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REYKJAVÍK GRAPEVINE

CORONA



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WORLD TOUR

2020

EXTREMELY
ONLINE

GIG GUIDE

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CITY MAP

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TRAVEL IDEAS

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FOOD



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What We Can Learn From The Virus

From the Editor-In-Chief, Valur Grettisson

In the light of unprecedented situations, The Reykjavík Grapevine has decided to put a pin in publishing until mid-April (we hope it won't last longer). Although, our web, grapevine.is, is always up and full of content, and that's where our focus is right now. But we are busy people and get bored quite easily. So we decided to publish a special online PDF for our supporters in the High Five Club, and of course, our devoted readers.

There is no shame in admitting that the COVID-19 situation is hurting our business, just as it has impacted the businesses and livelihoods of thousands connected to Iceland's travel industry. But temporary troubles are a small price to pay if lives are saved. The health of our fellow citizens is a higher priority than our wallets right now. We understand this, and we think this an important way of looking at things.

The coronavirus has given us

our humbleness back. It's a harsh reminder that nothing is a given in life. That our society is a fragile one. That everything we consider business as usual, is actually a privilege. The world was a completely different one just a month ago. Now, you can't travel and many countries have deprived people of their individual freedom in many ways. This will be a battle that we will have to fight for the next few months. The most pessimistic believe that this could take up to two years. And when that's over, well, then many of us around the world will probably need to fight with our governments to reclaim those rights.

While the timeline of this pandemic remains unclear, what's certain is that we will never see the world with the same eyes again. But it's up to us to use this unique opportunity to make changes for the better. Perhaps, there are some that want to go back to business as usual. But perhaps this will give us hind-

sight, and force us to ask a simple question: Do we want to go back to the same world we lived in before the virus? Perhaps the answer will be yes, we all want that. But we need to raise the question and see what we can learn from this experience and make something better out of it.

The staff of The Reykjavík Grapevine is incredibly grateful for the support from our High Five Club members. We are also touched by the general response from our readers. You remind us that we are on the right track, although much could change at The Reykjavík Grapevine, just as it could around the world. But it doesn't change the fact that we will keep on going as long as we can. We will bring you culture, news, and perhaps an occasionally bad joke while we do it. So, for the hand of The Reykjavík Grapevine, I just want to say thank you, and I hope that you will join our High Five Club if you haven't already. 🍷



Hannah Jane Cohen is based out of Iceland by way of New York. She's known for her love of Willa Ford, David Foster Wallace, and other such "intellectuals."

Her visionary work is known for expanding the definitions of emotion, introspection, and above all else, taste. Hannah is also the current Drag King of Iceland, Hans. Hannah is a Columbia alumni.



Sveinbjörn Pálsson is our Art Director. He's responsible for the design of the magazine and the cover photography. When he's not working here, he DJs as Terror-

disco, hosts the Funkpáturinn radio show, or sits at a table in a Laugardalur café, drinking copious amounts of coffee and thinking about fonts.



Samuel O'Donnell

Sam is an English major from The United States. He has his Bachelor's Degree, and keeps telling himself that this is the year he will begin pursuing his Master's. In his spare time, he enjoys playing video games, writing short horror sto-

ries, listening to all kinds of metal, and reading.



Andie Sophia Fontaine has lived in Iceland since 1999 and has been reporting since 2003. They were the first foreign-born

member of the Icelandic Parliament, an experience they recommend for anyone who wants to experience a workplace where colleagues work tirelessly to undermine each other.

A note from the art director: This is a temporary online-only redesign. As the issue will not be printed, the fonts are bigger, and we are not saving paper so we can allow ourselves more space, bigger pictures, and as much experimentation as we like. It's a new frontier! This issue is a bit messy. We pray forgiveness. We're still figuring out the kinks. Send your complaints to sveinbjorn@grapevine.is. Heart emoji, Sveinbjörn Pálsson, Art Director of The Reykjavík Grapevine.



Dystopian Iceland... As Usual

Iceland and the end of the world in Hollywood

Words: **Valur Gunnarsson** Image: **Enemy Mine Cinematic poster**

So the Apocalypse is upon us and we are all wondering what it will look like. For Iceland, it's business as usual, for when Hollywood filmmakers imagine the End of Days they surprisingly often come up with Iceland.

Dennis Quaid shot down over Iceland

One of the first instances happened in 1984 but was set in the late 21st Century. Mankind is at war with the reptilian Dracs, and Dennis Quaid is shot down over Iceland where he must learn to get along with Lou Gossett Jr. in a rubber suit. However, after spending the whole budget, the film was scrapped and Iceland was deemed to look too much like Iceland and Gossett too much like a man in a rubber suit. The director was replaced with Wolfgang Petersen, fresh off 'The Neverending Story', and reshot in the Canary Islands and West Germany. The finished product, 'Enemy Mine', bombed at the box office in 1985 but did brisk business

in the real-life dystopia known as the Soviet Union.

Tom Cruise dumped in Iceland

Iceland looking like Iceland was not an issue for Tom Cruise, who came to these barren shores in 2012 to shoot 'Oblivion', set in a post-Apocalyptic 2077. Cruise himself left scorched earth behind, irritating northern farmers by closing off their grazing land and rumours even circulated that he had supermarkets closed to others when he did his shopping. Perhaps he was just being sensible about germs? Anyway, the poor fella can hardly be blamed for being in a bad mood. Katie Holmes came to Iceland just to dump him on his 50th birthday.

Russell Crowe worked out in Iceland

Rather more popular with the locals was Russell Crowe who worked out at the local gym and even played guitar with Patti Smith on Reykjavík's

annual Culture Night. He came here the year after the Cruise to shoot the pre-Apocalyptic Biblical epic 'Noah'. Irrespective of whether Hollywood producers imagine dystopias in the future or the past, they look a lot like Iceland. The same is true for many an inhospitable planet, ranging from 'Thor: Dark World' to the Star Wars franchise.

One non-Hollywood production that may have included a post-Apocalyptic Iceland is 1972's 'La cicatrice intérieure', or Inner Scar, starring the Germanic goddess Nico. But since the film has no discernible plot, it's hard to tell.

Icelanders don't make Sci-Fi, but we tried

What about Icelanders themselves? While we have the scenery for sci-fi, we have sadly lacked the budget. One of the few exceptions, if not in terms of budget, was 2010's 'Boðberi' ('Messenger') about a cult intending to destroy the economy and featuring scenes

shot during the actual Pots and Pans revolution. Another film set in a seemingly dystopian world much like our own is 'Blossi/810551', which sank the career of promising young director Júlíus Kemp but has since been re-evaluated as 90s camp. It includes the immortal line: "All we need to do is find another planet and keep the party going."

An odd masterpiece

Perhaps the best Icelandic dystopias are ones that are set in the past. This goes for almost all of Hrafn Gunnlaugsson's oeuvre, who for a while specialized in Viking films. Yet his masterpiece, if unacknowledged as such, is 'Myrkrhöfðinginn' ('Prince of Darkness') from 2000. Set in the Puritan era of the 17th century, it has witch hunts, superstition, castration and Danes. None more dystopian.

We will see how the post-COVID era holds up in comparison. 🇮🇸



A Little Help Here!

Smá Hjálp bands small businesses together in the face of uncertainty

“These are tough times for us all and we are all in this together, so we will only get through it by sticking together and supporting each other.”

Words: **Hannah Jane Cohen**
Photo: **Art Bicnick**

With the COVID-19 situation all but halting the Icelandic economy, many small independent businesses are in serious jeopardy. In order to help at-risk institutions, Anna Worthington De Matos, the founder of the Reykjavík Tool Library, created the website Smá Hjálp, shining a light on local businesses endangered by the crisis.

Creating a platform

“The idea for Smá Hjálp came about when friends with small independent businesses started to voice their concerns about what would happen if we were made to close down or reduce services,” she explains. “The point of the website is to give a platform for those businesses to communicate directly to the customer how they can be helped and supported during this time.”

The coronavirus pandemic, with subsequent travel restrictions and gathering bans, has already profoundly changed many local businesses, particularly those that thrive on person-to-person contact, Anna emphasises. “What we do at the Tool Library is a circular economy and that means we need to share things to stay alive,” she says. “This is not a really good time for ‘sharing’ unless we are talking about kindness.”

“People are scared and worried about their financial situations over the next couple of months and that will affect their ability to also support us local small businesses,” she explains. “It will be a matter of them needing to save money vs. wanting to help us. These are very difficult times indeed.”

Out-of-the-box thinking

Businesses are doing their part though, by adapting their services to better cater to customers in the current climate. “Restaurants and bars are offering delivery and

take-away, which is a great option, but this still means they will have less staff on,” Anna explains. “Others are selling gift cards that can be used at a different date in the near future.” She names vegan cake company Baunin as a good example of this.

Some, particularly non-profits, have opened up donation channels. For instance, Kattakafihúsið is accepting donations to take care of the cats. Others are thinking more out-of-the-box. “We at the Tool Library are trying to figure out a system where people can possibly pre-book their borrowings,” Anna explains. “We are working on it.”

People over business

Aside from do-it-together solutions, what can the government actually do to protect small businesses? “Honestly, at this point I am not sure,” Anna answers. “Tax breaks might be a good idea for the time being, but I am at a loss. The government should prioritise people over business, but I also think they should prioritise small businesses over for-profit corporations that are going to be fine.”

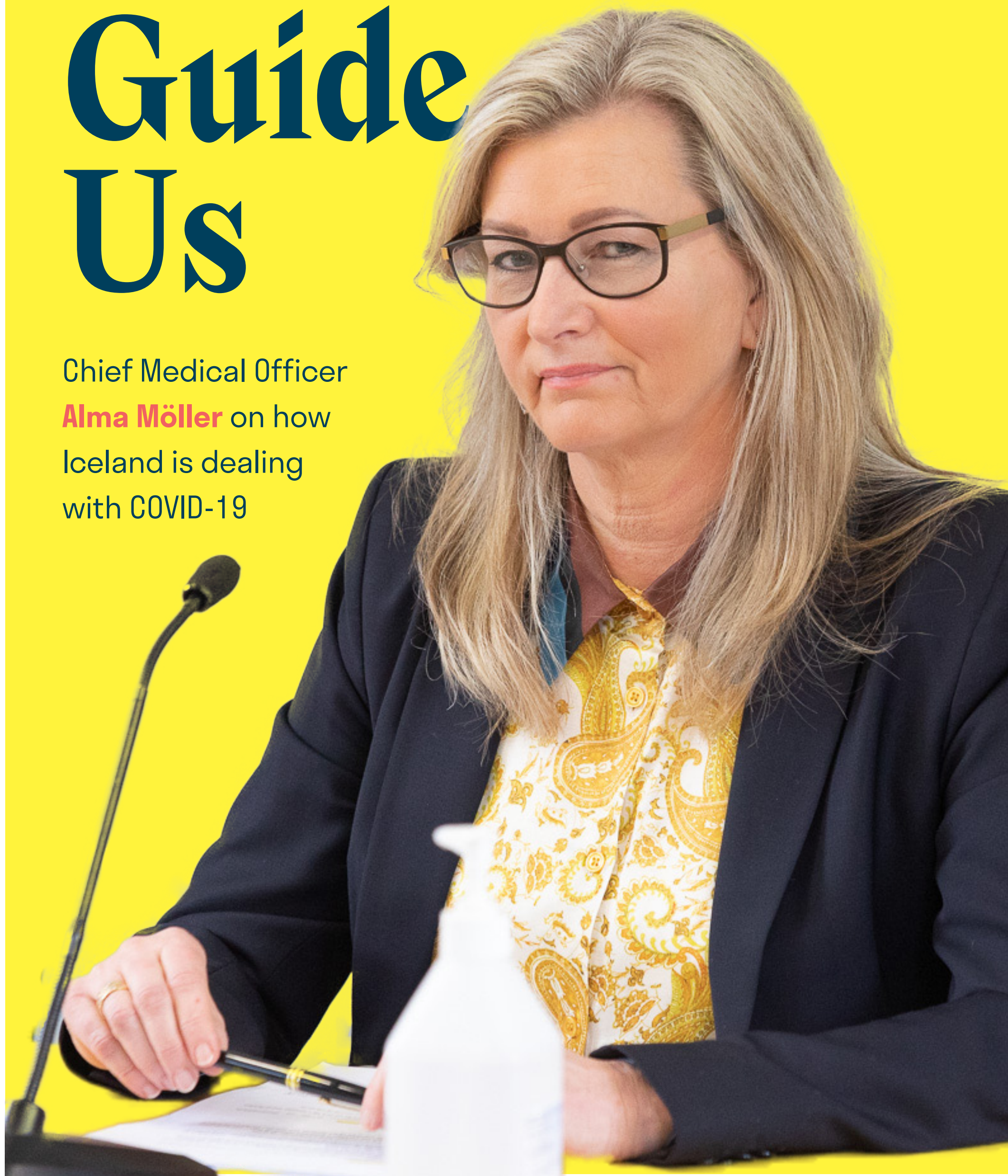
Most of all, Anna believes that the instant catastrophic effect COVID-19 had on the Icelandic economy should be a wake up call. “If there was ever a time to start making significant systemic changes to the economy, this is it,” she says.

Current difficulties are sure to pass, but in the meantime, all the average person can do is try to prop each other up, which is the overall goal of Smá Hjálp. “If you like a place, like what they stand for and want to help them keep going, share their posts, pass on their information, like, comment and, if you can afford to, buy something,” Anna concludes. “These are tough times for us all and we are all in this together, so we will only get through it by sticking together and supporting each other.” 🍷

Not Letting Panic Guide Us

Words: **Andie Sophia Fontaine**
Photo: **Art Bienick**

Chief Medical Officer
Alma Möller on how
Iceland is dealing
with COVID-19



As some countries close their borders, screenings and tests are either too expensive or impossible to get a hold of, and even some world leaders take up science-denying rhetoric, Iceland has distinguished itself in its fight against the spread of the novel coronavirus. This has involved a concerted effort by the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management, local and national authorities, and the office which oversees Iceland's healthcare system, the Directorate of Health.

Chief Medical Officer Alma Möller heads this office, and has been at the front lines in Iceland's fight against the virus from the start. She's been a part of the daily press briefings that have kept the country informed, the screening and quarantine operations that have helped slow the virus' spread, and the creation of the information site—covid.is—which is loaded with helpful resources.

Iceland's advantage

Contrary to what you might have heard elsewhere, the novel coronavirus is not like the flu; in many ways, it's worse.

"It's a new virus that we haven't seen before, and it's always cause for concern when a new epidemic arises," Alma tells us. "We know that this virus is more contagious than influenza, and we know that it results in more people becoming seriously ill. There isn't any vaccine or cure. We see what's happening in China and what's happening in northern Italy, and this has caused us concern and prompted us to take more extensive measures."

Iceland's edge in the fight against the novel coronavirus is a combination of both policy choices and its small size.

"What makes Iceland special is that we have this good civic protection system, and a good emergency response system," Alma says. "[Also good are] our small size, and how easy it is to reach people. It might also be good to be a small nation, as it can make the health care system more extensive and exact. Our response in Iceland has actually been growing a lot since the end of January, while other nations have maybe not taken any large-scale responses. We started by educating the general public, and have been doing so for a long time now. Then we've been trying to test for the virus early, and put people [who test positive] into isolation. We've tracked paths of transmission while having people go into home quarantine. Isolation is for people who test positive, and quarantine is for those who may have had contact with the virus without us yet knowing."

"Now we've gone a bit further in our response, by instituting this public gatherings ban," Alma explains, referring to the ban of gatherings of more than 100 people that went into effect on March 16th. It has since been amended to limit gatherings to no more than 20 people, maintaining a two metre distance between people at all times. "We're also protecting those who are the most sensitive to COVID-19; the elderly, and those

with certain pre-existing medical conditions. We want to protect those from infection as best we can. All of these responses are to slow down the spread of this epidemic, so that we don't get many cases in just a few days."

Alma points out the oft-touted "flattening the curve" approach; that protective measures help keep the number of people treated within numbers that any given country's health care system can handle. This has been a central theme in the Icelandic response.

The deCODE screenings

In mid-March, prior to a shortage of testing pins, deCODE Genetics was taking samples from roughly 1,000 Icelanders per day. Preliminary results from testing the general public indicate that the novel coronavirus is not widespread in the country, and could be as low as less than 1%. In fact, deCODE CEO Kári Stefánsson speculates that "it's likely that those who have reason to believe they may have contracted or come in contact with the virus are more likely to come to us."

Alma, for her part, remains cautiously optimistic.

"This is a small sample size that deCODE [has collected], but it indicates that under 1% of those in the greater Reykjavik area are carrying the virus," Alma says. "It's difficult to comment definitively at this time, but if this percentage bears out, then it's perhaps lower than we expected. This also encourages us to continue on with the same measures we've already been taking. It shows that they're working; that the virus isn't spreading out. So it would be wise to continue with what we've been doing; screening early, quarantining and isolating. It's just not known anywhere in the world what percentage of the general population has the virus; we only know how many people have gotten very ill. As it's a new epidemic, it's very important to get better information."

The criticism

Alma emphasises that there are as yet no plans to increase or intensify the measures Icelandic authorities have already taken, saying, "This screening is ongoing and we've already done a great deal, and it's working, but we are continuously assessing the situation."

Not everyone has been satisfied, though. Across social media, armchair diagnosticians have called for Iceland to raise the threat level, take more drastic measures, or even shut its borders entirely. Alma advises that people look at the situation accurately and not lose their heads.

"I think the numbers that we have here [on rate of infection in the general population] don't support that criticism," she says. "But of course, we always welcome criticism, and continue to assess the situation. As things stand now, our measures have been working, and no decisions have been taken in a state of panic."

Please don't break quarantine

Up until now, those who have been placed in quarantine have been advised to stay home. They are not kept in isolation—as has been said, isolation is for those who test positive, while quarantine is for those who may have caught the virus but are still waiting on results. There have been some dubious reports of people breaking quarantine, and at the time of this writing authorities have announced that they will be doing phone checks to make sure people in quarantine stay home. In addition to breaking quarantine potentially endangering the general public, those who do so may face criminal penalties.

"There have been some tips to the police that someone has broken quarantine, and in a very few cases that has been the case," Alma tells us. If someone does break quarantine, then according to Icelandic law on infectious disease, it is possible to enforce penal law. But thus far we haven't had to do that, as people are in general doing well and listening to orders, as this is something everyone should do."

"Our goal is to tell the truth"

Regardless of Iceland's effective approach, Alma maintains that the emphasis on personal responsibility is not unique to Iceland.

"We've maybe acted sooner in getting these health guidelines out to people, but I think this is the key component," she says. "And I think it's easy for us to get this information to the public, because we're so few. Our goal is to tell the truth, and we make decisions based on the facts that we have. It's very easy to judge after the fact, but all the decisions we make are based on the best knowledge we have at that given time."

She also points out the website, covid.is, which is a veritable wealth of information on how to stay safe and keep others safe as well.

There's no telling how long this situation may last. Things may get better, and they may get worse. The situation changes from day to day. At the very least, however, Icelanders are not kept in the dark about the current state of things, they have full access to the country's health services, and all the information one might need is just a few clicks away. 🍷

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28/02
- **First confirmed COVID-19 case in Iceland**
An Icelander in his 40s tested positive at Landspítali hospital having fallen ill after returning from a ski trip in Northern Italy.

6/03
- **First transmission within Iceland**
Four cases of domestic transmission are reported, bringing the total to 47. Up to this point, infections had been confirmed exclusively among people returning from abroad.
- **Emergency declared**
The Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management declares a state of emergency, triggering the emergency phase of Iceland’s response to the outbreak.

12/03
- **Over 100 confirmed cases**

13/03
- **deCODE Genetics begins testing for COVID-19**
deCODE launches a free drive-thru COVID-19 screening service. 510 people are tested on the first day and the first results indicate that about 1% of the population is infected.

16/03
Mass gathering ban starts
Gatherings of over 100 people are banned. Universities, secondary schools are closed and concerts are cancelled.

17/03
- **First COVID-19 related death in Iceland**
A 36-year-old Australian tourist died at a hospital in Húsavík, however he did not display usual symptoms of the virus despite testing positive. Medical authorities are still investigating his death, though the preliminary autopsy points to COVID-19 as the likely cause of death.
- **Almost 250 confirmed cases**

20/03
- **Iceland joins EU travel ban**
Following initial reluctance to institute a travel ban, the Icelandic government adopts European Union guidelines banning travellers from outside the EU.
- **Government scraps schedule to focus on outbreak**
The Alþingi withdraws all schedules; COVID-19 will be the only issue addressed for at least a month.

21/03
Over 550 confirmed cases

24/03
- **First Icelander dies**
An Icelandic Woman in her 70s dies in Landspítali hospital. The woman was infected domestically and suffered from asthma.
- **Stricter gathering ban begins**
Public assemblies of more than 20 people are prohibited, and a 2 metre distance must be maintained between people. The closure of libraries, swimming pools, sports centres and museums is also announced. Hairdressers, nail bars, and other businesses involving close physical contact are required to close.



ART IN OUR TIME

Diary Of An Artist In Quarantine

Óttar Norðfjörð journals a creative life in lockdown

Words: **Sam O'Donnell** Photo: **Elo Vásquez**

These are strange times. We're in the midst of a global pandemic. Most of us are just trying to get by. Amid all of this confusion, Óttar Norðfjörð, novelist and head writer for 'The Valhalla Murders' ('Brot' in Iceland), has compiled his thoughts on the epidemic into a journal. Published in Mannlíf in Icelandic, the journal reveals the artist's experience surviving in these chaotic times.

Stress and lockdown

Óttar lives in Spain with his wife and their two year old son. They have another baby on the way. While he and his family are healthy and safe, the entire country is currently on lockdown, meaning that people must stay inside except for absolute essentials.

Some people find this easy to deal with. "I'm a writer. I can work from home, in a way it's not different from my everyday life," Óttar says, adding that it's not as easy for his wife, who is a photographer and used to being outside. However, since she is 33 weeks pregnant, they have decided to keep her away from the general public until the baby is born. "She hasn't left the house now for twelve days," he says, "So I go out for food like a caveman."

Catharsis

This situation has, naturally, resulted in an increase in stress. Initially, Óttar intended to write about the situation in the form of a novel as a coping mechanism. "Since I write novels

and screenplays, I thought fiction would make sense," he says. But every time he sat down to write the novel, he hit a wall. "I failed miserably in the first days," he admits. In the end, he decided he was too close to the crisis to write a fictional account. "I need distance. I need time away from this."

Around the same time, the editor of Mannlíf approached Óttar to pen a longread in the form of a diary about the life of an artist in quarantine. The diary format felt comfortable to him, and Óttar had a draft ready in half an hour. "I realised there was so much stuff going on in my head about this that I really needed to get out," he says. By the time the first draft was finished, he had to restrain himself from writing more. "I could have gone longer, but at the moment I feel like I got it out of my system."

Fresh perspective

Besides sticking to word count, the biggest challenge for Óttar was trying to say something new. "There is so much stuff, memes, articles and blogs, and it's endless," he says, adding that he tried to bring some new perspective to the table. Since he is in Spain—a country on lockdown, with more than 4000 dead at the time of writing, and 56,188 infected—perhaps his account will serve as a warning for the Icelandic government to take the virus and its spread more seriously.

"Iceland feels like Spain felt two weeks ago," Óttar says. "I guess Iceland will be in our position in, I dunno, two weeks?" That's a chilling idea. 🍷