at our gigs, but the owners decided they could make more money from turning the space into hotel rooms," says KEX's outgoing event organiser Ólafur Halldór Ólafsson (Óli Dóri). "I think it is incredibly important for

Over the past two decades, he has witnessed the changes to the city's concert scene firsthand.

"When I started out, there were way more venues. For instance, during the early years of Iceland Airwaves there were a lot of great places for concerts, which are now gone. NASA, Faktóri, Húrta, the list is long," he says. "This development is very short sighted, I don't think people realise how important the music scene is for us. Tourists go to the countryside for nature, but they come to Reykjavík for the culture and the music."

The tourists who come here and think about Reykjavík as some amusement park or a zoo deserve no warm welcome.

bands that we have these small and medium size venues, this is where they get noticed and where they learn how to perform."

For the past four years, Óli Dóri has been managing live music and events at KEX, but he has been booking artists for various bars and clubs in Reykjavík since 2004.

According to Óli Dóri, the disappearance of the smaller venues that provide a stage for emergent artists could stifle the growth of young bands, having a devastating impact on the future of Icelandic music.

"The tourism industry is muscling these places out of the market and



I think authorities need to do more, because these venues are a vital part of Iceland's very vibrant music scene," he says. "But I want to be positive, I want to believe that the authorities realise how important this issue is."

nature lover – they came here for the bands, not the Blue Lagoon. The worry now is that if up and coming bands lose the opportunity to take these necessary early steps, the talent pipeline could dry up.

The tourism industry is muscling these places out of the market and I think authorities need to do more, because these venues are a vital part of Iceland's very vibrant music scene.

THE GOVERNMENT STEPS IN

Icelanders have always prided themselves on punching above their weight when it comes to producing internationally renowned bands. It is hard to adequately underscore just how important artists such as Björk and Sigur rós have been for putting Iceland on the map internationally.

Before the post-financial crash tourism boom, the typical tourist was more Pitchfork reader than

"I can't overstate how important these smaller venues are for the music scene," says María Rut Reynisdóttir, the director of Icelandic Music. "This is where the grassroots lives, where bands take their first steps. If we don't have that part of the scene, then we won't have the bigger, more established part of it."

Iceland Music is a public organisation, which was founded last year with the mandate of serving Icelandic music and artists "locally and internationally." Part of that work is a new ISK 216 million fund that, among

other things, will support music venues financially.

"I've been arguing for the importance of supporting smaller venues for years," María Rut says. "We need a place for the entire spectrum of music and that includes everything from small joints to Harpa. The government has now created a policy when it comes to this issue, which is great, because we need a clear vision on how to tackle the issue. But it is very sad that a prolific place like KEX is closing down."

María Rut claims that initiatives like Iceland Music are positive steps towards safeguarding the local music scene and their approach is constantly evolving. They have researched what other Nordic countries are doing and she claims that her organisation is always looking into ways to help safeguard the vibrancy of the Icelandic music scene.

"There is a lot of value in Icelandic music," she says. "Culture is what creates a city and our music scene receives a lot of attention abroad. We don't want to end up with a downtown that is nothing but hotels."

During COVID, the Reykjavík municipality put together a fund that helped concert venues operate and invest in things such as sound sys-

tems and stages, which was of great benefit to places like KEX. However, as it is with all government intervention into markets, it remains a tricky subject, as the places in question are privately owned, despite serving an obvious cultural good.

UNCOOL COUNTRY

For both Geoff and Óli Dóri, there is one big question that needs to be answered to guide policy: what kind of city do we want to live in?

rent in Reykjavík rose by 13% according to figures from the Icelandic Housing and Construction Authority.

"I'm in my 30s and I come from a time that doesn't exist anymore, but I remember being in my 20s when it was possible for young people to live downtown," says Geoff. "Today I have these prejudices against young people who can afford to own an apartment downtown. There is no way these kids didn't get help from their parents. These things are all

The people who are making money hand over foot on the downtown real estate market and the tourism industry need to start pondering what it is that makes this city great.

It used to be that Reykjavík was considered a pretty cool city that had a lot more to offer than its size suggested, but that status was built on a vibrant and appealing culture that needs space to thrive. Much of downtown is unrecognisable from 20 years ago as developers rush to profit from an out of control housing market. Just in the last 12 months,

related."

Business owners have not been immune to the astronomical increase in property prizes. According to figures from the Icelandic Central Bank, from 2021 to January 2024, the prices for commercial properties rose 26%. Running a small concert venue is usually not a big money maker and for businesses that often



exist on a month-to-month basis, a quarter increase on rent can make it untenable – or impossible – to keep the doors open.

“The people who are making money hand over foot on the downtown real estate market and the tourism industry need to start pondering what it is that makes this city great. To think about the times when they had a great night out in Reykjavik,” says Geoff.

According to Óli Dóri, it is vital to make investors, who have been making bank off the housing boom that is not showing signs of slowing down, understand that a city is built out of more than profits and concrete.

“It is always getting more and more expensive to rent a space to do anything in Reykjavik and I think we need to get real estate owners onboard, to make them understand the value of culture. To make them understand how shortsighted this development is.”

THE DOWNING OF NASA

One of the earliest and most high profile victims of the Reykjavik tourism boom was the concert venue NASA on Austurvöllur. It can be argued that the popular venue was the canary in the coalmine – in many ways, it is possible to draw a direct timeline from the closing of NASA in

dóttir, better known as Inga á NASA, who ran the beloved venue for years. “It’s a very sad development and I think it is inevitable that it will have a negative impact on the music industry and the future for Icelandic bands.”

The venue was torn down and despite promises from the owner

a million ISK – far beyond what a local musician can even dream of affording.

“Today, NASA is a beautiful wedding and conference hall, but it is not a nice concert venue,” she says. “I think what has happened to the small and medium sized venues in Reykjavik since then is incredibly sad. I guess all the hotels are full, but is that all there is? All musicians have to start somewhere, nobody starts out by performing in Harpa.”

five more times since. It was also just amazing for us to perform with a proper sound system and an audio engineer. What will inevitably happen is that the artists currently playing in Harpa will die out and there won’t be anyone to replace them.”

Björgúlfur says that the value of smaller venues for bands starting out isn’t just the ability to reach an audience, it is also a learning experience and a possibility to test out songs. To find out what works and what doesn’t. Their 7th concert at KEX will be on the closing day on August 31, where Spacestation will perform alongside Hasar and DJ Óli Dóri.

“We’ll be the final act at KEX’s final night,” Björgúlfur concludes. “I’m going to use the occasion to chant something against tourism in Reykjavik.” ■

I guess all the hotels are full, but is that all there is?

2012 to the situation Reykjavik finds itself in today. For years, the venue had been a mainstay for the local music scene, operating as the stepstone for bands moving from the smaller venues onto the big stage.

“A lot of musicians and others came out to protest the closure of NASA, but the owner of the building decides what happens and I believe he felt there was more money to be made in the tourism industry – money talks,” explains Ingibjörg Örylgs-

that it would reopen with a similar mandate and continue to cater to live music this has been far from the truth. The old, loud and rocking club that used to be a key component of festivals such as Iceland Airwaves and Innipúkinn and where artists such as Trabant, GusGus, Páll Óskar and more played weekly is now the rather garishly named Independence Hall, located so conveniently in the Iceland Parliament Hotel. Reportedly, booking a Friday night event there will set you back at least

THE LAST HURRAH

One of the more notable bands, who took their first steps onto the scene at KEX is the rock band Spacestation. The band started performing live last year and has been a frequent fixture at KEX ever since.

“We would never have made it to the surface without getting the chance to play these small venues,” says frontman Björgúlfur Jes Einarsson. “We had our first gig at KEX in April of that year and we’ve played there

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Culture Night Crazy-ness!

How we'll be celebrating Reykjavík's big day

WORDS Rex Beckett
IMAGE Art Bicnick

MENNINGARNÓTT
Saturday August 24, all day
All over Reykjavík

Have you been yearning for a day of free waffles, street parties, mylar balloons, candy floss and frightened dogs in crowds all over town? You're in luck pal, because it's once again time for Menningarnótt ("Culture Night"), Reykjavík's de facto birthday party and city-wide fun times explosion!

Officially founded on August 18, 1786, the city is now a sprightly 238 years of age, and each Saturday on or around that date is when the celebrations take place. The downtown core erupts with live music, dance parties, outdoor flea markets and so much more, ending with a fireworks display that marks the return of dark nights.

While there are far too many events to mention here — check CultureNight.is for the exhaustive programme — here are a few happenings that have really piqued our interest.

R6013 BLOCK PARTY

Even before it became the underground scene's favourite DIY basement venue, R6013 had been host-

ing Culture Night block parties for years. This year will feature bands I Adapt, Kælan Mikla, Deathmetal Supersquad, Sigrún and more. Plus there will be a street market and tasty vegan food! The place to be for true punks and their families.

KEXCULTURENIGHT

If you've just finished reading our cover feature, you are most likely as gutted as we are that Kex Hostel will no longer be a live venue. Since this may be their final Culture Night shindig, a stop by here would be in proper order. Bands on the lineup include BSÍ, Celebs, KUSK + Óviti, Kvíkindi and more.

VITAFEST

We have a new one on the Culture Night calendar in VITAFEST, thrown by Tungan elder statesman Vitabar! For their maiden festival, bands Supersport!, Ex-Girls, Spacestation and Geisha Cartel will rock the street while the corner bar serves up its iconic burgers and raffles off some sweet prizes.

WAFFLE & COFFEE WALK

Of course we would be remiss to ignore the most classic of all Culture Night standards: the waffle and kaffi crawl! Back after a long break due to that virus that swept the world, homes throughout Pingholtin will sling free treats between 14:00 and 16:00. Fill up on waffles while you party your way through the city! ■



Jazzy Stuff

Get All Up In This Jazz

The Reykjavík Jazz Festival is be-bopping and scatting all over the place

WORDS Rex Beckett
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

What's the difference between a pizza and a jazz musician? The musician can't feed their family. Ba-dum-tss!

If you didn't know that onomatopoeia is called a rimshot, you need to be getting your ass over to this year's Reykjavík Jazz Festival (August 27-31), the annual gathering of all the finest grooves and sweet licks this country has to offer.

Taking place since 1990, the festival features diverse programming of the ubiquitous and deeply influential music, which Iceland has long embraced.

"I think the quality level is really high here," says Pétur Oddbergur Heimisson, general manager of the Reykjavík Jazz Festival. "You see it for example in bands like ADHD and Mezzoforte, but you can find jazz nights almost every night of the week. It shows how people are eager to play and just making their own opportunities."

Meeting in an appropriately retro lounge with proper cool-cat Nordic style — a room one could have imagined Miles Davis and John Coltrane hanging backstage in 1960s Sweden — Pétur has been the general manager of the festival since January and it's his first foray behind the scenes of the jazz world.

"I come from a classical music background and with a lot of knowledge in festival organising," he says. "I've worked for different festivals like Dark Music Days, Nordic Music Days, and Opera Days, so I had the festival experience, but my background is not in jazz. I just love jazz because it has connections to so many different genres and different music styles. And people in jazz are cool and nice."

Those cool and nice vibes are just what the festival programme bring, with a wide-ranging roster of artists including Hist og, ES Sextett & Marína Ósk, Hróðmar Sigurðsson & Ingibjörg Turchi, the Rebekka Blöndal Quartet, Silva & Steini, and the Reykjavík Big Band.

And that's just warming up the local fingies. There's also a tight but snappy selection of international guests bringing over their melodious tunes. Among them are the young and highly celebrated Shuteen Erdenebaatar Quartet from Germany. Named after their Mongolian-born lead pianist, the rising-star combo won the prestigious Young Munich Jazz Award in 2022. Other notable imports include Jakob Bu-

chanan, Tania Giannouli and a masterclass by American saxophonist Chris Speed.

"We also have international connections with other festivals like Vetarjazz from the Faroe Islands," adds Pétur. "Arnold Ludwig and Gø from the Faroes will be playing, and then Vetarjazz is going to invite at least one or two Icelandic musicians to their Festival in January."

With about 20% international programming, Pétur hints that the festival would love to invite more artists from overseas, which he hopes will be possible over his tenure with the organisation. Hopefully they rake in enough dough to allow that to happen.

This year along with the main showcase events happening in Harpa, there will also be one-off gigs at Frikirkjan, masterclasses at the school MÍT, and nightly jam sessions at BIRD. Overall, it's ramping up to be a super jazzy time around downtown.

"I'm a little bit stressed, but also excited to see how it all works out and to see how many people show up," says Pétur. "Just overall, to see the experience that people will get from the festival. We're working with great sound engineers in great locations and we're well prepared, so I think it's gonna be great." ■

For further information about the programme and tickets to the festival, visit reykjavikjazz.is



So Festive

Welcome To “The Only True City In Iceland”

Hamraborg Festival continues a trajectory of exploring what (and where) an arts festival can be.

WORDS Ish Sveinsson Houle
IMAGES Joana Fontinha

dons the pink, punk Hamraborg Festival scarf and shiny silver sunglasses, while Agnes is in bright, colourful sneakers. “I’m wearing my running shoes all the time now, just getting prepared! They even have grips,” Agnes notes with a laugh. “Yeah, I’m ready.”

Jo, who has been in Iceland since 2018 and part of Hamraborg Festival from the start, is an intermedia artist. Enthralling and playful, their work explores hybrid gendered bodies, internet narratives and radical queer intimacies. Raised in Kópavogur, Agnes is an artist, writer and current student of curation who focuses on non-human life in her art.

ARTISTS WEARING THEIR CURATOR HATS

The two emphasise that their ability to understand both the curator and the artist side of a festival is crucial to the way they work. Agnes even jokes that they “think every artist should be a curator, actually. It’s a radical opinion, maybe!”

She goes on to poetically describe that the curator’s role “is to be the weight and to be the carrier, so that artists can jump as high as they can and do their little twirls and falls and little things.”

The core trio of the festival’s organising team describe their clear

communication and collaboration: “our work dynamic is very intentional, focusing on care,” Jo explains.

CROSS THE STREET AND MEET THE OTHER SIDE

“It’s very interesting to get reacquainted on these terms, to make an arts festival, to see all of the multiple sides of every corner that can be brought out with different pieces, in different contexts,” Agnes shares when asked how it feels to return to Kópavogur’s Kársnes neighbour-

hood in this context.

hood in this context. A big goal of the festival is to interweave these corners of Hamraborg with each other. “It’s so multifaceted, the Hamraborg area,” Agnes explains. “Some people never go across the street from here, you know, or the other way around. So it’s quite interesting and I think that’s also a goal we have in our curatorial practices, to try and invite those groups to exchange also. If you only come here for openings at Gerðarsafn, you all of a sudden

have an invitation to come to Catalina for concerts – and the other way around, as well.” This exciting, wandering purpose permeates their festival programme: events range from paper-making to a fashion show, spanning locations from Y Gallery to Euromarket. “Hamraborg Festival is playful and funky. We are just horsing around, mindfully and intentionally,” Jo declares. Agnes adds to this sentiment, humbly saying “not to say that we’re inventing the wheel, but I think still,

children and teenagers.” Throughout the interview both note a keen interest in social relationships and dynamics, which informs how they think about the festival. As Jo puts it, “what I like about Hamraborg Festival is that it’s a very socially-oriented art festival.” Nonnegotiablely, every event of the festival is free. “I think, if you’re trying to build a community with people coming from different places, with different class structures, it needs to be free. It’s like, those are the terms” Agnes states. “We’re really lucky. We’re in a good collaborative relationship with Kópavogsbær, where we apply every year for this festival and are very generously granted.” This year the team also received grants from Myndlistarsjóður (the Visual Arts Fund) and from Barnamenningarsjóður (the Children’s Arts Fund).

The two note that this is not light work, of course – it’s something the three person team has to focus on year round. “I think we are much more established right now and people do recognize the value of the festival. Every year, more people are showing up to events and workshops and exhibitions,” Jo observes. “I think what we’re so generously allowed to do with hosting this festival again and again, is that you get to dwell and peek beyond the surface,” Agnes adds.

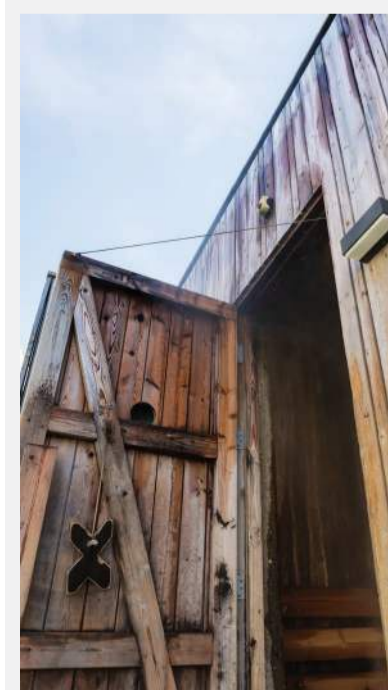
Hamraborg Festival is playful and funky. We are just horsing around, mindfully and intentionally.

A SOCIALLY-ORIENTED ART FESTIVAL

“Being mindful about intergenerational dialogues that very much exist in Hamraborg, we also try to accommodate different needs,” Jo identifies. “Therefore, you also have workshops like interactive performances dedicated to younger folks and

Since its inception in 2021, Hamraborg Festival has been thriving on the fringes. Literally, of course, with its residence in Kópavogur, not Reykjavík. But, also ideologically. This fourth iteration of the festival, spearheaded and curated by Agnes Ársælsdóttir, Jo Pawlowska and Sveinn Snær Kristjánsson, will run from August 29 to September 5.

As they sunbathe on the porch of Bókasafn Kópavogs – “our office,” they joke – Jo and Agnes chitchat about the upcoming festival. Jo



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Jo notes that the first Hamraborg Festival was still “a big risk.” Blossoming from the Midpunkt venue that used to reside in Hamraborg, the artists and co-founders of that space, Ragnheiður Sigurðardóttir Bjarnarson and Snæbjörn Brynjars-son, are praised by Agnes and Jo throughout our interview. The two also mention the book *Með Hamraborgir á Heilanum* (“With Hamraborg on the Brain”), which debuted during the 2022 festival. A collection of writings about the area by nine different authors, and edited by Snæbjörn and designed by Sveinn, the book is “dedicated to the only true city in Iceland: Hamraborg.”

A CELEBRATION OF ODDITY

Kamil Wesołowski, self-described “artist, fashion designer, performer, a dudette,” is travelling from Poland for this year’s Hamraborg Festival, specifically to put on a much anticipated fashion show. When I ask Kamil for themes present in his work that echo themes found in the festival, she presents a beautiful list: “Diversity for sure! Being vulnerable. Queerness. Being yourself. Celebration of oddity.”

Icelandic-based artist Deepa R. Iyengar echoes this sentiment, sharing that she sees “such life and joy and inclusiveness in the festival. Inclusiveness not only of many types

of people, but also many types and forms of art.”

Jo also underscores the importance of inclusivity – specifically the purposeful inclusion of many queer

in this hub, it is striking how much respect everyone has for Hamraborg. Summarising this mystic charm that keeps getting alluded to, Kópavogur-native Agnes puts it perfectly: “I think these types of

I think these types of phenomena can only live in Hamraborg, like they can only exist in Hamraborg.

artists in the festival – explaining that “this is something we were very intentional about this year, to not only invite artists working with different art mediums and different art practices, but also to invite different audiences and go beyond these binaries as well. I think Hamraborg is a super queer and non-binary space, in that sense.”

Sveinn echoes Jo in his characterization of Hamraborg. “It still seems amazing to me how much character the place has,” he tells me. “It’s so defined in such a unique way, from the super weird architecture to the vastly different people that hang around there. The place seemed queer in a way.”

Whether celebrating the one-of-a-kind area, or how artists and appreciators can find their home

phenomena can only live in Hamraborg, like they can only exist in Hamraborg.”

“Now it’s going to be the fourth time for the festival here in Hamraborg – a space to dream and bring people together,” Jo says with excited gumption as we reached the end of our interview. “What kind of burst of togetherness can come if we burst these art bubbles? And what can spring from that?” they wonder. “What can happen if you allow yourself to submit to this fluidity?”

Let’s all find out in Hamraborg. ■

Hamraborg Festival runs from August 29–September 5. Check HamraborgFestival.is and find them on Facebook and Instagram @hamraborg_festival for more information.



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Film Feature

Between Heartbreak And Sunsets

Rúnar Rúnarsson's latest film, *Ljósbrott*, delves into the power of grief

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGES Joana Fontinha & Supplied stills

Without being too revealing, *Ljósbrott*'s trailer, indeed, captures the mood. The 88-minute feature follows a group of young adults on a long summer day in Reykjavík – from sunset to sunset. An unexpected event disrupts their day.

"I love the energy of this age," Rúnar says, referring to the film's characters in their early 20s. "You're not a kid anymore, yet you haven't been a grown-up for long, either. But you have so much energy and you feel invincible. You're never gonna die. You believe you can run through all walls," he pauses, then adds, "And then all of a sudden, there's a wall they hit that they weren't expecting."

Having opened the Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year, *Ljósbrott* has since received four international awards and been sold to almost all territories. It premieres in Iceland on August 28.

YOUTHFUL ENERGY AND ARTISTIC VISION

"It's a topic that I've been trying to deal with for decades," Rúnar

explains. When asked about the names mentioned in the film's dedication, he's brief but poignant, "They are dear friends that went too early."

It's not unusual for Rúnar to base his films on first and second-hand experiences, mixed with fictional elements. "But I have stopped saying

Between a busy year of musical projects, Elín Hall – the winner of the 2023 Grapevine Awards Album of the Year for *Heyrist í mér* – cemented herself as a confident actress ready for any challenge. Starring in *Ljósbrott* as the pansexual character Una, Elín found time between takes to collaborate on a music project

for it," he says, explaining his directorial approach. "Generally, I prepare a lot. I try to find people that are better than me in each and every position – a better set designer, better DOP and so on. I have a vision, and they enlarge the vision in a coalition together."

He explains that rehearsing each scene is essential for finding flaws in the dramaturgy, giving an example: "I step on a nail, and I say, 'Fuck,' you say, 'Hell,' and the next person doesn't say anything, just keeps on walking. I want all my actors to find what is fluent for them to say, so [I'm open to] changing dialogue," he says, adding, "And what I love doing is deleting dialogue."

In *Ljósbrott*, Rúnar allows many things to remain unspoken – either in the deliberate use of empty spaces, thoughtful application of music or elements that are intentionally left behind the frame.

The soundtrack of the film is the late Jóhann Jóhannsson's requiem "Ódi et Amo," which translates from Latin as "I love and I hate."

All of my films have helped me process something.

what is what," he says. "Personally, I have nothing to hide, but if I'm dealing with something that is based on real things, or my interpretation of reality, it's not other people's (question) to answer. It's mine to answer."

The cast of the film, including Elín Hall, Baldur Einarsson and Katla Njálsdóttir, feels like a group of friends coming together. "And most of them are," Rúnar confirms, noting that some of the actors studied together or collaborated on previous projects. "They're all great actors," he continues. The group's dynamics played a key role during casting.

called Mammaðin with her co-star Katla (who plays the role of Klara).

"They told me about it in the middle of the shoot," Rúnar laughs. "Katla called me and said, 'Rúnar, Elín and I are starting a band. Do you agree?' I thought she was just joking at first, and I said, 'Great for you guys, but can we focus on the shoot for now.' The other day I saw their band on top of the chart at Rás 2. They have a bunch of talent, both of them."

Rúnar admits that working with the young actors was a smooth process. "They were so open to just throw themselves into the pool and just go

"I hate trailers," director Rúnar Rúnarsson states confidently. "Trailers are getting worse. They are just answering the final question." As we meet to discuss his fourth feature, *Ljósbrott* (Where The Light Breaks), Rúnar remains cautious. He's wrestling with a filmmaker's dilemma: how much to say without saying too much.

"I've been told that I have bad trailers because I keep everything away," he admits. "But I think we have a good trailer now."



"Of all the great compositions of Jóhann Jóhannsson, this is one of my favourites," Rúnar says. Typically, he collaborates with Kjartan Sveinsson on his film scores, but with Kjartan busy touring with Sigur Rós, Rúnar recalls, "We didn't have the time that we normally have, so I started to look around; it didn't take me long to remember this."

Reflecting on his connection to Jóhann, Rúnar shares, "Iceland is small. Jóhann and I grew up on the same street. When I started to listen to music, at age 12 or 13, I realised that this dude in my street was just doing insane experimental music. I was a groupie for a really long time. He was a great artist. I'm really thankful for his daughter and the people that are managing his estate, that they gave permission for this beautiful piece to be a part of our film."

THE CASE FOR FILM

Rúnars's decision to shoot *Ljósbrott* on 16mm film resulted in a unique visual aesthetic for the picture. The colours and textures, less crisp than digital, give the film a distinct char-

acter. Working with the film medium was not a first for Rúnar – with the exception of one, all his previous projects were analogue.

"One thing is this taste," he says. "Another thing is how I think it works. Even though the source really matters, it's similar to music – you record it on tape, but then you listen to it and broadcast it digitally. There's something that happens with the source. The imagery is softer, the light behaves differently."

Despite the common perception that making a feature entirely shot on film is very expensive due to the film cost and the need to develop footage abroad (since there is no professional lab in Iceland), Rúnar shakes his head, "It's a different procedure. It doesn't have to be more expensive."

He explains, "When you shoot on film, you tend to be differently prepared. You're not just leaving the camera running. There is less material, which makes it easier to keep an oversight of what you're doing in the editing room."

For Rúnar, there was no question of going digital or analogue for *Ljósbrott* – the choice was easy. Looking at the number of Oscar-nominated movies from the previous year that used the same medium, Rúnar be-

raining – like what we're used to."

Ljósbrott was shot over 30 days during summer 2023, with weather and sun position dictating the schedule to maintain continuity so the viewer

What I love doing is deleting dialogue.

lieves film is experiencing a revival. "Every story has its medium," he says. "The analogue way to shoot on film enhances the emotional side of things, while the digital enhances the rational side of things."

CHASING THE SUN

Pondering the challenges of making *Ljósbrott*, Rúnar answers quickly, "It tends to be the weather in Iceland because it's ever-changing. We live in this country, so we know that weather is like this – just like since we started this interview, first there was no sun and now sun is just burning us here," he points to the sky, squinting from the sun. "But for an audience, that's just weird if there's sunshine, then it's snowing, then it's

doesn't doubt it's the same day. This meant the filmmaking team had to prioritise scenes where weather was a crucial element.

"There's a lot of luck involved. We can think about a visual or something that you want to do, but even if you think that you're budgeted for it, you can't control mother nature," Rúnar admits.

THE URGE TO CREATE

Between travelling to festivals and promoting *Ljósbrott*, Rúnar had a productive year. He also finished a new short film, *O*, about a man whose success is obstructed by his own actions – it will premiere at the Venice Film Festival. One of the

director's earlier short films *The Last Farm* was nominated for an Oscar, but it's not the awards Rúnar is after. "My aim is never to make a film that wins awards. My aim is to get something out," he says. "My aim is to have fun at work as well – there're so many people that make a film and make a film function. If I was a one man show, I would make quite lousy films."

Rúnar acknowledges that working on *Ljósbrott* has been a significant part of his personal journey. "I write because I have an urge. It's self-reflecting, it's a part of some kind of process for me of trying to be a better human being, of trying to be in better connection to myself," he says. "All of my films have helped me process something." ■

Ljósbrott premieres at Bío Paradís and Sambíó theatres on August 28.

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The Edda Or Whatever

The Season Finale

All good things must come to an end – and so does the Gylfaginning

WORDS Grayson del Faro
IMAGE Maria R. Dell'Olio

Welcome to The Edda or Whatever, where I'm spilling the tea on Norse mythology. We're breaking down the Prose Edda, a Mediaeval Icelandic textbook that also low-key recaps most of what we know about the Norse gods today, but we're doing it with a little bit of style and a whole lot of sass. (Not to mention ass!) If you've ever wondered, "Wasn't Þórr like the meathead of the Norse gods?" (he was) or, "Didn't Loki get dicked down by a literal horse?" (he did)... Then shut up, I'm getting to it.

BAWLING FOR BALDUR

So our main bitch Gylfi (some king) has overstayed his welcome in the

sex dungeon (castle) of our favourite throuple (three other kings all stacked up). He won't stop asking questions but, to be fair, that's the whole point of their little game. He asks a question, they call him stupid, they answer it. I can only assume everyone is turned on by this, which makes it sound pretty gay – so count me in! That is, except for the part where he dies if he loses. Murder does not pass the vibe check.

Be it Brat Summer or Gylfaginning, all good things must come to an end. The end of Gylfaginning starts with Baldur, that shiny, pretty-boy god. He has a nightmare about his own death, which freaks everyone out, so everything on Earth is made to promise not to hurt him. I do mean everything, including water, fire, metal, diseases, animals and Ketamine overdoses. (We know what really kills pretty boys.) You know, just in case.

Then all of Baldur's family promptly take turns trying to kill him with all those things, just for fun. Like it's some kind of hillbilly family reunion.

Loki is here to fuck around, so he learns that a plant called mistletoe is the only thing that didn't promise not to harm Baldur. Then he tricks Baldur's blind brother Höður into shooting him with a mistletoe arrow. You could say he slayed, because oops, his brother dies. At first everyone is shook and then those bitches be bawling. Not ballin' like the ageing millennial slang, but bawling like ugly crying. Like snot running, mascara smudging and probably live-streaming it for pity likes. But hey, we stan dudes in touch with their emotions.

ÞÖKK FOR NOTHING

Baldur's other brother, Hermóður, goes to hell to fetch him. Hel, the goddess of the underworld, says she will only release Baldur if every single thing on Earth weeps for him. Everything does, even the grass, which is how dewdrops are created. Isn't that cutesy? It's all cutesy except for one giantess named Þökk, which literally means "thanks." She refuses to shed a tear and Baldur is

ALL ARE WELCOME

HAPPY HOUR DAILY

LAUGAVEGUR 1B - 101 REYKJAVÍK

ÆGIR BAR

EY, ÞREKK, OG VER GLAÐR



of Gylfaginning

doomed to remain in hell. Thanks for nothing, motherpökker!

Plot twist: it turns out that that giant-ess is actually Loki in drag.

So Loki has fucked around and now its time for him to find out. He tries to hide by serving fish, by which I mean he literally turns himself into a salmon, but the gods catch him anyway. They rip out the intestines of his son, Vali, and use them to tie Loki up while a venom-dripping snake looms over his head. Although Loki's wife is forced to catch the poison in a bowl, it still drips on him when she dumps it out – his agonised thrashing is what causes earthquakes. This punishment is a total flex and I'm starting a petition to bring it back. I think JK Rowling could use a taste of her own venom, as could several politicians.

That was the beginning of the end. Now we come to the end of the end. Our favourite throuple must be coming down from whatever they're on because they've launched into a description of Ragnarök. They don't

quite mention the current climate crisis apocalypse caused by late stage capitalism, but their version isn't too far off. It starts with three years of winter in which humanity descends into chaos. Then wolves eat the sun and moon, the stars go out, mountains collapse and lands are flooded. Then the sky cracks open and fire spills out. Bad? Yes. Still kinda lit? Also yes.

RAGNARÖK-N-ROLL

It is truly a Netflix-style series finale because all the side characters you'd forgotten about over the last seven seasons suddenly reappear and go to war. We've got gods, we've got monsters, we've got a boat made out of the unclipped fingernails of dead people! Óðinn is eaten by the giant wolf Fenrir before Viðar finally uses his giant shoe to kill the beast. Loki sides with the baddies. Þórr finally gets his hands all up and down the slippery dick of the sea serpent Jörmungandur. He rubs it out, killing it. Then he dies because it squirted "poison" on him. (We all know what it feels like to get jizz in

the eye.)

The world is burned away. Everyone keeps to their own lanes in heaven or hell, waiting for it to be reborn. Very demure, very mindful. The Earth reappears from the sea and the gods return. They spend their days yapping and playing a special edition gold-plated Settlers of Catan. Two humans survived by hiding in a special nook of the cosmic tree and they repopulate Earth. Okay, byeeeee!

That's basically how the throuple leave the chat. There is a sudden crashing as their sex dungeon collapses around them and Gylfi is left standing alone in the middle of nowhere. I guess the game is over, because he blurts out some final thoughts about how the Norse gods were actually Turkish and that Loki was Ulysses. Wait, who won?

Morals of the story

1. Crying is not unmanly. It's healthy. It's even kinda hot.
2. You wanna fuck around, you're gonna find out. ■



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Centre Map

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

Dining

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Drinking

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

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

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

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

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

15 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

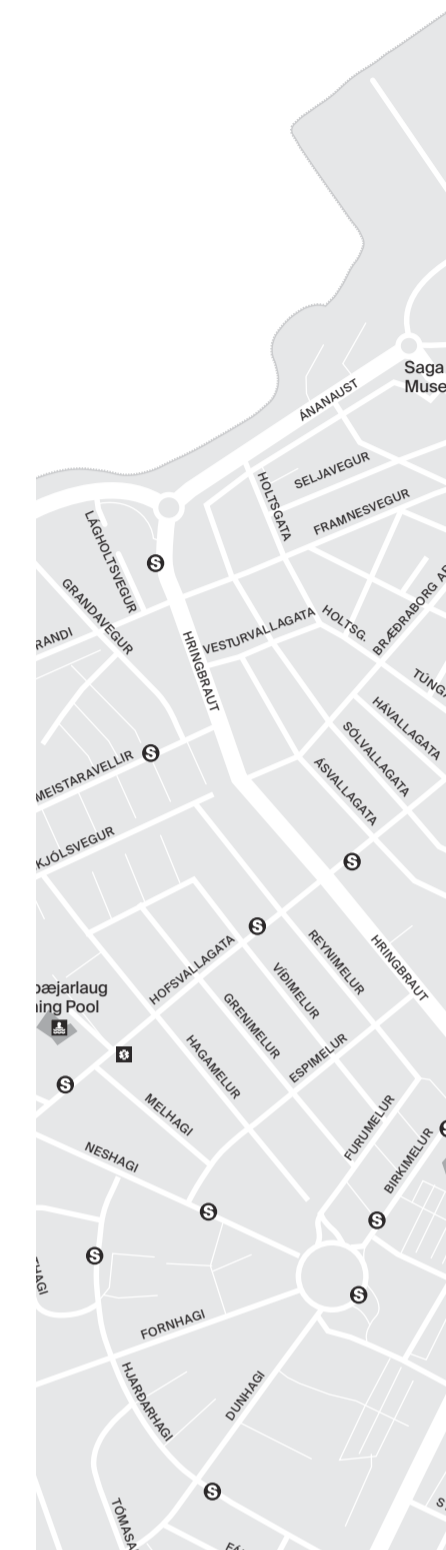
16 BÍÓ PARADÍS
Hverfisgata 54
Sometimes the smell of popcorn fills the air of Hverfisgata, as if beckoning you to come inside. You succumb and find yourself in the cutest art house cinema with colourful posters on the walls and vintage-looking bar straight outta Wes Anderson movie. There's always a film 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 LAVA SHOW
Fiskislóð 74
I didn't know I had a primal urge to see a person clad in a Homer Simpson nuclear suit replicate the natural flow of molten lava until I paid the Lava Show a visit. Nothing will prepare you for sitting in an enclosed space while literal magma flows out of a chute through the wall. And then you just stare at the colours as the host explains the geological properties of lava. JB

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

Be Warned

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



has been in the same spot ever since Hrunið. RG

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

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



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OPENING HOURS:
Every day from 10:00 to 13:00 and 15:00 to 18:00*

*Opening hours may vary



S

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Art Exhibitions

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Opening

ÁSMUNDARSALUR
Helgi Þórsson – Solo Exhibition
Helgi's work combines various mediums such as painting, sculpture, and sound. Helgi tends to use humour as a tool to reflect more serious themes, playing with references to pop culture and absurdism.
Opens August 24
Runs until September 29

GALLERY GRÓTTA
Untamed
This mixed media group exhibition explores themes relating to the concept of the "wild" and how it is represented in our culture, specifically in art, feminism, nature and aesthetics.
Opens August 24
Runs until September 14

HAFNARBORG CENTER OF CULTURE & FINE ART
Unknown Benevolence
Group exhibition of works shaped by the need to get a sense of magic in a world that largely seems to be devoid of the magical, in somewhat hopeless times.
Opens August 29
Runs until October 27

Elin Sigríður María Ólafsdóttir – "We See What We Want to See"
Winner of the artist of the festival prize from Art Without Borders 2024, this solo exhibition spans the artist's entire career from childhood to present day.
Opens August 29
Runs until November 3

REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Eva Ágústa – Queer and Autistic
Photographer Eva Ágústa, who is trans and on the autism spectrum, exhibits her works of queer individuals on the autism spectrum, with or without an official diagnosis
Opens August 24
Runs until November 3

Ongoing

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

ÁSMUNDARSALUR
Elísabet Anna Kristjánsdóttir – Leitin
Photography, collage
Runs until September 1

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

GALLERY PORT
Erfið – Leikar
Group exhibition, mixed media
Runs until August 31

GALLERY SIGN
Anna Hrund Másdóttir – Water Lilies
Mixed media, silicone works
Runs until December 15

GERÐARSAFN (KÓPAVOGUR ART MUSEUM)
Gerður Helgadóttir – Transformation
Works from the collection
Runs until October 21

GERÐUR
Works of sculptor Gerður Helgadóttir
Permanent exhibition

Glerhúsið
Finnbogi Pétursson – 1,322,452,800 beats
Mixed media
Runs until September 8

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

Murmur
Group exhibition, mixed media
Runs until September 8

THE HOUSE OF COLLECTIONS
Opaque Shadow: Flags in Icelandic Art
Flag works, group exhibition
Runs until August 25

Resistance: Interplay of Art and Science
Interdisciplinary group exhibition
Permanent exhibition

HÖFUÐSTÖÐIN
Shoplifter/Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir – Chromo Sapiens
Installation, colourful whole body experience
Permanent exhibition

i8 GALLERY
Stefán V. Jónsson (Stórval) – The Mountain Within
Historical paintings
Runs until October 5

i8 GRANDI
Andreas Eriksson – Real Time
Paintings, progressive exhibition
Runs until December 2024

KJARVALSSTAÐIR (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)
Paintings from Home
Group exhibition, works from the collection
Runs until October 6

Kjarval and the 20th Century: When Modernity Anchored
Paintings, drawings
Runs until December 2024

LITLA GALLERY
Jennifer Rooke – The Second Tasting
Drawings, paintings
Runs until August 25

THE LIVING ART MUSEUM
Some Paintings
Group exhibition, paintings
Runs until September 29

MOSFELLSBÆR ART GALLERY
Ólöf Björg Björnsdóttir – Smávægilegar Endurfæðingar / Minor Rebirths
Mixed media
Runs until September 6

MUSEUM OF DESIGN AND APPLIED ARTS
Straws and Branches
Design and textile works
Runs until August 25

NAPKINS: 29 Designers
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

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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 1

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

The Lögrétta Valences
Historical textile works
Runs until June 2025

NESKIRKJA CHURCH
Erla S. Haraldsdóttir – Tæri
Paintings
Runs until August 25

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

PHENOMENON GALLERY
Artists At Work
2nd Anniversary exhibition, mixed media
Runs until August 29

PORTFOLIO GALLERY
Egill Logi Jónsson – Margbrotið Hjarta
Paintings
Runs until August 24

REYKJAVÍK MARITIME MUSEUM
Heimir Freyr Hlökkversson – 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

SIGURJÓN ÓLAFSSON MUSEUM
Anni Bloch & Sigurjón Ólafsson – Cultural Diversity in Fibres and Wood
Sculpture
Runs until September 15

The Gift of Children
Reliefs and Portraits
Runs until September 24

From Various Sources
Sculpture, mixed media
Runs until September 24

SÍM KÖRPUFSSSTAÐIR
50/100/55: The Textile Association 50th Anniversary
Textile works, mixed media
Runs until August 25

PULA
Kristín Morthens & Scott Everingham – Axis
Paintings
Runs until September 29

Art Picks



Codapent – The Recovery Letters
Saturday August 24,
12:00 (single event)
Ásmundarsalur

Are you sick and tired of putting everyone's feelings before your own? Is your persistent codependency killing your rock and/or roll? Are you ready to make yourself number one? Codapent may be the right drug for you! Made in the team at Codapent labs, this groundbreaking supplement will give you back your life. Come hear testimonies of how others have recovered! Side effects may include having a good time and not giving a fuck. RX



Untamed
August 24 – September 14
Gallery Gróttta

With all the talk these days of being very demure, very mindful and very cutesy, a lot of folks sure are wilding out. In fact, this demure-pushing is making the wild ones even wilder! Taming oneself to please the establishment is a tool of the patriarchy. In this exhibition, the theme of the wild is unpacked from various contexts and critical lenses and taking back the power and freedom of being unhinged, unbridled and untamed. RX



Hamraborg Festival
August 29 – September 5
Hamraborg, Kópavogur

As far as urban planning and municipal borders are concerned, Kópavogur is pretty ridiculous. But it's not without its charms! Namely, the old area of Hamraborg, which will once again be taken over by artists and turned into a living, breathing week-long art explosion. Since 2021, the Hamraborg Festival takes over the culture houses, public places, cafes, shops and offices of the area for non-stop fun. Check out the programme and head to Hamraborg! RX



Unknown Benevolence
August 29 – October 27
Hafnarborg Center of Culture & Fine Art

Let's be honest, we are living through extremely bleak times. The war crime atrocities of Israel's active genocide on Gaza play on our phones each day, the climate disaster is worsening across the globe, the greed of billionaires seems endless. We are all craving some magic and hope in these brutal times. This exhibition is an invitation to experience rare tenderness, infinite hope and benevolent wonder to douse the flames of cynicism and light your heart with optimism. RX



Stefán V. Jónsson (Stórval) – The Mountain Within
Runs until October 5
i8 Gallery

Returning from their summer vacation, the prestigious downtown gallery i8 has thrown open their doors with the first exhibition of the season. They are kicking things off with a retrospective of the works of Stefán V. Jónsson, more commonly known as Stórval. A widely known figure in Icelandic art, his trademark style of colour-blocking and his paintings of the mountain Herðubreið have become iconic among locals. Take in this true piece of art history. RX

Events 23.08–05.09.24

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

KEX Culture Night: BSÍ, Celebs, Kælan Miklan & More
14:00 Kex Hostel
Bobbie's Strip Lab
21:00 Kiki Queer Bar
Music Workshop for Kids & Íslatin
13:00 LEMMY
R6013 Block Party: Deathmetal Supersquad, Snowed In, I Adapt, & More
13:00 R6013
MOMENT Afterparty
23:00 Radar
Pabbaheigi (Benni B-Ruff & Gísli Galdur)
22:00 Röntgen
Langi Seli og Skugganir, Sigga Ózk, Úlfur Úlfur & Kristín Sesselja
16:00 STEF Headquarters
Soffía Björg
16:00 Telebar
Vitafest: Supersport!, Ex.Girls, Spacestation, Geisha Cartel
14:00 Vitabar

Sunday August 25

Organ Summer:
Nils Henrik Asheim (NO)
17:00 Hallgrímskirkja

Monday August 26

LoFi Monday
20:00 Gaukurinn

Tuesday August 27

Karaoke Night
20:00 Gaukurinn
Reykjavík Jazz Festival
19:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)
Lunchtime concert: Voices of the Summer Sun
12:00 Seltjarnarneskirkja

Wednesday August 28

Reykjavík Jazz Festival
19:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)
Latin Party: Íslatin, Las Hienas & Dj Otho
20:00 Iðnó
Reykjavík Poetics #14: Mad As A Hatter
19:30 Mengi
Vinyl Wednesday: DJ No Service
21:00 Röntgen

Thursday August 29

Hróðmar Sigurðsson & Ingibjörg Turchi
12:00 Fríkirkjan
Reykjavík Jazz Festival
19:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)
Helga Margrét & Vigdís Þóra
17:30 Jørgensen Kitchen & Bar
Gugusar
18:00 Kaffi Flora
Quiz
20:00 Kex Hostel
Rams & Cloud Cinema
21:00 LEMMY
Drink'n'Draw
19:00 Loft
DJ Björn Leó
21:00 Röntgen

Friday August 30

Páll Óskar, Systur, Gugusar & Villi Neto
17:30 Fríkirkjan
Herra Hnetusmjör
21:00 Gamla Bíó
RVK Bear Tops Off Party
21:00 Gaukurinn
Iceland Symphony Orchestra: Our Classics, Powered By Emotion
20:00 Harpa (Eldborg)
Reykjavík Jazz Festival
19:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)
Babies
20:00 Kex Hostel
UN Women FO Party with DJ Apex Anima
17:00 Loft
NAKADIA, LaFontaine, Samwise & Tæson
22:00 Radar
DJ Ok
22:00 Röntgen
Valdimar & Örn Eldjárn
20:00 Salurinn
Rebekka Blöndal Quartet
17:30 SKÝ Bar & Lounge

Friday August 23

Piparkorn
20:00 Bird
Drápa, Mørose & TOC
21:00 Gaukurinn
Hope Rises: A Musical Journey of Resilience
19:30 Harpa (Norðurljós)
DJ Ingvar Lucky
20:00 Kex Hostel
Óheimsk Tour Fundraiser: knackered, XWIFE (DJ set) & More
18:00 Mengi
Simon fknhdsm
22:00 Röntgen

Saturday August 24

BOY
23:00 BIRD
Bjartmar Guðlaugsson, Fræbblarnir Blóðmör, Brimbrot & More
13:00 Dillon
Constantinos, Æð, Meistarar Dauðans, LadieLex & More
17:00 Gaukurinn
Upprásin: Andverel, KUSK & Óviti
17:00 Harpa (Flói)
Lady Brewery PopUp Bar
17:00 Hafnarhús (Reykjavík Art Museum)
Snorri Rodríguez & Himintunglin
20:00 Iðnó



Listasafn Íslands
National Gallery
of Iceland



Steina (1940), Borealis, 1993, LÍ-8069

Steina Borealis

13.4.–
8.9.2024

listasafn.is

Event Picks



Tango On Ice Festival
August 30 – September 1
Kramhúsið & KEX Hostel
3.000 – 38.400 ISK

Merely days ago, a friend back in my hometown who is a tango aficionado asked me if Iceland has a tango community. "I honestly don't know," I replied, dismayed at my own ignorance. But now, thanks to the Tango Club Reykjavík hosting Tango On Ice, I can say it does! This three-day festival celebrating the passionate and enchanting dance style will be full of milongas, workshops, mixers and dinner parties – a perfect place to heat up on our cold island. For anyone already deeply into or curious to learn the intense art of tango, now is the time. RX



Babies: Final Ball at KEX
Friday August 30, 21:00
Kex Hostel
Free

In case you hadn't yet clocked it from the rest of this issue, the impending loss of KEX's concert capacity has us going truly bonkers. As it is for local cover band Babies, who for many years have held blow-out "ball" style shows that draw in huge raucous crowds ready to drink, dance and sing along to all the hits at top volume. Their regular appearances have been at KEX for the past while and, sadly, this will be the last one. While we hope they will find a future venue (just as our cover art does), this show will be one for the ages. RX



Extreme Chill Festival
September 2 – 8
Multiple locations
14.900 ISK

Can you believe the chilliest festival in Iceland is turning 15? Starting as a two-day festival for the local ambient community under the Snæfellsjökull glacier in 2009, the now Reykjavík-based festival is an ambitious and multifaceted event hosting some of the most cutting edge and exceptional talents from Iceland and abroad. For their quinceañera, the lineup includes Alessandro Cortini, FUJIIIIIIIIITA, Christopher Chaplin and Mary Lattimore (see P. 33) from abroad, and Kira Kira, Ægir, Paddan, and Borgar Magnason amongst the locals. It's pure vibes. Chill out, bro. RX

Reykjavík Art Museum
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Three locations

Hafnarhús
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101 Reykjavík

Kjarvalsstaðir
Flókagata 24
105 Reykjavík

Ásmundarsafn
Sigtún
105 Reykjavík

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listasafnreykjavikur.is
artmuseum.is

Events

23.08-05.09.24

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

- Saturday August 31**
Hamraborg Party: MSEA, Xiupill, Ghostigital & More
 20:00 Catalina
WEILL!
 12:00 Frikirkjan
Herra Hnetusmjör
 21:00 Gamla Bíó
Devine Defilement, Oskaal (NO) & Holdris
 21:00 Gaukurinn
Á inniskónum: Elín Hall & Magnús Jóhann
 20:00 Hannesarholt
Reykjavík Jazz Festival
 19:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)
Gammar
 15:00 Jómfrúin
Spacestation
 20:00 Kex Hostel
Bjorn Salvador & GHOZT
 22:00 Radar
Young G&T
 22:00 Röntgen
- Sunday September 1**
Strip Lab Live Drawing
 20:00 Gaukurinn
Sunday Classics: UMBRA: Echo of the Ages
 16:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)
Rickie Lee Jones (US)
 20:00 Harpa (Silfurberg)
Hlynur/Kjalar
 12:00 Jörgensen Kitchen & Bar
Anya Shaddock & PAU

- 17:00 Salurinn
- Monday September 2**
LoFi Monday
 20:00 Gaukurinn
Ida Pellicoli (IT)
 20:00 Iðnó
Extreme Chill Festival
 19:30 Mengi
- Tuesday September 3**
Karaoke Night
 20:00 Gaukurinn
Extreme Chill Festival
 19:30 Mengi
- Wednesday September 4**
Extreme Chill Festival
 19:00 Bíó Paradís
Queer Open Mic
 20:00 Gaukurinn
Meraki Trio
 20:00 Mengi
Vinyl Wednesday: DJ Silja Glömmi
 21:00 Röntgen
- Thursday September 5**
Extreme Chill Festival
 19:30 Gamla Bíó
Ingólfsvaka: Suicide Prevention Fundraiser
 20:00 Gaukurinn
Iceland Symphony's Open Rehearsals
 10:00 Harpa (Eldborg)
Iceland Symphony Orchestra: Wagner Festival
 19:30 Harpa (Eldborg)
Drink'n'Draw
 19:00 Loft
D'n'B Thursdays
 21:00 Radar
DJ Día
 21:00 Röntgen



Featured Happy Hour

Stúdentakjallari

HÁSKÓLATORG, SÆMUNDARGATA

School is now in session, kids. That means long hours in class, running across campus, and late night study sessions. Or maybe it means none of that because you graduated a long time ago. Whether you need to unwind from the books or the daily grind, Stúdentakjallari ("The Student Celler") is a top-notch spot to kick back a few cold ones. Their spacious laid back atmosphere and extensive bar menu of drinks and food are just the right vibe. Plus they host all kinds of events and shenanigans and sport-ball games on their big screen. RX

HAPPY HOURS:

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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 14:00 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

DAISY
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.200 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
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

PRÍKID
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 SVÍNID
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

SLIPBARINN
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
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1.890 ISK every day from 11:30 - 15:00

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You can pick up your copy of The Reykjavík Grapevine in Krónan all around Iceland!

KRÓNAN

Music News



Kaleo Gets Soapy

Move over, Ridge Forrester, there's a strapping new heart throb on the scene. Kaleo frontman Jökull Júlíusson has been tapped to make an appearance on the *Bold and the Beautiful*. The long-running U.S. soap opera follows the trials, tribulations and all the drama surrounding the Forrester family, who run the cut-throat fashion industry in

Beverly Hills. While we think Jökull would play a stellar long-lost evil twin or child swapped at birth who has grown up, fallen into a coma, reappeared with amnesia and now comes seeking revenge, he is actually just playing himself. Jökull will perform the Kaleo hit "Way Down We Go" in the episode that airs Sept. 27. **CF**



Iceland Music Makes It Rain

Iceland Music doled out 97 million ISK in grant money on August 15. The Music Fund was divided up to 111 projects. Young upstart musicians Nýdönsk banked 2 million ISK, as did the ever-jazzy ADHD. Also making bank at Iceland Music's second grant ceremony of 2024 were Hlutmengi, which received 3 million ISK over two years for programming

at Mengi; chamber group Nordic Affect, who got 2.5 million ISK for their 2025-26 concert programme; and Iceland Airwaves, which pocketed 6 million ISK for the project "Sustainable showcase – the future direction of Iceland Airwaves." Grants are disbursed for marketing, performance, music and business. **CF**



Blues Musician Dóri Has Died

Musician Halldór Bragason died in a fire that broke out at his home on Amtmannsstígur in central Reykjavík on August 13. Halldór, also known as Dóri, was a prominent figure in Iceland's blues music scene. He is known for playing with bands such as Landsliðið, The Riot, Þrælarnir, Blúsboltarnir, and Big Nós. Dóri was

a leading figure in the blues scene for many years and was named an honorary member of the Reykjavík Blues Festival, of which he was also an organiser, in 2013. Halldór is survived by his adult son and granddaughter. We wish his friends and family peace at this time. **RG**



Healing Sounds

In The Tropic Of Lobster

Kaktus Einarsson on love, healing and his sophomore solo album

WORDS Irina Shtreis
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

shell, a hard lobster shell," says the artist. "It's a visualisation of nowness that I have for this."

Lobster Coda is Einarsson's most personal work to date. The songs were written while the young musician was in the process of recovering from functional neurological disorder (FND), which suddenly impacted the artist's life in September 2022.

goes.' But when I relaxed, I started feeling a bit heavy, my legs started to be a bit careful of what they were doing. It was kind of a safety mechanism of the body."

Having called the after hours clinic, Kaktus was advised to go to the ER immediately. A nurse said over the phone the symptoms sounded like a stroke. A panic attack followed. "My nervous system had an immediate

Life was very slow paced. It was beautiful, very beautiful.

"I was at my father's exhibition [Miniature by Einar Örn] and everything was getting blurry," Kaktus recalls. "I was meeting a lot of people there, it was in a dark room and I really couldn't see them well. So I had to say, 'I'm sorry but I can't see you well enough.' People started to suggest different things – go home to bed, go to the ER or go out for a fresh air... basically a lot of different opinions on how to make me feel better. I was saying, 'I'll just chill, let's see how it

response: Fuck, I might be fucked," he recalls. "I came out of this panic attack rebooted so strangely. I had all these weird facial tics, I couldn't control my legs, and it got worse and worse." Diagnosed with FND, the artist embarked on a long healing process.

As time went by, Kaktus was gradually restoring his connection with his body. "My nervous system just went on a holiday. I had two months of pretty hardcore work on myself

Three years after his debut solo album, *Kick The Ladder*, Kaktus Einarsson returns with a record that gives his prolific career a new start. Named *Lobster Coda*, the collection of eight tracks can be treated as a transition from one phase of life to another. "It's me breaking out of a



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er

not walking correctly at all. Finally, when I was walking correctly, it was very slow.”

“Life was very slow-paced. It was beautiful, very beautiful. I took one of my calmest friends out for a walk, leading it at such a slow tempo. And I said, ‘Yeah, man, this is my new tempo.’ He said that was amazing. You see things differently when you walk that slowly.”

While a newfound embrace for deceleration might hint that *Lobster Coda* could be an ambient album, it is actually more dynamic than its predecessor. Starting with a lulling pace, bossa-nova-tinged “White Burn” speeds up, its keyboard arpeggios evoking shimmering water.

Although *Lobster Coda* does not aim to give an account of Kaktus’ recovery process, it has a few referential points. Coloured with serotinal melancholy, the opening title track begins with the line, “I found my tempo this year.”

Still, it is the conclusive thoughts and realisation rather than steps to overcome his condition that defines Kaktus’ record.

A few tracks, in particular — “Daze Gold” and “Heart Spell” — strike a balance between gossamer and pounding, finding the artist questioning his ability to love. “The lyrics for those two songs would come together,” the artist explains. “They sum up the effect that these things had on me. I just had to learn to receive the love surrounding me, to learn how to give love because, in the end, this whole thing is about

myself, maybe not controlling my love. It was more all over the place instead of focusing on where it should be. Here I am, a loving partner and a loving father, and I can feel that I’m loved back. When I understood that, this all made sense to me. This is the album, this is the content. This is how I will write about this experience.”

The appreciation of love and being loved go hand in hand with the appreciation of friendship. One of the contributors on *Lobster Coda* is Blur’s Damon Albarn, whose debut solo album *Everyday Robots* featured Kaktus as an assistant engineer. Inspired by Albarn’s work at the studio, Kaktus soon found himself

I just had to learn to receive the love surrounding me, to learn how to give love.

back writing songs for Fufanu, an incarnation of his previous techno project Captain Fufanu.

“Damon and I have a history of collaboration,” admits Kaktus. “There is so much mutual understanding of each other’s musicality, which for me is something unique.”

Unlike *Kick The Ladder*, Kaktus’ second solo work is permeated by ideas from various sides. Among other contributors to *Lobster Coda* are Nanna, School of X, Thibault Gomez and Albert Finnbogason.

“For me, music is a dialogue,” says Kaktus. “To invite people to join

these conversations is a way of dropping my ego. It doesn’t have to be all done by me.”

Hence, “Daze Gold” has a chorus co-written by Rasmus Littauer of School of X. “Rasmus sings in the chorus at the back,” Kaktus continues. “We wanted to celebrate our friendship with music that feels so personal to me. The track is a successful development of our friendship. It reaches out to various moments and connections in life.”

While certainly a testament to love and friendship, *Lobster Coda* has a certain therapeutic quality. One example where this shines through is on “Koddi,” a gentle lullaby fea-

turing Einarsson playing the piano and singing. Talking from his studio, the artist recalls how he recorded the song (the first in his songwriting career to be written in Icelandic). “I think I just have too many references with many examples of Icelandic music that I don’t like. ‘Koddi’ brings this new element and the beauty about it is that it sounds like a lullaby for my kids but it’s actually a lullaby for myself. I’m just saying that I’ll sleep alright.” ■

Lobster Coda will be out on October 25 via One Little Independent. Two singles, “Be This Way”, featuring Nanna, and “White Burn” are out now.



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Date night in the heart of Reykjavík

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Track By Track

The Depths Of Keli's Soul

Ást & Keli paints a celeb in a new light

WORDS Daniel Þorsteinnsson
IMAGE Supplied by Artist

The solo venture of Hrafnkell Hugl Vernharðsson, Keli strikes a distinctly different tone from the boisterous jams of his party outfit Celebs. Here, Keli is stripped back and bare, a folksy foil to the glittering, energetic persona he projects while on stage (or leaping into the crowd) with siblings Katla and Valgeir. The raw, velvety tones of his vocals lend a richness and warmth to each track on *Ást & Keli* (released Aug. 16). Keli walks us through the release, track by track.

SPRUNGIN VÖR

"Sprungin Vör" means "busted lip" and is about my dealings with epilepsy. (During seizures I bite down hard and puncture my lip). It is the inciting incident of the emotional turmoil that my album documents in chronological order. When I started having seizures again it felt like the ground disappeared from under me. I was in free fall and the rock I counted on to steady myself wasn't there any more.

EF ÉG TRÚI NÓG

Shortly after I began having seizures again my romantic relationship withered away. I moved out into a basement apartment and immersed myself in sadness. One morning I find myself lying on wet bathroom tiles, the result of having a seizure in the shower. It felt like the Grim Reaper came for me but he himself slipped in the shower and drowned instead.

After that incident I knew something had to change. I forced myself to believe I wasn't hurting, because I knew I had to move on.

KRUMLA

"Krumla" is a bitter song about a breakup and the finite joy of random hook-ups. I wasn't quite sure if I should release this song, to let more bitterness into the world. But it's a good practice to use songs to express emotions. I definitely needed to express my bitterness somehow. And at the end of the day, even though IceGuys released a song with the same name, the groove was just too good to not release.

GEISLI

Have you ever had a really good day, a day so good you wish you could bottle up its leftovers to crack open on a really bad day? Well that is exactly what "Geisli" is about. Some days are good and full of sunshine, others leave life lacking and dark. Would it be better if all days were equally good, or do the bad days bring the necessary dynamic for the really good days to flourish?

HUXA MINNA

I overthink things a lot — it turns out a lot of people do. It isn't always the best idea to dedicate your life to music; if you do, you had better get used to being broke all the time. "Huxa Minna" means "think less" and was written during a point in my life where I was unsure of if I was on the right path. I came to the conclusion I was just overthinking things. Do what feels right, even if you end up broke.

KELARINN Í KÚRINU

This is a song about love, life and doubt. I've been lucky enough to experience love in many forms in my life, often though it presents itself dressed up in doubt. Doubt is a tricky little thing; I wouldn't want to live without it, but it's also a pain in the ass. I've now learnt it's something to either listen to or overcome — either does wonders for the soul. Just don't let it linger in your thoughts.

KOLRÓT

I've wanted to make this album for a long time and the original plan was for it to be released a year earlier. Then I found out my roof was rotten and all the recording budget went into repairing it. Well at least I got a song out of it. "Kolrót" is about how life can throw a wrench in your gears and you end up doing something completely different than you planned. And, of course, it's also about building a new roof for your house.

VANGAVÍSUR

As a symptom of my overthinking, I often wonder where I stand in life — you can call it karma or whatever. I wonder if I'd add up everything positive about myself and weigh it against all the negatives, where would I end up? I don't think it's for me to judge but I certainly think about it often. That's the gist of "Vangavísur."

EF TIL VILL

Do you enjoy being mushy and romantic? Sentimental and emotional? Well I certainly do, though I sometimes have difficulties expressing it. Well, not on this song. "Ef Til Vill" is my mushiest, most romantic, sentimental song. It's a bit fragile but that's what I love about it. It's about feeling your lover's warmth, being held by them and not being afraid of anything.

ÞIÐNAR OG FRÝS

We Icelanders know a lot about ice, there's this specific type of ice that is especially annoying. The sun brings its warmth, enough to slightly melt this ice, then during nighttime it freezes all over again expanding the ice-sheet, shattering the hips and skulls of pedestrians indiscriminately. Sometimes I feel the same can be said about love. Someone's warmth thaws out a heart, but when that warmth dissipates the heart freezes over again, now a danger to others. ■

What are you waiting for? Go listen to *Ást & Keli* now.



Chill Out Zone

As Beautiful As Possible

Mary Lattimore leads the line at Extreme Chill 2024

WORDS John Rogers
IMAGE Jamie Kelter Davis

Extrême Chill is an annual festival whose roots extend to coil around a certain set of underground sounds and vibes. Its broad remit includes expansive ambient soundscapes, cosmic drones, avant-garde composition and the wild edges of experimental electronica.

The event has evolved over its 15 years from one-night-only concerts in the Westfjords, to weekenders in Berlin and Vík, to its current multi-venue downtown Reykjavík format. "It started as an electronic music festival," says Pan Thorarensen, one of the festival's founders. "But it's getting more eclectic. Right now we just call it an experimental music festival. It can be everything, basically."

INTERNATIONAL AMBIANCE

Extreme Chill has become part of a community of like-minded events. "We all have meetings, and try to share a bit of workflow," says Pan. "There's Intonal in Malmö, Insomnia in Tromsø, CTM in Berlin and Norbergfestival in Norberg, Sweden. It seems like the scene is getting bigger. More people are listening to this type of music than 10 years ago."

This year, the festival is a week-long event, with nightly performances from Iceland-based and international artists. Pan reels off the acts in the programme, fizzing with anticipation. "We'll have Alessandro Cortini, who's a legend in this game. He'll use modular experimental synthesizers, I think," he says. "FUJI!!!!!!-TA will be in Europe for the first time. He's bringing all his homemade instruments from Japan. And we'll have Mary Lattimore. She's one of my favourites – it'll be really beautiful to see her at Frikirkjan."

MAKING LIFE INTERESTING

Mary is an L.A.-based harpist whose melodious, mesmerising music has become something of a phenomenon in recent years. She first came to Iceland in the early '00s to

visit fellow harp player Katie Buckley. "I had never been to Iceland before and it felt like a very exotic place that I would never get to go to ever again," she says. "But little did I know that I would end up going there... kind of a lot."

Her connection to Iceland grew organically. "Julianna Barwick is a close friend of mine, and she had recorded with Alex Somers and toured with Sigur Rós," Mary explains. "She introduced me to Alex, and Jónsi and his family. And then I played at the festival that Sigur Rós put together in 2018 [Norður og Niður]."

Mary's 2018 long player *Hundreds of Days* got a sister album of remixes by Icelandic artists like Sin Fang, Kjartan Holm and Jónsi. Her catalogue is studded with collaborative releases, underlining her enthusiasm for mixing up her sound. "I love recording solo," she says. "But you want to make your life as interesting as possible, and to make your music as interesting as possible, to keep up the curiosity. Music is a series of choices and when you add in someone else's choices and see how they combine with your own – it's just bound to make something cool, y'know?"

HARP EMOJI

Mary started her harp career early – her mother plays, too – and went on to study classical harp at university. But she contends that there's more to the instrument than tradition. "Harp can get typecast, but I meet a lot of different kinds of harpists. Classical harpists, harpists who have never read a note and play by ear, harpists who make their own harps. Experimental harpists who listened to Joanna Newsom and felt inspired to play and sing. I think you can take this instrument to such a personal place."

So there's an international harp underground? "Oh, you don't even know," she laughs. "My gosh, the message boards, the magazines – it's a world. We were slightly involved with the proposal for the harp emoji, which got accepted. And so there's going to be a harp emoji. We're all very excited about it." She grins, barely concealing her glee. "The emoji is coming."

A SONIC ADVENTURE

Something that all touring harpists have in common is dealing with the instrument's lack of portability. Mary often ends up playing on instru-

ments provided by the venues in which she's booked, which is always a roll of the dice. "If I fly into a show, sometimes I play on a harp that I've never met before," she says. "It's kind of fun because you never know how it's going to be. Sometimes it's like, 'wow, I get to play on this Salzedo model that I wouldn't ever be able to afford.'"

The flipside is occasionally playing on a rental harp that hasn't been kept in peak condition. "Those shows are more like, 'okay, even though you're a bad instrument, I'm gonna figure you out how to make you sound as beautiful as possible,'" says Mary. "You have to discover its character on the spot, at the sound check. And it's a little sonic adventure that you're on together for this moment in time. Then you leave it behind – but it's always part of the memory of the show." ■

Extreme Chill Festival happens Sept. 2 to 8. Mary plays on Sept. 8 at Frikirkjan. Get tickets and further info at extremechill.org.

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Go North

Enfiladed Chambers of Dreams

Finding wonder and comfort at The Icelandic Folk and Outsider Art Museum

WORDS Rex Beckett
IMAGES Joana Fontinha

urðardóttir and translating directly to “The Museum Museum,” the building itself is an architectural preservation of historic houses that were emblems of social and cultural life in the region. The museum’s original premises are in the former elementary school and community centre of Svalbarðsstrandarhreppur. In 2006, the building of the region’s former cooperative store Gamla-Búð, built in 1900, was moved to the museum grounds and adjoined by a modern building by Ragnheiður Þóra Ragnarsdóttir.

DREAM STUFF

There is a very particular kind of dream that is common to many. You find yourself in a familiar house, perhaps the home you grew up in, and as you make your way through it more rooms begin to unfold and reveal themselves to you, unveiling more wonder and surprise with each new chamber. This is how the museum felt to me, as though I was in someone else’s dream of new rooms in their home.

Masterfully cobbled together with idiosyncratic coherence, the outside of the museum at first glance just looks like one big house built in a

corner. It becomes more apparent after one moves through the entrance that all is not what it seems. Inside, a series of enfiladed chambers open up on each other in an ever-expanding layout of pathways.

At every unexpected passageway, I found myself exclaiming a delighted “Oh!” and crossing the threshold with the curiosity of a cat in a new home. There was something both entirely unknown and uncannily nostalgic about it.

OUTSIDE IN

Although I have spent a great deal of time in fine and contemporary art spaces, as I get older I’ve realised that I’ve always connected more profoundly with forms of folk art, handcraft and outsider art. Being in this museum drove that revelation deeper, particularly as I’ve found myself growing less engaged with and interested in art that comes out of academia.

At Safnasafnið, there was a palpable and almost overwhelming humanity and aliveness to the pieces, especially those of autodidact outsider artists. Even in the group exhibition Aesthetics of Senses and Delights,

showing the works of many educated artists, incredibly low levels of pretence were a welcome relief.

The paintings by Sigurlaug Jónasdóttir in the exhibition Ordinary Life depict scenes from 18th century life in Breiðafjörður, and drew me in with their vibrant colours and almost children’s book-like tableaux. Equally stunning and colour-saturated scenes of Iceland were found

My favourite room, which took me by surprise, was the blossom-filled solarium in a corner, just off an exhibition of historic dolls from around the globe. On closer inspection, I see small paper and pipe-cleaner figures hiding in and among the plants, as this was the Flower Fairies exhibition by children from the Álfaborg preschool, which the museum collaborates with annually on initiatives to engage children with art.

At every unexpected passageway, I found myself exclaiming a delighted “Oh!” and crossing the threshold with the curiosity of a cat in a new home.

in the tufted needlepoint works of Þórunn Franz’s exhibition Mountain View, along with a piece of her own furniture and audio of her famous compositions performed by Ellý Vilhjálm and Ragnar Bjarnason.

FRAGRANT BLOSSOMS

But the display I found myself planted in front of for the longest time was a large vitrine full of vintage and antique perfume bottle. Installed on a wall in the museum’s Jenný Karlsdóttir Room for historical textiles, I was absolutely thrilled by these beautiful flasks of potions and

“Look for the statue of a giant man,” I told my passengers as we headed up Svalbarðseyri in Eyjafjörður, just across from Akureyri, being tailgated on the narrow highway while searching for the elusive left turn to our destination. The giant statue was the beacon of Safnasafnið (“The Icelandic Folk and Outsider Art Museum”), a gem of an institution housing some uniquely intriguing works of local art and handcraft.

Founded in 1995 by married couple Niels Hafstein and Magnhildur Sig-



flooded with memories of why I have this fascination to begin with. Some were scents I knew, and somehow without even smelling them, I could recall how and where I placed them in my life.

works were composed of bird bones reclothed as ominous and rebellious figures, holding protest signs and exuding anarchic energy. This sudden connection was Icelandic folksiness to the core.

As the building revealed itself, it was as though my own mind revealed itself to me.

THE FINAL SECRET

After making my way through the entire museum – or so I thought – I doubled back over all the rooms I had just made my way through in the reverse order. When I returned to the first suite of rooms I visited, in the exhibition Assortments by Örn Karlsson, I happened upon the band Geigen, who had been performing at the festival Mannfólkið Breytist í Slím the night before. Member Gígja Jónsdóttir informed me that her grandfather Yngvi Örn Guðmundsson's works were in the entrance of the building.

Shown within the exhibition Dark Deeds and the Light of Hope, his

Having a very quick coffee before leaving, I turned towards a glass door and realised that just outside was a wooden deck leading to a small enclosed gazebo on a platform, surrounded by lush verdant trees. I immediately walked out into the drizzling rain to go enjoy my coffee in this outdoor nook of exposed wood adorned with earth-toned squiggles and splatters. After already several hours in the museum, I felt like I could have stayed in this place for several more.

REVELATIONS

It is theorised by experts that a dream in which you discover new rooms in a familiar place signifies

a need or desire to look beyond your perceived limitations. The expansion of perceptual biases and limitations is precisely the source of imagination that flows throughout Safnasafnið. As the building revealed itself, it was as though my own mind revealed itself to me.

From the unconventional and mesmerising works of autodidacts who perhaps would never have labelled themselves as artists, to the intentional pieces created within a specific academic practice, the collected found objects displayed in uniquely curated manner, and the very building itself, the entirety of the museum was a continuous revelation.

There is a sort of comforting melancholia that came from my languid escapade through the museum that I still can't put my finger on. I still feel like maybe there was another secret room that was in the corner of my eye and I just didn't see. Maybe if I close my eyes, my subconscious will find that room, extending the museum far beyond its limits. ■

Safnasafnið closes for the winter on September 22, so make the journey north and experience it before then.

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Day Tripping

Summer In Bloom

A leafy getaway in Hveragerði, Southeast Iceland's garden oasis

WORDS John Rogers
IMAGES John Rogers

ing onto a gnarled lava field before ascending to the high, windblown Hellisheiði mountain pass. Up there, the air takes on a chill and the wind picks up. In winter, it becomes a sometimes treacherous stretch of slush and black ice, closing to traffic when vicious wind storms blow by. But in the summer it's a welcome first taste of Iceland's raw, rugged wilderness.

On the other side of the pass lies a welcome sight – the valley in which Hveragerði is nestled. The downward winding road yields a birdseye view of the town, where a verdant treeline traces the mountains cradling a small grid of residential streets. Geothermal steam gushes from the cliffs, providing enough warmth and energy to heat several long rows of greenhouses. By day, Hveragerði's greenery is pleasant and eye-catching; by night, the greenhouses provide a warm and homely glow. Amongst the boul-

der-strewn tundra and black floodplains of southern Iceland, Hveragerði is nothing short of an oasis.

THE TOURIST MALL

Hveragerði is also the first town on Route One South, placing it directly in the path of Iceland's incessant tourist tidal wave – advantageously, or not, depending on your perspective. Almost every bus and car that's heading for Seljalandsfoss and Solheimajökull, Vestmannaeyjar, Vík, Jökulsárlón (and beyond) passes through Hveragerði first. Passers-by used to stop to visit Bónus and the bakery, fill up on gas, or take an early restroom break. But the arrival of The Greenhouse – a hotel, department store and food hall rolled into one – has changed all that.

We stop for a look on a sunny late summer afternoon. The hall is close to capacity, even on a weekday, and it takes a couple of laps to find a

The road to Hveragerði is like a miniature tour of Iceland's topography. Passing the broken red rocks of the Rauðhólar craters that mark the edge of Greater Reykjavík, the route streaks through some low pine woods dotted with cabins, emerg-

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seat. It's hard to know how to feel about it. On one hand — yay, there's a Yuzu Burger and tacos and the smell of espresso drifting through the air! There are shelves full of smoked salt and seaweed snacks, and rails of Kormákur og Skjöldur singing a siren song directly to my wallet. It's like we never left 101! And then, on the other hand — ugh, I'm trying to get out of downtown for once and yet here I am, surrounded by tables of boisterous tourists and rampant kids all hopped up on holiday Haribo. Before my semi-fancy latte is empty, I'm empathising with the grey-faced staff, who seem understandably over the whole scene.

GET INNI

An upside of The Greenhouse's conveniences — or not, depending on your perspective — is that it magnetises the masses away from the old town, where our accommodation for the evening is situated.

Inni Apartments is a swish complex of well-appointed flats with sleek, comfortable furniture — artfully strewn with blankets and cushions — and a kitchen, a freestanding bath, a walk-in shower, and easy access to a shared hot tub and a sauna. The apartments are chill, cosy and discreet, and, as I hit the sauna, I feel the pent-up tension draining out of my body.

Suitably relaxed, it's time to take a drive around town. We stop for a peep into the Flóra greenhouse — a laid back gardening palace that sells plants, handsome pots and all kinds of supplies. It's a lovely spot to wander around, with a relaxed mood and the scent of flowers hanging in the warm air.

CHANGE IS GONNA COME

It's interesting to see how Hveragerði has responded to the tourist boom. The Reykjadalur hike — once

a faint, semi-secret trail leading to a geothermal river and bathing spot — now has an expansive and fully packed car park. There's a new welcome centre from which a steady trail of hikers head up into the mountains. It's a whole event and while the old wild hiking vibe may be gone, sometimes change is just necessary — it's clear from the amount of foot traffic that these facilities were sorely needed.

There's also a stand to hire fat bikes and a long zipline threading down into the valley from above. Participants are driven up to a tall platform and clipped onto the line before coasting back down into the valley. Some extend their legs and surrender to gravity, flying down the rope easily and shrieking in delight. Others are more nervous and reluctant. One shy zipliner goes lumpen as soon as their feet leave the ground, grinding to an inevitable, humiliating halt midway down. I watch with a

mix of empathy and amusement as they're dragged down to the terminus to join their photo-snapping friends.

THE FRESHEST BEER

Hveragerði also has a surprising variety of food options for a town of its size. Rósakaffi is a simple café in a leafy greenhouse, serving coffee and cake among the flowers. The nearby Ölverk Pizza & Brewery is a good vibes family operation that's understandably popular with locals. There's an extensive pizza menu and a chalkboard of eight craft beers — sours, lagers, ales and experimental blends. Most of them were brewed just a few feet away, making it some of the most fresh and delicious beer you'll find in all of Iceland.

Skyrgerðin is a more formal sit-down option. It's a quiet, cosy eatery that opened in 2016, offering Italian staples, steaks, and comfort food

dishes. The service is warm and attentive, and the smoky king prawn bruschetta and piping hot, crisp and creamy arancini are menu highlights. There's also Matkráin, a smart and snappy sister restaurant to the classic Reykjavík smørrebrød joint Jómfrúin, where we have a lunch-time snack of perfectly plated steak tartare and a decadent, creamy prawn cocktail.

Eventually, it's time to reluctantly head back to town, and as we hit the Hellisheiði, my eyes scan Hveragerði's leafy streets and rooftops one more time. We're only just leaving, but I'm already planning a quick return. ■

Hveragerði is 45km from Reykjavík on Route One South. Book a stay at Inni Apartments at inniapartments.is



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Explore & Eat

Far Flung Food

A week of discovery and dining around the Westfjords

WORDS Shruthi Basappa
IMAGE The Reykjavik Grapevine Archives

shame, because the not-so-remote Westfjords boast some of the most stunning landscapes the country has to offer. From stretches of white sandy beaches at Rauðasandur, to one of the world's most impressive bird cliffs at Látrabjarg, to the brilliant cascade of Dynjandi waterfall, the fingered fjords of the region pack a dizzying punch.

Having now spent a year living in the region, I can attest to the warmth of the Westfjords and how well connected it is to the mainland despite the distance. Then again, as with many places in Iceland, the drive and distance is as much a part of the experience as the destination.

HOW TO GET THERE

In 2022, Lonely Planet named the region #1 on the list for Best in Travel. Fuelled both by international recognition as well as the tireless efforts of local communities, the Westfjords have been intentional about their positioning as a unique, sustainable travel destination. For decades now, its remoteness and small population have somewhat preserved pockets of traditional life in its many fishing villages and towns. Many, like in Bolungarvík, still hold annual "peysuföt" parties for couples, while the sighting of the sun after a long winter culminates in rightful celebration, replete with pancakes and parties, on "fyrsti sólardagur."

There are several ways to get to the region, depending on what towns and attractions you want to visit. Since there are no direct flight services to the region out of Keflavík, it is likely you will either fly from the Reykjavík's domestic airport to Ísafjörður, or make the drive from the capital along one of two common routes – traversing the fjords of 'Djúpið or taking the mountain roads of Dynjandisheiði. Both will reward you with unforgettable sights of the grassy plains of the south, swiftly changing to hilly terrain, endless skies and unforgettable views. Don't forget to make pit stops as necessary.

Even in over-exposed Iceland there exist areas visited by less than 10% of tourists each year. In fact, just as few Icelanders have ever travelled to the area. And it's a



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Ban Thai is not "fast food" restaurant food made fresh from scratch, it's not pre-made, every meal take some time to cook.



Right as you enter the Búðardalur region is Rjómabúið Erpsstaðir. Pioneers of dairy products, there has seldom been an independent producer who offered as delicious alternatives to monopolistic dairy company MS as this family business. The skyr konfekt is an utterly delicious confectionary, marrying Iceland's two culinary loves, skyr and white chocolate. Plenty of cheese, homemade bread and butter speckled with sea salt flakes stock the shelves. Whether you have a picnic basket or not, get a scoop of their ice cream. The rhubarb is especially lovely — a taste of the creamy summer we all yearn for.

You can continue on your journey past Búðardalur in one of two ways. The scenic route of Breiðafjörður is especially pretty, with little islands dotting exceptionally still waters. See if you can spot the little fisk-búð by Þverá á Barðaströnd to buy duck eggs and smoked trout. Pay by transferring money to the account info shared inside. It's an honesty system, so don't be an ass — pay for what you take.

If you go the other way, then you may want to stop in Hólmavík for an introduction to all the witchcraft and magic steeped into runes and bones or just keep driving until you make it to either Ísafjörður or one of the fjord towns on the other side of the peninsula.

Since an itinerary would vary depending on your interest, here is a selection of our must-do's when in the Westfjords, from a food lover's perspective. Stop as much or as little as you'd please. Plan for contingencies if you're flying to the region, as windy weather can often stall or delay flights. If driving, make sure to have a good car, preferably a four-wheel drive, as weather can play havoc even during the summer months — you are in Iceland, after all; changing weather is the one thing you can always count on.

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61, 401 Ísafjörður
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Once a family home where 27 people are believed to have lived, this sensitive restoration of a traditional turf house comes alive during summer. Seals laze around in their

ble — keeping a restaurant going in one of the more sparsely populated regions. Open throughout the year, this conscious cafe dishes up wholesome eggs on toast, warm-from-the-oven cakes and pastries, and a mean coffee. The walls are papered in a rotating carousel of community outreach programmes. It is an excellent place to practise your fledgling Icelandic.

TJÖRUHÚSIÐ
Neðstakaupstað,
400 Ísafjörður
Monday: 18:00 - 22:00;
Tue-Sun: 12:00 - 14:00
& 18:00 - 22:00

Despite its popularity with locals and Icelanders across the country, Tjöruhúsið still manages to be a bit of a secret haunt. The definitive seafood buffet experience, this is one of a kind dining that showcases the best of Icelandic seafood cooked simply but still elevated. No matter your feelings about cod throats, make room for unctuous on the inside, crispy on the outside morsel of gellur or kokotxas. Most of the fish is cooked in copious amounts of butter, pan-fried with olives here, some grapes there, lots of lemon, or a savoury onion sauce. Helpings are unlimited so bring an appetite. Children eat for free, so hurrah!

otherworldly, so stay a while, even as the seagulls squawk overhead.

VÍKURSKÁLINN
Purðarbraut, 415 Bolungarvík
Daily: 10:00 - 16:00

Would you believe me if I told you this tiny restaurant/drive-through in a former gas station whips up tasty pizzas and burgers that would rival Reykjavík's juiciest joints? Locals from around the area flock to this tiny place to fulfil their fast food cravings, washing it all down with an ice cold beer.

ÍPRÓTTAMÍÐSTÖÐIN BRATTAHLÍÐ
Aðalstræti 55,
450 Patreksfjörður
Mon-Thurs: 8:00 - 21:00;
Friday: 8:00 - 19:30;
Sat-Sun: 10:00 - 15:00

That rare pool in Iceland that doesn't overlook a grey parking lot or block out views with tall timber screens meant to protect from the wind. In Patreksfjörður, the town went all out and splurged on an infinity-style pool with sweeping fjord views and lounging pools that make the drive well worth it.

SIMBAHÖLLIN
Fjarðargötu 5, 470 Þingeyri
June 1-Sept 8,
Daily: 10:00 - 17:00

Cute as a button Simbahöllin is a passion project of an industrious Belgian family that fell in love with Þingeyri and the rundown Sigmundurarbúð, which they restored into the easily recognised yellow-green café. Known for their now legendary Belgian waffles with cream and their in-house bakes, the family has built a community around them, as is commonplace in the countryside. Stop for soup, stay for waffles and gazing out at the dreamy vistas. You might even end up staying for their special tajine nights or one of many concerts and gallery openings. ■

In Patreksfjörður, the town went all out and splurged on an infinity-style pool with sweeping fjord views and lounging pools that make the drive well worth it.

chonky blond glory by the rocky beach close by. Inside it smells like grandma's house with freshly baked waffles and pancakes all day. Psst... keep your eyes peeled for the plastic box of blueberry and rhubarb jam; it's some of the best in the country.

SÚÐAVÍK HIKING TRAILS

Just before you reach this sleepy fishing village, stop at Valagil, a spectacular ravine with an even more impressive waterfall that runs through it. You'll find this at the end of Álftafjörður, not too far from Suðavík. I believe its remote location is the reason for its hidden status. This is a good time to whip out that picnic as Suðavík has not much in terms of food options except for the cafe at the Melrakkasetrið.

HEIMABYGGÐ
Aðalstræti 22b, 400 Ísafjörður
Mon-Fri: 8:00 - 18:00;
Sat: 10:00 - 17:00;
Sun: 10:00 - 16:00

A cosy little cafe/bakery/lunch spot all rolled into one, Heimabyggð seems to be doing the impossi-

DOWNTOWN ÍSAFJÖRÐUR
Neðstakaupstað,
400 Ísafjörður
May 15 - Aug 31: 10:00 - 17:00;
Sept. 1 - 15: 11:00 - 15:00

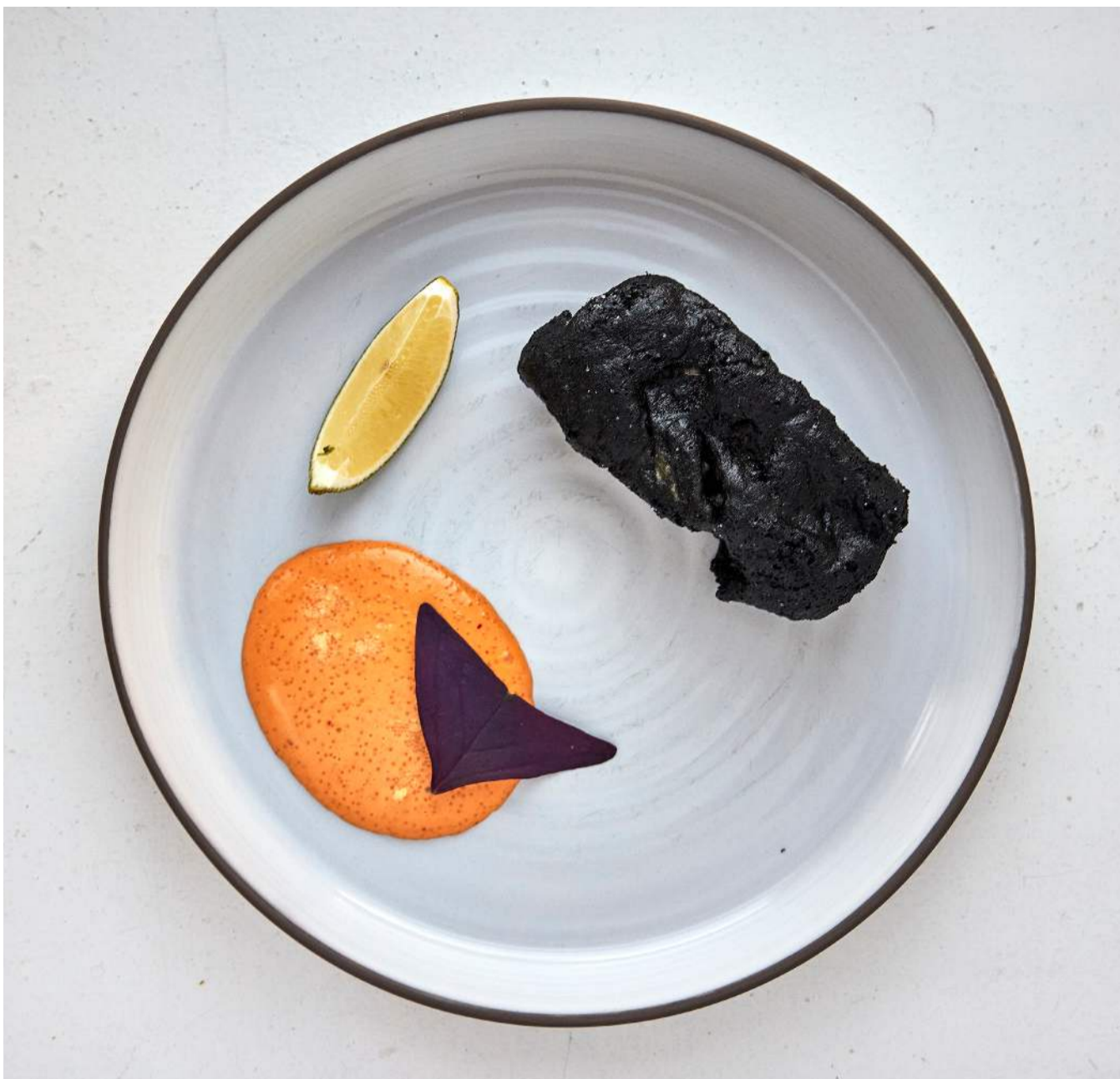
Once bundled up out of the café, make your way towards Tangagata. All the streets between Aðalstræti and Silfurgata are some of the most charming cottage-core lanes, replete with full elevations of old Icelandic timber houses, some dating back to the Danish period. Don't miss out on the impressive swimming pool by state architect Guðjón Samuelsson. Walk towards Neðstakaupstað and you'll find a collection of pristine timber houses. The grand dame of them all is the black timber house with an impressive roof and style rarely seen in Iceland. This is home to the Westfjords Heritage Museum or Byggðasafn Vestfjarða. Dating back to the 18th century when Danish merchants still ruled, the exhibition is a fascinating insight into the fishing industry of the times. The building, setting and the exhibition make for a time-travelling experience that new-built structures seldom achieve.

SUNDLAUG BOLUNGARVÍKUR
Höfðastigur 1, 415 Bolungarvík
Mon-Fri: 6:00 - 21:00;
Sat-Sun: 10:00 - 18:00

This modest pool may not look like much from the outside, but walk into the changing room, pool and spa, and you'll quickly change your mind. Designed in a brutalist fashion by architect Jes Einar Þorsteinsson, custom details abound everywhere — from the tapered wall corners on the way to the spa, to the tiled corners. The outdoor hotpots and slide may not be avant garde, but there is little that comes close to the surreal joy of an early morning soak in an Icelandic hot pot.

ÓSVÖR MARITIME MUSEUM
Bolungarvík
Daily: 10:00 - 16:00

This sensitive, albeit romantic ideal of shoreside refuge for fishermen of yore is absolutely breathtaking. You'll even meet your host, a true Icelandic fisherman, kitted out in once traditional attire for the occupation. The views from Ósvör are



Festival Time

The Matey Seafood Festival Is Back!

Your guide to making the most of the Iceland's tastiest weekend

WORDS Shruthi Basappa
IMAGES Supplied / Karl Petersson

year – comes the third edition of the Matey Seafood Festival. From September 5 to 7, all of Vestmannaeyjar will turn into one big roving feast.

The brainchild of Frosti Gíslason and chef Gísli Matthías Auðunsson, Matey has garnered the support and respect of patrons and purveyors in equal measure. After last year's successful outing, this year promises to be an equally delectable affair, spanning a weekend of endless wining and dining in the food chest of Iceland.

On the roster are chefs Adriana Solis Cavita from Mexico, Rosie May Maguire from the U.K., and Renata Zalles from Bolivia. They will be taking over the kitchens at Gott, Slippurinn and Einsí Kaldi, respectively. In addition to the chefs bringing their A-game, techniques and tastes from their homelands, the organisers promise a weekend of feasting

across the many eateries and breweries in town.

Between them, these powerhouse chefs boast of experiences at Pujol and El Bulli via Adriana, while Rosie

After the furore over the all male line up at Food and Fun earlier this year, this is a heartening and much needed development to showcase the breadth and diversity of chefs.

and book accommodation, call in a favour with your island relatives or lay claim to a campsite post haste.

To get to Vestmannaeyjar, drive to Landeyjahöfn and take the ferry over to the archipelago. You can take the car over, or park overnight for a small fee. If you are car-free, then you can take the bus from Mjódd in Reykjavík to Landeyjahöfn. It is a comfortable, scenic drive and you'll get to see the grassland vibes of southern Iceland along the way.

Once in Vestmannaeyjar, there is plenty to do before dinner! So dress appropriately for some outdoorsy fun that promises to be just as spectacular as the dinners that await you.

Last year when I was there, the weather gods shone on us the entire weekend and I made the most of my days exploring the archipelago by ATV (not for the faint hearted!) and

After last year's successful outing, this year promises to be an equally delectable affair, spanning a weekend of endless wining and dining in the food chest of Iceland.

May brings time at Mana and a deep insight into modern British cuisine, and Renata lends a craft honed under culinary legends like Wolfgang Puck, José Andrés, Gaggan Anand, Garima Arora and Kamilla Seidler.

HOW TO MATEY

My professional advice would be to treat Matey like a music festival that requires some logistical finagling. So make reservations ahead of time

Vestmannaeyjar seems to be hell bent on keeping that "festival town" tag intact. Hot on the heels of Þjóðahátíð – the biggest music festival in the country, now in its 150th

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walking around the Eldheimar Volcano Museum and the Sagnheimar Folk Museum, which has gloriously shied away from anything digital while throwing in curveballs like jewellery made entirely of human hair.

If you'd like to explore the great outdoors, I cannot recommend the Ribsafari enough! It was probably the highlight of my visit last year. And being outdoors, getting up close and personal with the many islands and cliff faces definitely

dental by-catch of a massive bluefin tuna – a rarity in these parts and one we were lucky enough to try at each participating restaurant.

Food festivals allow for broad experimentation and throws open possibilities that wouldn't otherwise happen in more traditional settings. It's also a chance to try the best of Icelandic seafood seldom seen here.

Leaning into the role women have played in shaping the history of maritime Iceland, it seems fitting that as Matey grows, their commitment to centering these community stories and connections take centre stage. ■

Food festivals allow for broad experimentation and throws open possibilities that wouldn't otherwise happen in more traditional settings.

If you'd like to spend time indoors, then the SeaLife Trust Beluga Whale Sanctuary offers a first hand look at the local bird life and boasts of a couple of rescued belugas and puffins.

drummed up an appetite.

When it is time for dinner, I would dine at a different place for the duration of the festival. The menus are yet to be announced, but diners lucked out last year with an acci-

The Matey Seafood Festival takes over the Westman Islands September 5 to 7. Check out Matey.is for more information and to make reservations. See you there!



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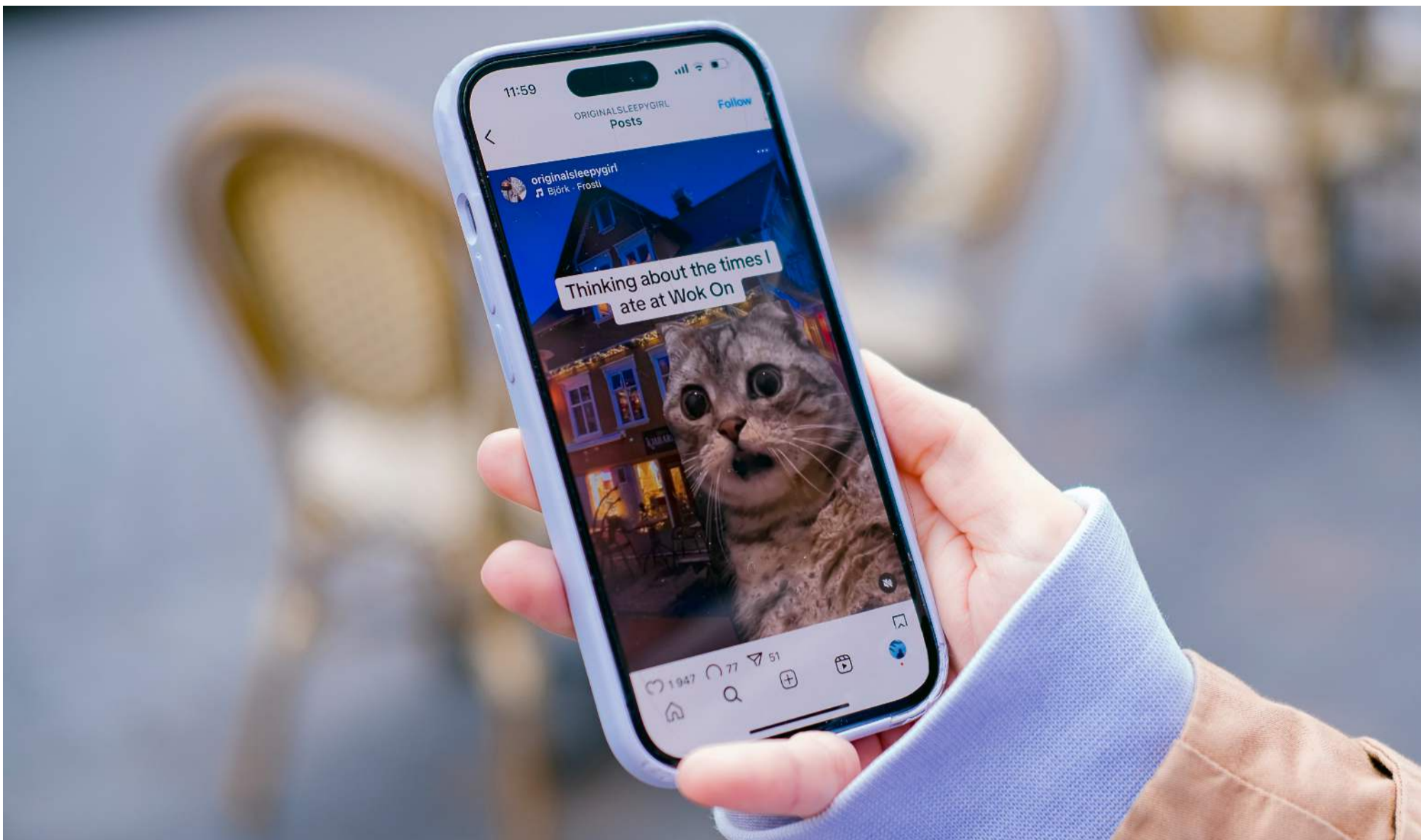
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Islanders When Life Gives You Hlemmur, Make M

Original Sleepy Girl turns daily life in Iceland into meme gold

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

If you look beyond the endless waterfalls and geothermal springs, living in Iceland can, at times, be just plain brutal. From wallet-draining bills when eating out to weather that triggers seasonal affective disorder (no matter the season), the reality of living on this “rock in the middle of the Atlantic” is far from the picture-perfect image that is often portrayed.

The creator behind the anonymous Instagram account “Original Sleepy Girl” captures the highs and lows of life in Iceland with a mix of sarcasm, self-deprecation and an unfiltered insider’s perspective – through memes.

I’m a snowboarder. I grew up skiing and snowboarding, and worked in the ski industry for a long time before ending up here five years ago. I make art and I’ve always been a creative person. The page started when I felt that social media was always showing me the same thing over and over again – just cookie-cutter stuff about Iceland.

I love it here, but it’s not perfect. Every joke I make is out of love for Iceland – I love the people here and there’s no other place like it, but I don’t think it’s perfect. I’m just opening up that discussion.

When I started, I was really struggling with immigrating here and I felt like nobody was talking about the challenges of living here. My friends were, of course, but from the outside, the content I was getting fed from Instagram was just “Iceland’s perfect. This is where you need to come if you want a better life.” It wasn’t realistic.

I started joking with people about things that are hard about living here. That’s how it started – a community of people talking about the realness of being here. It helps people feel less alone and just laugh about their experiences.

THE BIRTH OF ORIGINAL SLEEPY GIRL

I had a personal account with about 1,000 followers, where I had just been posting snowboard stuff or whatever. I didn’t focus on it. Then, I just renamed it.

I have narcolepsy, hence the name. There’s different levels of it, so mine is not so severe that it really debilitates my life, but I have sleeping spells where I get really tired. Basically I can just fall asleep at any time, any place.

There were people who were following me before who know who I am, but they probably stopped following me because now those things wouldn’t make sense – I don’t think

the jokes make sense, if you are not living in Iceland or have spent some time here. Otherwise, I don’t tell people who I am. The reason I like to keep it anonymous is that if everyone knew it was me, I personally wouldn’t be able to be creative and make jokes like I do. I’d be worried

KEEPING IT REAL

I started by watching funny things on Instagram, then I’d show them to a friend and say, “Oh, it’s like this when this happens in Iceland,” and they’d laugh. I just started posting them and it immediately took off.

I love it here, but it’s not perfect. Every joke I make is out of love for Iceland.

about what people would think. Since nobody knows it’s me, I feel okay doing riskier things. I don’t worry about it and can be free to create whatever I want. I also don’t see the point – everybody’s face is on the internet now. It’s a meme page and it doesn’t need to have a face. But I also think there’s no mystery in the world or on the internet anymore. It’s fun to have a little bit of mystery. I’ve heard people talking about the “Original Sleepy Girl memes,” but nobody knows it’s me.

My background is in marketing, so I know what you need to do to get views. I’ll use some trending content if a video going around applies to what I’m talking about, or sometimes I’ll use one hashtag about Iceland. Besides that, I don’t really do any trending stuff, because I think most of it is pretty cringy, like when it’s a dance or people selling guides to Iceland. You can do whatever you want, but I definitely don’t want to do anything like that. I just want to talk

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emes

about my experience. I don't make money off of it and I don't plan on trying to make money off of it, unless I tried to sell art or something tangible. But I'll never sell a guide or try to make money that way. I think we have enough people doing that.

I've heard the best way to do it is to make stuff ahead of time and have a schedule, but I just don't work like that. It depends if I'm in a funny mood or not. Sometimes I'm in a bad mood and I just don't post anything.

If I tried to monetise it for some reason, it would defeat the purpose of the account — which is about being real and discussing how hard it can be here sometimes.

I've had brands reach out to me and ask for product placements or to make memes for them. But I'm not going to post any of that stuff on my page and I haven't done any of it. I did one for free for the Deig bakery because I love that guy — he's a friend. I want to stay away from it because I think the people who follow my page do so because it's not like that. If I tried to monetise it for some reason, it would defeat the purpose of the account — which is about being real and discussing how hard it can be here sometimes.

My approach is pretty spontaneous. I'll just be walking and think of something that's funny, or if I see something that's funny online, I'll see if I can change it into something that fits what I'm thinking of. I don't take it too seriously and I don't spend too much time thinking about something. It's more of a creative release.

Or, if I'm really pissed about something, like "Oh my god, Hlemmur is totally torn up. I can't take a bus anywhere," I could just make a joke and share about how Hlemmur is always messed up. It's also kind of therapeutic for me.

MEME-INGFUL IMPACT

I've met a lot of talented, awesome people and have made a lot more connections and friends through my page. Some people I've been talking to for a while I've met in person. Most of them I haven't met, but we're still online friends.

I found it really hard to make friends at first here, especially when I didn't know Icelandic at all. The account made me feel a lot less alone. People tell me they feel the same way about my page. They feel less alone here and can relate to some of the stuff I post.

A lot of Icelanders follow me, but also many people who have moved here from different countries. I think 90% of my followers are in Iceland. It's probably mostly people who have moved here, but Icelandic people definitely understand [the jokes]; we're all dealing with the same issues — the housing, the taxes, and so on. Once, Bubbi Morthens liked and commented on one of my videos. That was one of my best achievements because he's so amazing and such a national treasure.

I get a lot more positive feedback than negative, but I definitely get some. I'm a really sensitive person, so at first I thought, "Oh, I'm not going to post anymore." But it gets easier the more you receive. You just push through and get to the point where you're just gonna keep doing it, no matter what. Now it does not really bother me as much.

I get a lot of messages from people that say, "This is really cool," "You make a difference," "I really appreciate it." I try to focus on those rather than the negative stuff.

BONDING MEDIUM

I've been thinking about what else I could do with my page. I tried TikTok a little bit, but I feel kind of too old for it. I still use it a little bit, but the way TikTok's algorithm works, it pushes content that I don't want to make. I've been thinking about other options: possibly making a website, maybe trying to have meetups, or selling art. It would be cool if it could actually bring people together and people could actually make friends, since many people from the page already talk to each other.

The page has already surpassed my expectations of what I thought it would be. I don't measure [success] or worry about how to get to a certain number of followers, I just wanted to reach a point where I feel like I'm doing something positive. Even though it's sometimes through a negative approach, like complaining, it's still an outlet for people. When the first person commented, "This made a difference to me," I realised I had achieved my goal. Now I'm trying to figure out what the next step is. My goal was simply to make people laugh and feel better. I think I've done that. ■

For your daily dose of memes, follow @originalsleepygirl on Instagram.

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The Haul

The We Don't Know What's What Shopping Bag

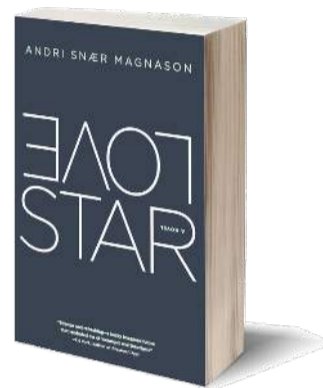
What day is it? Is this summer? Who even am I?

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGES The Internet

Sometimes you're feeling too scattered to think of a theme. So we're going on a retail free for all. A little bit to wear, a little bit of decor, a little snackage. All the things all at once. Because sometimes that's what life calls for. Here's what's in our shopping bag this week. ■



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8

1 *High neck cashmere sweater from Kristensen Du Nord*
48.000 ISK, available from Buy My Chic, Óðinsgata 8b

2 *"Lovestar," a novel by Andri Snær Magnason*
3.399 ISK, available from Eymundsson

3 *Origami Paper*
1.990 ISK, available from Nakano, Grensásvegur 16

4 *Be Nice T-Shirt, Kids – 7*
.990 ISK, available from Húrra Reykjavík, Hverfisgata 18a

5 *Moccamaster 741*
42.900 ISK, available from Kokka, Laugavegur 47

6 *Mofu Wool Blanket*
32.990 ISK, available from Mikado, Kolagata Hafnartorg

7 *Saltverk Flaky Sea Salt*
1.367 ISK, available from shop.grapevine.is

8 *Oloves, olives with basil and garlic*
155 ISK, available from Krónan



Musings

Know Thyself (If You Can Afford It)

The prohibitive cost of mental health care in Iceland

WORDS Halldór Armand
IMAGE Art Bicnick

We live in a world that slowly drives most of us to the brink. A society where everything revolves around profiting off others with minimal effort, where people scramble to gain wealth and opportunities through political connections, and where the majority are forced to sell the best years of their lives into servitude. The emptiness of this existence is so profound that, as one of our best authors once put it, “It’s a full-time job just trying not to lose your mind in Iceland.” Are we not, after all, the biggest consumers of psychiatric drugs in the world?

The capitalist reality (or state-capitalist, to be precise) is essentially one big assault on mental health. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, people’s well-being has significantly deteriorated as the general public was locked up and isolated in the name of public health. Moreover, people may struggle with old wounds, trauma, grief, and suffering from the past that they cannot manage, which dictates their daily lives—often without them even realizing it or understanding why. Given all this, easy

access to psychological services is absolutely essential.

Yet, mental well-being isn’t a direct part of the welfare system except in limited ways. If you break a toe, you can go straight to the emergency room at any hour of the day, but if you experience a mental breakdown, lose someone close, or suffer from terrible heartbreak, there’s nowhere to turn. There is no center that will take in a crushed heart. When life pulls the rug out from under us, we stand alone; either friends and family catch us, or no one does.

To some extent, modern therapy serves as a secular channel for the Christian concept of redemption in a world where God is dead. Just as faith is a journey from darkness into light, from the desert to the promised land, the role of the therapist is to guide you out of the jungle of your own emotional life and into the freedom that awaits beyond. Icelanders, generally speaking, are a reserved bunch, probably having spent centuries without the luxury of pondering how they felt. This attitude lingers still—people are expected to bear their grief in silence, content themselves with drinking their milk, and pour extra gravy on the potatoes.

But the fact is that psychological treatments like EMDR therapy can completely transform a person’s life and well-being in a remarkably short time. The brilliance of some of these therapies is that we don’t even fully understand how they work—they just do. For those interested, I recom-

mend the powerful book *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel van der Kolk, which explores how holistic psychological therapies can help people confront trauma. It’s extraordinary that people can access such help, find strength, guidance, and hope from someone who understands their situation. But what’s not extraordinary is that to access this help, you need to be able to pay 25,000 krónur per session. So there’s a significant class divide—not only in the housing market but also in our inner lives. Icelandic authorities are willing to subsidize and protect the most ridiculous things that have nothing to do with public welfare, but this should be a priority. Wake up! Even the most hardened advocates of “free markets and individualism” must see that this would ultimately save the healthcare system a lot of money. Where do all these lifestyle diseases come from, anyway?

The famous inscription on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi read: “Know thyself.” Today, we might add: “...if you can afford it!” It’s a major revelation in a person’s life when they realize that this task—knowing oneself—is much deeper and more complex than we ever imagined. We are mysteries to ourselves. Gradually gaining more understanding of who we are, how we function, and why is invaluable knowledge that can, over time, become wisdom. And it is this wisdom that ultimately leads to the one true, great victory in life: conquering oneself. *Vincit qui se vincit.* ■

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Horotropes We Know What You Will Do Next Summer!

These horrorscopes are coming from inside the house

WORDS Charlie Winters & Catherine Magnúsdóttir
IMAGE Adobe Stock

Ah! The cabin on the outskirts of Mosfellsbær, you say? No one's been up there in 13 years. Not since... well perhaps I shouldn't say but the last group to go never returned. It's slasher season, you know, so this month is gonna get messy



ARIES
(March 21 – April 19)

You just had to touch the cursed anvil of the zombie man who drowned twice and died thrice, didn't you? Well, undead killers be upon ye, Aries. Him and his entire murder family are coming for you.



VIRGO
(August 23 – September 22)
Gotta catch 'em all! Those horny thirty-year-old looking teens aren't going to inflict gratuitous violence upon themselves!



TAURUS
(April 20 – May 20)

My God, you're good at running. Keep it up, Taurus, with your grit, stubbornness and lung capacity, you might be the blood covered Final Girl™ (gender neutral) after all!



LIBRA
(September 23 – October 22)
If your friends are going missing one by one, is this really the time to go skinny dipping in the lake? Have you at least waited an hour after eating?



CAPRICORN
(December 22 – January 19)

Hiding in the closet is no solution. Not only is it inauthentic but there are no more exits in here, you idiot! Go out there and slay or be slain!



GEMINI
(May 21 – June 20)

You know, Gemini, you might be inquisitive but ... Wait, did you hear something? I think there's someone in the bushes. Gemini, you should go check it out.



SCORPIO
(October 23 – November 21)
I know what you did last summer. We both know what you did. I definitely know. And since we both know, we're gonna say it at the same time, ready? Okay... 3... 2... 1...



AQUARIUS
(January 20 – Feb 18)

We get it, you think slasher films are beneath you – “the fast food of cinema.” Just remember when you're puffing your cigarette and adjusting your critic beret that none of your friends want to watch *Nosferatu: a Symphony of Horror* with you.



CANCER
(June 21 – July 22)

Kudos to you, Cancer, you just don't stay down! Just like that hulking figure with the machete behind you. T-t-turn... turn around, Cancer! TURN AROUND!!



SAGITTARIUS
(November 22 – December 21)
The fact that you got your freak on in the woods says nothing against you personally and we do not slut shame. You will, however, trip on a garden rake on your way back and die bloody and awkwardly while the killer is left to just watch in mild disappointment.



PISCES
(February 19 – March 20)

There are blood stains on the walls and the realtor mentioned the mysterious murders that occur every 13 years like clockwork, but honestly the housing market is in fucking shambles and this cabin is a killer deal. The price is to die for!



LEO
(July 23 – August 22)

Listen Leo, I know you came on this trip just to get laid by the quarterback but I'm telling you, the killer is gonna come through that window, stab him four times and then you're next. So go put on your underwear and start running.

“Drenched in taboo and encroaching vigorously on the pornographic, the slasher film lies by and large beyond the purview of the respectable audience.” (Carol J. Clover). And we wouldn't have it any other way! ■



Last Look

IMAGE: Leó Steiðsson from The Reykjavik Grapevine Archives
Stylised by Joana Fontinha

What will life look like in Reykjavik if the few remaining live music and cultural venues continue to be shuttered in favour of more hostel rooms, more puffin shops, more tourist luxuries? Joana Fontinha reflected on that trajectory to create an image that alludes to the larger loss of identity and connection that would ripple throughout society. But hey, at least the tourists get to sleep at night close to where those wild Reykjavik nights used to play out. ■

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Potent Quotables

All musicians have to start somewhere, nobody starts out by performing in Harpa.

Eliás Þórsson delves into the troubled state of Reykjavík's live music scene on pages 14-16

Diversity for sure! Being vulnerable. Queerness. Being yourself. Celebration of oddity.

Ish Sveinsson Houle previews the upcoming Hamraborg Festival in Kópavogur on page pages 18-19

My aim is never to make a film that wins awards. My aim is to get something out.

Award-winning director Rúnar Rúnarsson discusses his latest feature, Ljósbrót, on pages 20-21

For me, music is a dialogue. To invite people to join these conversations is a way of dropping my ego.

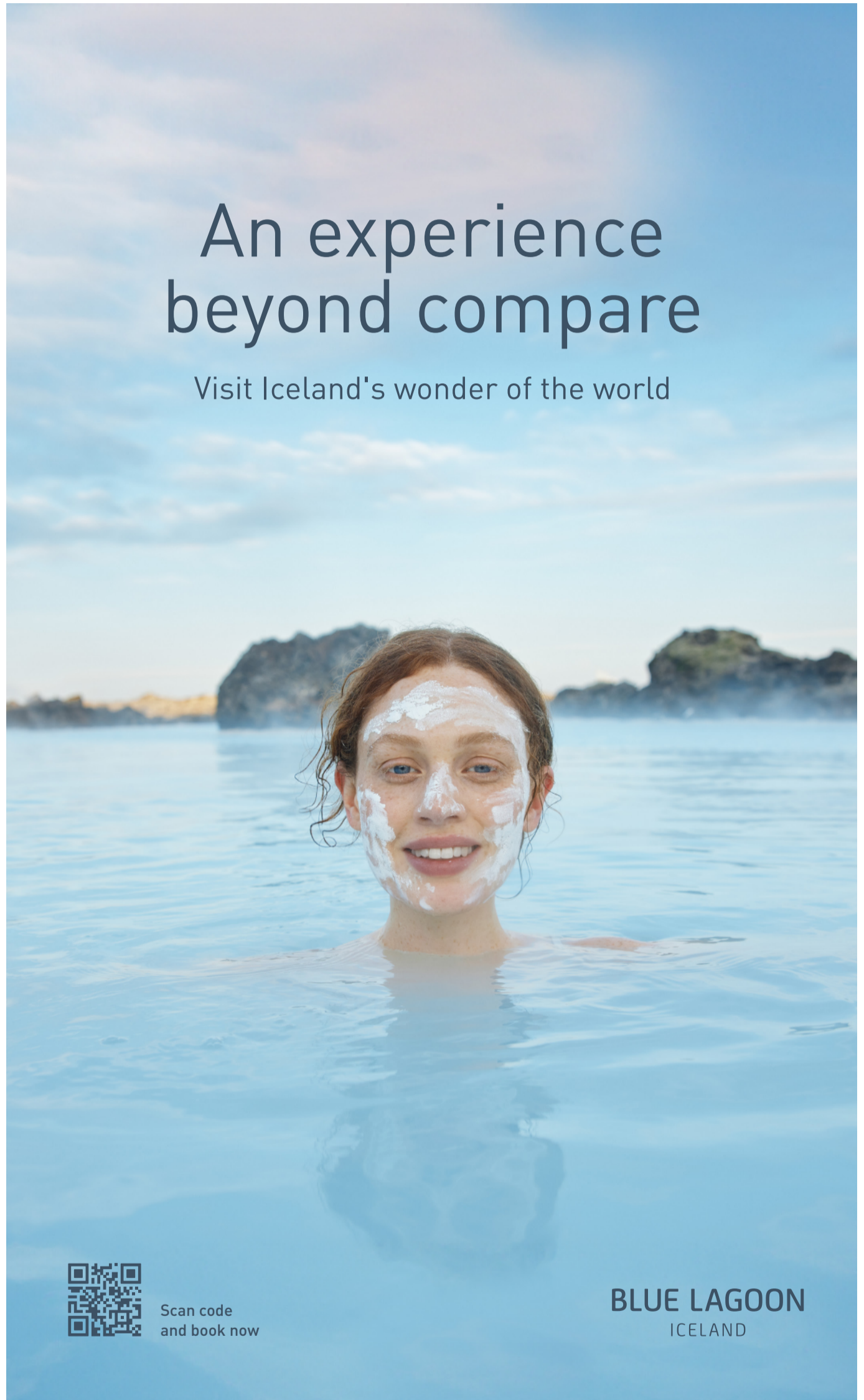
Kaktus Einarsson reflects on making his second solo album on page 30

As the building revealed itself, it was as though my own mind revealed itself to me.

Rex Beckett travels to Akureyri to visit the Icelandic Folk and Outsider Art Museum on page 34

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