THE NEVER BEFORE HEARD HISTORY OF ODIN'S RAVEN MAGIC, IN WHICH...

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:
HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN PROTEST ARRESTS
THE ASCENDANCY OF ULTRAFLEX
THE GOVERNMENT-SANCTIONED AMOUNT OF YULE LAD CONTENT

... & MORE
EDITORIAL

What will change in the new year? Well, everything—or not so much. The whole world connected for a moment over the dreaded coronavirus. We saw what leaders and nations are made of. And what’s perhaps more important, we were reminded of how united we are at the end of the day. Scientists broke records developing a vaccine within a year. That’s no small feat for science or humankind.

The pandemic exposed our worst and our best at the same time. Icelanders can be proud of their politicians, who listened to top scientists when needed. But we were also reminded of how underfunded our healthcare system is. Icelanders of my generation have been raised up to believe it was the best in the world. It is not. The reason is decades of politicians underfunding the system in hopes of privatizing it bit by bit.

The pandemic is also a rude awakening to the fact that the whole world can be flipped upside down in a matter of weeks. Nothing stays the same forever. It’s a simple sentence to write down, but nothing stays the same forever. The whole world can be flipped upside down in a matter of weeks. Nothing stays the same forever. It’s a simple sentence to write down, but no one understands it fully until we’ve been slapped across the face with it.

Soon, the hope is that the virus will seem like a distant dream. That everything and everyone will get back on their feet. That tourism will come back. That we will be able to visit our loved ones when we want. And that the economy will bloom.

It will be easy to put this behind us and keep on going like nothing ever happened. But this is when the real work starts. We have to reorganize how we are doing things. Global warming is still on the rise. The gap between the rich and the poor is still growing. And the importance of good health care that can take care of our brothers and sisters can’t be underestimated. This is the year. From what I have seen and experienced myself in this pandemic, I’m more optimistic than pessimistic. Let’s wake up, do the work and make a better world in memory of those that have died from COVID-19.

Merry Christmas and happy new year. Thank you all for reading our magazine and supporting the Reykjavík Grapevine. Duð Valur Gretthólssoon

Editor-in-chief
In the Westfjords of Iceland, what we call “downtown” others might refer to as “the Arctic.” Call it what you will. We just live here.

Made for life

Keeping Iceland warm since 1926
What Are Icelanders Talking About?

The topics that are getting people banned from the comments

Words: Andie Sophia Fontaine
Photos: Adobe Stock, ‘Highlander’

WHAT ARE ICELANDERS TALKING ABOUT?

You can always tell when a particular issue in Iceland really gets people talking when their Facebook profile photo frames start changing. One of the biggest topics being argued about right now is the proposed Highl-lands National Park. On the one hand, it seems like a good idea to preserve one of Europe’s largest last known wilderness areas. On the other hand, the idea has been met with concerted pushback from rural municipalities and tourism industry workers, amongst others, both of whom believe the park would encroach upon small towns and small businesses alike. While the Ministry for the Environ-ment has tried to smooth things over, Parliamentary President and historic firebrand Steingrímur J. Sigfusson characterised the critics as a “whining minority” trying to get their way. And that’s why a good portion of your Icelandic friends now have Facebook profile frames which read either “I support the Highlands National Park” or “I am the whining minority”.

Much like the rest of the year, coronavirus continues to be a hot topic, with one particular flash-point flaring up between swim-ming pools and gyms. Earlier this month, the Ministry of Health allowed for the relaxation of some pandemic restrictions, which included the re-opening of swimming pools—arguably more important to Icelanders than opening pubs. However, gyms remain closed, as they have been since October. Gym owners have been decidedly upset about the matter and have even threatened to sue the state over the closures. Meanwhile, public broadcast-service RÚV reached out to a literal chemistry professor to ask whether chlorinated water, such as that found in pools, kills the virus (it does) by way of explanation as to why one would be open but not the other. When the gyms will open again is as yet undetermined.

In more optimistic coronavirus news, it looks like a vaccine will be here soon. After making a deal with Pfizer, one of the producers of a coronavirus vaccine, the Minister of Health announced that vacci-nations could begin around New Year’s eve. Some 170,000 does will be made available over this period of time, which should be enough to cover 85,000 people—not too shabby for a country of 350,000. Those being prioritised include frontline health care workers, and individuals with conditions that make them especially vulner-able to the virus. But do Iceland-ers even want to be vaccinated against coronavirus? Turns out—yes, pretty much all of them, according to the most recent poll on the matter, which showed some 92% say they either will definitely or probably take it.

— Helgi Ólafsson

First
Icelandic lamb roam free in the pristine wilderness of Iceland grazing on wild berries and herbs like red clover, Arctic thyme, sedge, willow, thrift and angelica resulting in it having an unrivaled flavor profile. Infused with the flavor of nature, Icelandic lamb is fine-textured, tender and naturally rich in Omega-3 and iron. Icelandic lamb – an exceptionally pure taste experience.

Enjoy the best we have to offer, Icelandic food – naturally.
The Highlands, yesterday

Controversy Surrounding Proposed Highlands National Park

MPs question the wisdom of the move

The Icelandic highlands is one of the largest undeveloped areas in all of Europe, covering some 40,000 square kilometres of Arctic desert, glaciers and mountains. It is then probably unsurprising that the government wants to make the highlands a national park. However, the proposal has been met with concerted criticism and is being hotly debated in Parliament—even amongst parties within the ruling coalition—and objections have also been raised by rural municipalities and tourism industry workers.

How it started

The establishment of a highlands national park was part of the joint policy agreement of the then-newly elected ruling coalition—the Left-Greens, the Independence Party and the Progressive Party—in November 2017. Minister for the Environment Guðmundur Ingi Guðbrandsson formally introduced the bill earlier this month, but it now seems unlikely to pass.

What’s the issue?

A number of rural municipal territories are covered by the park’s proposed area, with some of these municipalities raising objections that it constitutes the national government running roughshod over small rural towns. Another issue raised was the cost and where exactly the money will come from. Guðmundur himself says it will likely cost close to a billion ISK over the next five years to establish the park, but believes tourism money and employment opportunities within the park will help offset the costs.

Tourism and freedom of movement

Perhaps the biggest objections being raised comes from the tourism industry. The Highlands National Park proposal is currently the hottest topic within groups such as Bakslund Ferðafjölsstýriðnar, a Facebook group for tourism industry workers, who are worried the national park will restrict freedom of movement and add more red tape to their operations.

A long ways to go

There is little doubt that Icelanders love the highlands. Poll after poll has shown that most Icelanders want to protect one of Europe’s last remaining wildernesses. However, given the number of raised objections, the strength of the push-back and the numerous issues that are still unresolved, it is quite unlikely that the Highlands National Park is going to become a reality any time soon.

Lost in Google

Translation

The simulation is failing and once again a glitch in the matrix has been revealed to the Grapevine team via Grapevine medium of Google Translate. Absolutely positive.

Egg Weapon

The existence of one more powerful and ultimately superior “man with an egg weapon”? If so, where is he now and what does he want?

Blú at the Grapevine imagine that the weapon is used to propel eggs, but concede that it could also be a non-egg based weapon tradition ally used against eggs. A hard-boiled egg might produce the most force, but a raw egg would presumably require the bigger cleanup. In reality, The Icelandic ‘eggguips’ actually means blinde, but Google Translate is totally convoluted it means ‘egg weapons’ absolutely positive. Every single time.

If you’ve ever attempted to buy a home in Iceland, you may have noticed inflation-indexed housing loans on offer. If you rent, you may have an agreement with your landlord that your rent may change from month to month because the landlord took out such a loan on the property you now rent. Inflation-indexed housing loans are fairly uncommon in Europe, so what makes Icelandic so special? We asked Halldórur Benediktsson, an economist at the Icelandic Confederation of Labour, for an explanation.

“Inflation in Iceland has been great, compared to the general inflation rate in Europe. It is not too long ago that depositors lost their deposits and credit institutions on loans due to persistently high inflation.

“Credit institutions are now careful not to lose out on loans with indexed loans or spreads due to inflation on non-indexed loans. The inflation premium is added to the interest rate on non-indexed loans and the interest rates are therefore higher here than in a stable price environment. Indexed loans spread the risk of inflation with increasing principal over the loan period, but at the same time lower interest rates that otherwise can be offered.

“The debt service burden of indexed loans is lower in the beginning of the loan because the borrower who enter the real estate market to take out loans that would otherwise be difficult to support. Young people have applied for indexed, 40-year equal-payment loans due to lower debt service burden in the environ ment of high interest rates and inflation. Real estate buyers get more expensive housing with indexed loans but pay for it with interest on the principal, which rises with prices over the loan period. Younger people who enter the real estate market with indexed equal-payment loans should have an option to refinance with rising income and have the option of converting to non-indexed loans.”

Get Grapevine Merch!

Don’t Hesitate! Act Now!
**DEITIES OF ICELAND**

Get on your knees, mortals, for now, it is time to talk about Hel—ruler of Hel, daughter of Loki and someone who is described on nearly all websites mentioning her as having a “gloomy, downcast appearance.”

**Gloomy and downcast**

To be fair, we understand why she’d be gloomy. Apparently, the deity was the daughter of Loki and Angrboda, a giantess, and therefore the sister of wolf Fenrir and serpent Jormungand. Based on our intuition, we highly doubt this was a particularly nurturing and supportive environment to grow up in. In fact, we’d hazard a guess and say that it might have been a pretty chaotic place and the world should probably be grateful that Hel only ended up “grim” and fierce and not “a fucking serial killer.”

Unfortunately, due to lack of info, we don’t know a ton about Hel’s daily activities. She’s rarely featured in most activities. She’s usually depicted as being gloomy and downcast, and in fact, the only myth she plays a large part in is that of the Death of Baldr.

**The tale of the death of Baldr**

Baldr was a very cool god who everyone liked, much like Tom Hanks or Meryl Streep. Unfortunately, he died. The story of how he did so is too long and convoluted but the TLDR of it is that Loki got this blind dude to stab him in the eye on Baldr with some mistletoe. Don’t ask questions. That’s what happened.

So Baldr, now deceased via shrub, is sent to the domain of Hel, who follows by Hermod, his brother, who pleads with Hel to let Baldr—who is now also gloomy and downcast—go. Hel says that she will happily let him go if everything in the cosmos weeps for him.

The Gods then go all Avengers, mobilise and get everything in the cosmos to weep for Baldr. Well… not everything. Loki, being a big dork, pretends to be the giantess Tokk and definitely doesn’t weep for Baldr. Why does he do this? Probably just to be a dork. That said, maybe he just wanted his lovely daughter Hel to finally have a super cool friend like Baldr for all of eternity. Wouldn’t that be sweet? It would, but we still think he was probably just being a dork.

And with a father like that, who can blame Hel for being gloomy? We certainly won’t. Loki was probably a distant and untrustworthly caretaker, so it’s natural this Goddess would be full to the brim with Daddy Issues.

Unfortunately, due to lack of info, we don’t know a ton about Hel’s daily activities. She’s rarely featured in most activities. She’s usually depicted as being gloomy and downcast, and in fact, the only myth she plays a large part in is that of the Death of Baldr.

---

**Get Grapevine Merch!**

[Shop Grapevine Merch](shop.grapevine.is)

**“Að fá uppreisn æru”**

The Icelandic honour system is complicated. If you have a shitty reputation, it will literally be more difficult for you to get a job than for those that have a good reputation. This can be especially true in smaller towns. But if you have been an idiot, pissing everybody off—or worse—there is still hope. The phrase “Að fá uppreisn æru” literally means restoring your honour. We even have this term integrated into our laws. In English that would be a pardon, but we use the legal term “uppreisn æru” when pardoning. Honour has always been a big thing in Iceland and many even quote a verse from our old Edda Poems, Hávamál, that says: “Orðsfræði dyr eftir hlut evarðið þat honum æst.” Meaning, your reputation will outlive you. In short; don’t be an asshole. VG
Icelanders have developed a positive reputation for their protests. Praised for having driven a government out of power, for pressuring authorities to prosecute bankers and for organizing the draft for a new constitution, to any outside observers it would appear as though protesting has become an acceptable, even respectable, way to exact change in Icelandic society. However, in the course of several interviews with lawyers and activists alike, the Grapevine found that police have sweeping powers to arrest, that courts take a very narrow interpretation of police power at the expense of these protestors, that prosecutors often severely limit or outright restrict defense lawyers’ access to the evidence against their clients, and that appealing these cases has such a high threshold that they can have a chilling effect—all of this sometimes in breach of the Icelandic constitution and European human rights laws.

How did things get this way, and what must be done to bring Icelandic law in line with the principles of a democratic society?

**Article 19**

Much of the issue rests upon Article 19 of the Law on Police, a single sentence with far-reaching implications: “The public is obliged to obey orders which police give, such as in traffic control or in order to ensure law and order in a public space.” This article has not only been used by the police to justify arresting people participating in peaceful protests—something which is supposed to be protected by Articles 73 and 74 of Iceland’s constitution and other international laws—the courts have often times taken a very narrow interpretation of this law: asking only if a police order was disobeyed, not if the order was lawful or even justified in the first place.

Elinborg Harpa Önundardóttir and Borys Ejryszew are two activists currently facing charges that include violating Article 19 (Note: at the time of this writing, Borys has been convicted of violating Article 19 and ordered to pay over 600,000 ISK in legal costs. He plans to appeal). Elinborg and Borys have worked extensively with Icelandic refugees who have organised for better living conditions and fair treatment by Icelandic authorities. Efforts to bring these grievances directly to the Director of Immigration (ÚTL) in March 2019 were blocked by around a dozen police officers.

“We were saying, ‘Well, we’re going in, we have every right to go in there,’” Elinborg recalls. “Then the police took out the pepper spray and were ready to use it. It says that in the police report from that protest, that they were ready to use the gas when people were ‘threatening to break in’ to ÚTL during opening hours.”

The demonstrators then decided to change tactics: as police had prevented them from bringing their demands to immigration authorities directly, they opted instead to demonstrate at Austurvöllur, the square in front of Parliament.

**Austurvöllur, ground zero for protests**

Austurvöllur has been the scene for numerous protests in Icelandic history. It was there that the famed “pots and pans revolution” grabbed international headlines as Icelanders gathered in the thousands. It was also the scene of the largest protest in Icelandic history, when some 13,000 people showed up in April 2016 to call upon the government to resign in the wake of the Panama Papers revelations.

At that protest, police simply observed proceedings and held the line. But when about two-dozen protestors arrived at Austurvöllur on March 11th of 2019, police response was vastly different.

“We got to the point where the refugees decided that they would like to try occupying the Parliament square,” Borys recalls. “When the refugees were trying to set up their tents, the police came over and pushed people around, taking the camping equipment. And then, for whatever reason, the unit commanders came up with the idea that the demonstrators wanted to start a fire. They confiscated a pallet that people had brought, believing that the refugees were going to use that for a bonfire, but that isn’t true—we mainly used it to sit on as insulation from the ground. It was March and it was freezing. After they took the pallet, the police further decided they wanted to take away the cardboard boxes, too. This is when the police line approaches and starts pushing people around in a very aggressive and escalatory manner.

Met with no resistance, the police nonetheless began using force against the protesters, including the use of pepper spray, sometimes against people attempting to leave the scene. All of this was captured on video. Two arrests were made.

**How peaceful is a protest supposed to be?**

Despite public outcry against police violence at this small demonstration, organisers decided to switch tactics.

“After the police riot, people were quite stressed and tired, so we decided it was time to do something peaceful and symbolic,” Borys says. “We organised a silent performance where a bunch of refugees and their friends stood in front of Parliament with their hands marked with ‘no deportations’ and tape over their mouths. There were parliamentarians passing through, but no one was stopping anybody. But the police decided this was also an unlawful protest and, citing the 19th, they came over, shouting in Icelandic to a crowd of people—many of whom don’t speak the language—and arrested three entirely random demonstrators, one of them Elinborg.

Tactics were changed again, with organisers deciding this time to take their concerns to the Ministry of Justice, which holds authority over ÚTL. This would take place in the form of peaceful sit-ins, held during opening hours, in the lobby of the Ministry.

Over the course of three sit-ins, no arrests were made: police dragged people outside of the building and left them there, sometimes using force. The fourth sit-in was a different story. “The fourth time around they arrived at the Ministry when we had been protesting for about 10-15 minutes,” Elinborg says. “They came in shouting at us to get out or we would get arrested. They did not explain on what premises nor did they tell us that the ministry was closed. Then they gave us all of 3-4 minutes before they began arresting people. We were asking them to give the orders in English as well, because in the arrests before, the order ‘no dispersal’ was only given in Icelandic.”
Out of bounds

Helga Baldvins Bjargardóttir, a lawyer working on Elínborg and Borys’ cases, is amongst the lawyers the Grapevine spoke to who believe Article 19 is interpreted too broadly by the police and too narrowly by the courts. She provided a list of cases heard by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) that handed down rulings which not only affirm the right to protest—they also would completely overturn, or radically change, Article 19, and with it the verdicts handed down by Icelandic courts on numerous occasions.

Helga explains that Article 19 is supposed to carry exceptions, as outlined by the ECHR, and that the police are supposed to take notice of international obligations, such as human rights obligations, in the course of their work.

“In that regard, they can manage control of traffic, they can forbid people from staying in certain areas, or ask them to leave,” she says. “They have this authority, and if this had been people entering the Ministry drunk and disrupting the peace of the staff in that way, the police would have the full authority to ask them to leave and, if they didn’t, to arrest them. But in the protestor case, the police don’t regard that the protestors have constitutional and human rights to protest and freedom of expression. Their actions need to be balanced in regard to these rights.”

Helga also points out that when the police step out of bounds, they should be held liable.

“[The ECHR] also talks about how when the police have this power to give orders to protestors and arrest them if they don’t obey, that this goes against the initial goal of the legislation. If you’re going to arrest protestors, you have to have something real that they’ve done other than disobeying police orders. The police have to be preventing a crime, there has to be chaos or people in danger for them to be able to intervene in a case like that.”

A narrow view

Sigrún Ingibjörg Gissadóttir, a lawyer at the law offices of Úttur, agrees that the police sometimes overstep the power that Article 19 grants them.

“Essentially, you can have an article that states there’s a public obligation to follow police orders, but that does not mean the obligation should be absolute,” she says. “It’s an obligation that needs to be considered and interpreted in light of other rights and obligations. Even if it’s absolute in language, that doesn’t mean it can be absolute in practice, because it needs to be interpreted in light of superseding laws, such as the constitution and rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, as the European Convention of Human Rights is an international agreement that has been legislated into Icelandic law. These are laws that supersede a general law such as Article 19. Essentially, Article 19 needs to be used while respecting the rights encoded in these higher laws, such as free speech and the right to protest.”

Aren’t protests supposed to be inconvenient?

One of the people who have championed reform in this area is lawyer Ragnar Ádalsteinsson. He has long fought for the rights of protestors, having defended the so-called Reykjavik Nine—a group of protestors accused of “violently” entering Parliament during protests in December 2008.

“The Icelandic courts tend to say that any inconvenience made by protestors needs to be stopped,” he told us. “But the ECHR has stated that any inconvenience is a natural consequence of protests, and that the state must understand this and not interfere unless everything goes too far.”

Another good example of this is the case of Ragnheiður Freyja Kristinardóttir and Jórunn Edda Helgadóttir, the latter of whom is represented by Ragnar. In May 2016, they stood up on board a plane set to deport an asylum seeker. The plane was, at the time, standing still on the runway, with boarding not yet complete. As they stood, they began speaking out loud about the fact that a person was being wrongfully deported on that flight. Jórunn was quickly restrained by passengers and flight attendants and both were arrested.

“The District Court concluded we had caused ‘severe disruption of public transportation’ without substantial reasoning for this,” Ragnheiður recalls. “The judge in fact concluded that we did not cause any delay of the plane, or not a severe delay at least, but that we did indeed cause ‘discomfort’ and ‘unease’ amongst the flight crew and passengers. This is one of the defenses in Appellate Court: no passengers have ever given their testimonies in this case. Which is very unfortunate, since there were 170 passengers on that plane, and none of them were asked to come and give testimony. The other peculiar thing is that people have very seldom been prosecuted for this and the times that people have, they have been acquitted.”

What counts as evidence

While the prosecution can seemingly offer any number of arguments in protest cases as to why a given protestor or group of protestors should be convicted, arguments from the defense often fall on deaf ears.

Borys experienced this firsthand, saying that in regards to his case, “The only thing that made it into the final verdict was the testimonies of the police. The judge seemed only interested in whether police gave an order and whether it was obeyed. That’s it.”

Borys and others had raised concerns about the possible existence of racism within the Icelandic police force having some role in how the police have responded to the refugee protests, bringing up the excessive use of force throughout many of refugee organisations. In speaking with Grapevine, Borys also pointed out the new “border patrol van” rolled out earlier this year, wherein one of the officers talked openly about targeting “Albanians and Romanians.” This concern, amongst many others, was summarily dismissed by the court.

“[The judge] refused to call in the unit commander [Árnar Rúnar Marteinsson] for further questioning about the justification for the police using excessive force and especially the ensuing arrests—a thing that happened only during the last sit-in and therefore in need of further justification,” Borys says. “The judge was only interested in whether the police gave an order and whether it was obeyed or not and entirely disinterested in whether [police] actions violate any higher laws—which in our opinion they did. The arrests that ensued go against both Icelandic constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

“If you're going to arrest protestors, you have to have something real that they’ve done other than disobeying police orders.”
Surely you can appeal, right?

The right to appeal is another important function of a democracy’s judicial system—that if you were found guilty in a lower court, you should be able to appeal the matter to a higher court. That function also exists in the Icelandic court system, but it can get a bit complicated when it comes to protest cases.

“We have this both in criminal cases and private cases, that in order to bring a case before the Appellate Court in Iceland, they need to meet a minimum threshold of a sentence,” Sigrún explains. “Generally, in criminal cases, this means you’ve been sentenced to prison, or that you were ordered to pay a fine in excess of around 1 million ISK; it’s indexed, so it changes slightly every year. But this is not absolute; there is an exception, and that exception is if you have a case—both criminal and private—that you believe was wrongly adjudicated, or if you believe it’s important for society or yourself to get the Appellate Court’s judgement, then you can request a grant of appeal.

We’ve seen this in cases such as those that concern freedom of speech, where people have been found guilty of defamation and ordered to pay compensation well below 1 million ISK, but nonetheless been granted an appeal. ... But it isn’t without risk because if you lose the appeal, you will likely end up increasing the costs.”

Helga agrees, adding that the daunting prospect can have a chilling effect on even going forward with an appeal in the first place.

“They could make an exception because it’s a principled case of human rights, but if they’re denied, they have to go to the Supreme Court,” she says. “It will be very interesting if these cases go to the ECHR. They talk a lot about the chilling effect. If even the fine is only 10,000 ISK, if the legal fees are like 600,000 ISK, this has a chilling effect. It prevents people from being able to exercise their freedom of expression. I think the ECHR would look at this as a punishment in itself.”

What needs to change

Elinborg emphasises that the broad use of Article 19, its narrow interpretation by the courts, and other issues have been an ongoing problem in Iceland for a long time.

“This is how it’s been for years now,” she says. “There have been people persecuted many times before for precisely this, breaking the 19th article and nothing else. It seems like the Icelandic courts just want to keep it that way. They don’t look at it in terms of why was the order given? was it reasonable? They don’t care. They just ask was the order given and did you obey it? If you didn’t, you’re guilty. This is what we’re dealing with. It’s up to people in society, I feel, to decide if it’s something they find acceptable. Because obviously the court system itself isn’t going to change it.”

“I would like to make Article 19 stricter, and provide directly that citizens only have to obey the orders if the behaviour is unlawful,” Ragnar says. “You have a right to express your opinion, individually or in a group, and that needs to be balanced against the inconvenience that the protest might have resulted. I would like to see the Icelandic courts go the same route as the European Court of Human Rights in accepting there’s going to be some inconveniences involved in most protests.”

For her part, Sigrún envisions more comprehensive changes on multiple levels.

“The most important role is played by the judge,” she says. “That the judge follows what we have said in our society are the principles that we’re supposed to walk through to come to a conclusion. It’s really important that the District Court judges go through the correct procedure in finding someone guilty. It’s not like people are never guilty and should never be found guilty, but the correct path must always be taken to finding someone guilty. There was once an English judgement that said something to the effect that ‘the appearance of justice is equally important as justice itself.’

Helga, in fact, would like to see the matter brought all the way to the ECHR, in the hopes of bringing some much-needed reforms to Iceland.

“I want to take this all the way [to the ECHR] because comparing the Icelandic court cases to the ECHR; well, we’re out of control with our police orders here,” she says. “It’s not in line with what’s normal in a democratic society.”
The end is nigh. You feel it in your bones. Each time you read the news, each time your phone beeps with fresh tidings of another catastrophe, there’s a sense of unravelling, a sense that we can’t possibly keep hurtling from one disaster to the next. Civilisation is exhausting. Give us some catharsis. Just let the whole thing splatter onto the pavement already.

The problem is that history never runs out of new corners to turn. The end times never really end.

“In the Eddas, Ragnarök is the end of the world, but what it actually means is that when something comes to an end, something new begins,” says Georg Holm, the bassist of Sigur Rós and one of the band’s two remaining members. ‘Remaining’ being the operative word here: for some years now, it’s been unclear whether or not Sigur Rós had ceased to exist, following several public scandals and, most notably, the departure of drummer Orri Páll Dýrason amid sexual assault allegations in 2018. There hasn’t been a studio album or a tour since the release of ‘Kveikur’ in 2013; keyboardist Kjartan Sveinsson left around the same time and frontman Jónsi remains conspicuously absent, currently holed up in Los Angeles pursuing his own projects.

And yet—

It’s December, one year into a global pandemic, and I’m on a Zoom call with Georg, Kjartan and long-time collaborator María Huld Markindsay (of Amiina fame). The band have just released a new album, the long-awaited ‘Odin’s Raven Magic’—ORM, for short.

Admittedly, “new” is a strong word here. In a release schedule that can best be described as glacial, ‘Odin’s Raven Magic’ was first composed in 2002 and performed just a handful of times, surviving only in whispers, legends and bootlegged YouTube clips. The new release was actually recorded live in Paris and mastered in 2008, with the band inadvertently deciding to sit on it for 12 years.

“There was a lot of other stuff going on and it sort of fell between the cracks,” explains Georg. “It was always meant to come out, but I guess it took a lot longer than anyone expected. It’s very fitting that the album is being recorded live in Paris and mastered in 2008, with the band inadvertently deciding to sit on it for 13 years.

There was a lot of other stuff going on, and it sort of fell between the cracks,” explains Georg. “It was always meant to come out, but I guess it took a lot longer than anyone expected. It’s very fitting that the album is being released now, though, it’s music that is really old and is all about the end of the world. It’s the end of 2020 and hopefully 2021 will be something completely different.”

Apocalyptic warnings

Unpacking ORM is no easy task, largely because it is so unlike any other Sigur Rós release. It is perhaps one of the band’s most collaborative efforts to date. The piece was originally conceived of by Hilmar Órn Hilmarsson, a veteran composer as well as the current allsherjarðgarð, the chief of the Icelandic Heathen organisation, Ásatrúarfélagið. Hilmar was commissioned by the Reykjavík Art Festival in 2002 to produce an orchestral rendition of “Hrafnagaldr Öðins,” a lost chapter of the Poetic Edda and the inspiration for the album’s name. Hilmar, on a self-described crusade to have the poem reinstated as part of the Edda, asked the band to join the project. They immediately said yes.

“Remaining being the operative word here; for some years now, it’s been unclear whether or not Sigur Rós had ceased to exist, following several public scandals and, most notably, the departure of drummer Orri Páll Dýrason amid sexual assault allegations in 2018. There hasn’t been a studio album or a tour since the release of ‘Kveikur’ in 2013; keyboardist Kjartan Sveinsson left around the same time and frontman Jónsi remains conspicuously absent, currently holed up in Los Angeles pursuing his own projects.

And yet—

It’s December, one year into a global pandemic, and I’m on a Zoom call with Georg, Kjartan and long-time collaborator María Huld Markindsay (of Amiina fame). The band have just released a new album, the long-awaited ‘Odin’s Raven Magic’—ORM, for short.

Admittedly, “new” is a strong word here. In a release schedule that can best be described as glacial, ‘Odin’s Raven Magic’ was first composed in 2002 and performed just a handful of times, surviving only in whispers, legends and bootlegged YouTube clips. The new release was actually recorded live in Paris and mastered in 2008, with the band inadvertently deciding to sit on it for 12 years.

“There was a lot of other stuff going on and it sort of fell between the cracks,” explains Georg. “It was always meant to come out, but I guess it took a lot longer than anyone expected. It’s very fitting that the album is being released now, though, it’s music that is really old and is all about the end of the world. It’s the end of 2020 and hopefully 2021 will be something completely different.”

Apocalyptic warnings

Unpacking ORM is no easy task, largely because it is so unlike any other Sigur Rós release. It is perhaps one of the band’s most collaborative efforts to date. The piece was originally conceived of by Hilmar Órn Hilmarsson, a veteran composer as well as the current allsherjarðgarð, the chief of the Icelandic Heathen organisation, Ásatrúarfélagið. Hilmar was commissioned by the Reykjavík Art Festival in 2002 to produce an orchestral rendition of “Hrafnagaldr Öðins,” a lost chapter of the Poetic Edda and the inspiration for the album’s name. Hilmar, on a self-described crusade to have the poem reinstated as part of the Edda, asked the band to join the project. They immediately said yes.

With less than two weeks to put the piece together before the festival, the team enlisted Steindór Andersen, one of Iceland’s foremost epic poetry chanting leaders. They then called Páll Guðmundsson, a sculptor and the inventor of the steinharpa—a marimba constructed out of stones—and headed straight out to the countryside to begin composing.

As only one member of Sigur Rós—Kjartan—is able to read music, it quickly became clear they would need outside help, so María jumped in to oversee the arrangements—or, as she puts it, “save Kjartan from a nervous breakdown.”

From there, this beautiful—if inaccessible—text began to take on new life.

A shot across the bow

In many ways the album and the text on which it is based are warnings from the past, shots across the bow into an uncertain, terrifying future. Just as the album was composed years before its release, the poem was discovered centuries after it was first written. It was proclaimed to be a forgery in the 1980s and disqualified from editions of the Poetic Edda until 2012, when new scholarship certified it to be authentic and possibly even hundreds of years older than the other Eddic poems. (It has only recently been included in published editions of the Edda.)
The original text—which forms the basis of the lyrics to Steindór’s hypnotic chanting—tells the story of the end of the world. The imagery of the poem, which scholars suspect to be missing its beginning and end, paints a story of decline, in which the world is freezing over from north to south. And while the world freezes, the gods feast, oblivious to their own doom.

“It was an apocalyptic warning,” says Hilmar. “Perhaps the people of the time felt it in their skins. Today, of course, Iceland is involved in environmental issues surrounding hydro-electric power and the destruction of the Highlands. We are being warned again."

A hibernating beast

‘Odin’s Raven Magic’ is much bigger than just a Sigur Rós album. It’s a truly collaborative effort. Steindór is a commanding vocal presence, almost relegating Jónsi to the sidelines as he leads the listener through the eight stanzas of this ancient text, while the steinharpa and the orchestra are so dominant as to almost make the band itself seem like backing musicians.

“As an outsider, it was an interesting project to take part in because of the complexity of it,” María says. “As well as the band and all their instrumentation, there is a sculptor that never performs on stage, then the chanter in a musical setting that he is not used to, and placing it all together is an orchestra and a choir. So part of the reason it went into hibernation was because it was just such a beast. Everyone had to step out of their comfort zone.”

The beauty of this is that all the people involved don’t recognise it as their own work. It’s so collaborative that it’s become an independent thing,” she continues. “The poem is just timeless and it’s more relevant than ever before, because it explores the end of the world. It’s been very interesting to actually look deeper into the poem—I didn’t have the time to actually look deeper into the poem at the time because it was just mayhem trying to cram it all together.”

The elephant in the room

While the new release is a long-awaited and welcome addition to the band’s discography, it’s a relic of an earlier Sigur Rós, and in some ways, the elephant is still in the room. They have only met online to make decisions about things like cover art and t-shirts. “It’s not like we came together like a football team and decided to release it,” Kjartan laughs. And, as we speak, there’s no fixed plans for the band’s future—no upcoming releases, no new projects, and no calendar. But then, perhaps there never has been.

“When you look at someone’s career, you might start to think about something was thought through and you might think it’s all calculated,” María says. “But I don’t think things are calculated. You just react to what’s happening. I’m in a band that has changed members so dramatically over the years that nobody knows what it means. It’s more like an umbrella or a musical force that just... continues.”

“Young people count members,” Georg says. “People come and go. It’s free-form. Through the years we have approached each record as a separate project, and they’ve always been done differently—not necessarily by sitting down and discussing what we are going to do. Things change and you create in a different way. People change as well. Times change. Your own attitude to life changes.”

Weathering the storms

Sigur Rós were founded in 1994, which, for this writer, means they have been active for an entire lifetime. In that time, Icelandic society has undergone massive tectonic shifts. The band has seen almost three of the country’s six presidents come and go, survived the rise and fall of entire industries and lived through the country’s transformation from a backwater in the North Atlantic to a global tourism hub and back again.

“Every generation has this feeling of Iceland changing so fast, but at the same time, the core doesn’t change.”

The Reykjavík Grapevine

Issue 10—2020

Get Grapevine Merch!

shop.grapevine.is

Don’t Hesitate! Act Now!
"Iceland has moved at such a speed since the two world wars because it was a very poor country at the turn of the century," says Kjartan. "Everything changes very fast these days and has been for the last eighty years."

"Except the politicians," Georg interjects.

Kjartan continues: "So it’s exciting, but at the same time it’s reckless."

"When we were filming [the tour movie] ‘Heima,’ I remember we came home after touring just before the 2008 financial crash and we were like, ‘What’s happening here?!’ Everyone wanted to be a banker and we felt like we didn’t know our own country," explains Maria. "Every generation has this feeling of Iceland changing so fast, but at the same time, the core doesn’t change."

"We like things to happen fast sometimes without thought, and it’s exciting in ways but it’s always the same feeling that you get stuck with when things aren’t done carefully. Which could be said about this album. It never would’ve been done if people had actually thought about what they were doing."

Like the Edda, Sigur Rós’ music has always spoken to the enduring elements of life on this island, channeling its geophony, the wind-battering rhythms echoing from the past into today.

"With Sigur Rós, you never know what will happen. Things just kinda fall into our laps and we don’t overthink it," Georg says. "Something could happen tomorrow or in ten years. We just never know."

‘Odin’s Raven Magic’ is a message bottled in a distant past, a reminder of the things that endure: old friends, old poems, old ways. Like the steinharpa, which is said to never go out of tune, the band’s spontaneity and the spirit of creativity that drove them to write ORM, also endures. Perhaps we needed reminding. Perhaps they did too."
Support The Holiday Economy!
Buy shit! Then give it away!

Words: The Grapevine Gift Givers Photos: Art Bieniek & Various Studies

We get it. You’ve got a lot on your mind. So let us lighten your metaphorical holiday load with the official Grapevine gift guide. We’ve got choices that everyone on your list is guaranteed to love. And if they don’t, do you really want those losses in your life?

From packaging-free shampoo to a special perfume section, Grapevine-favourite Fischer serves up a sensory, highly aesthetic shopping adventure. Tolelł, basically, everything they offer would be a stunning gift, but there’s something about the personal, long-lasting nature of perfume that really makes our heart melt. All of Fischer’s scents are vegan, alcohol-free, paraben-free and made with organic ingredients—more importantly, said ingredients will remind the recipient of your eternal love and superior taste every time they use it. While we’re fans of all their scents, we’re particularly enamoured by n.k, which, among other things, is supposed to smell like “Arctic wind blowing through hair in a damp pine forest”. Mom’ll love it.

Pretzel

Ragnar Axelsson ‘Arctic Heroes’
Bookstores around Reykjavík & shop.grapevine.is

‘Arctic Heroes’, the latest photobooks by Ragnar Axelsson, or RAX, is an intimate 40-years-in-the-making documentation of the Greenlandic sled dog. That said, even referring to the project as a “photography book” feels reductive. Ragnar spent decades getting to know Greenlandic hunters and hearing deeply personal stories about their intimate relationships with their dogs—a select few of which were put in the book along-side hundreds of photographs. Flipping through the pages is truly a visceral experience, allowing you to enter a remote world that feels lost in time. Hopefully, we will all be able to travel again soon, but until then, indulge in some canine escapism. Woof.

Potato

An Ice Cream Sandwich at Skúbb
The Grapevine’s love of Skúbb is no secret and it’s no big conspiracy: they simply make the best ice cream in the country. Vibrant flavours, natural colours, creamy texture—they are consistently wonderful. The parlourrotates their flavour supply so it’s difficult to guarantee the availability of a specific flavour (also: don’t make me Sophie’s Choice this thing). All we ask is you slap your flavour of choice between two of their rich, freshly-baked chocolate chip cookies.

Christmas

Farmers Market Socks
Farmers Market, Laugavegur 37 & Hólmasið 2 & shop.grapevine.is

What could be better than giving someone the gift of warmth? Everyone loves to receive socks for Christmas and these ones from Farmers Market are the perfect stocking stuffer. We all know somebody who walks around with holes in the bottom of their socks—and cold feet really are the worst—so why not help them out and set them up for a warmer 2021? They’d appreciate it a lot, trust us. The designs of these Farmers Market socks are also wholesome and folksy af, and with their vintage vibes, they’re the perfect accent to any cozy outfit.

When

An Ice Cream Sandwich at Skúbb
The Grapevine’s love of Skúbb is no secret and it’s no big conspiracy: they simply make the best ice cream in the country. Vibrant flavours, natural colours, creamy texture—they are consistently wonderful. The parlour rotates their flavour supply so it’s difficult to guarantee the availability of a specific flavour (also: don’t make me Sophie’s Choice this thing). All we ask is you slap your flavour of choice between two of their rich, freshly-baked chocolate chip cookies.

Sale

The Lemon Poppy Seed Doughnut at Skúbb
As with Skúbb, it’s hard to make any promises about availability at Deig due to the bakery’s love of innovation and surprising flavours. The good news is that you’ll rarely see a misstep there as all of their staff is amazing. Stop by, and Deig will fix you up with a chocolate cake croissant, cream-filled doughnut or some other fried delight. But if you get the chance to taste their glazed, almost cakelike, lemon poppy seed doughnut—leap on it like a were-wolf.

Socks

Farmers Market Socks
Farmers Market, Laugavegur 37 & Hólmasið 2 & shop.grapevine.is

What could be better than giving someone the gift of warmth? Everyone loves to receive socks for Christmas and these ones from Farmers Market are the perfect stocking stuffer. We all know somebody who walks around with holes in the bottom of their socks—and cold feet really are the worst—so why not help them out and set them up for a warmer 2021? They’d appreciate it a lot, trust us. The designs of these Farmers Market socks are also wholesome and folksy af, and with their vintage vibes, they’re the perfect accent to any cozy outfit.

Pastel Flower Bouquet
Pastel Flower Studio, Hverfisgata 50

Pastel Flower Bouquet
Pastel Flower Studio, Hverfisgata 50

Flowers die but a dried flower bouquet from hidden.gm Pastel Flower Studio will last forever. The runner-up of Grapevine’s 2020 Best of Reykjavík Hidden Gem award, Pastel is a charming little studio that creates unique (and incredibly trendy tbh) arrangements that reference classic Nordic style moments, grab a bouquet of muted jewel tones, put it in a very minimalist vase and present it to your stylish friend with a bottle of natural wine. Bonus points if you add a round trip ticket to Berlin for when 2020 ends.

Ragnar Axelsson ‘Arctic Heroes’
Bookstores around Reykjavík & shop.grapevine.is

‘Arctic Heroes’, the latest photography book by Ragnar Axelsson, or RAX, is an intimate 40-years-in-the-making documentation of the Greenlandic sled dog. That said, even referring to the project as a “photography book” feels reductive. Ragnar spent decades getting to know Greenlandic hunters and hearing deeply personal stories about their intimate relationships with their dogs—a select few of which were put in the book along-side hundreds of photographs. Flipping through the pages is truly a visceral experience, allowing you to enter a remote world that feels lost in time. Hopefully, we will all be able to travel again soon, but until then, indulge in some canine escapism. Woof.

Cruelty-free vegan hand soap at all Bookstores around Reykjavík & shop.grapevine.is

This backpack is made with leftover fabric, meaning it reduces waste and is better for the planet. We love to see it. This is the perfect gift for your friend or relative who is so conscious of their carbon footprint that they carry around zero-waste cutlery, a reusable coffee cup and cruelty-free vegan hand soap at all times. What better way to show them you support their virtuous plight than by gifting them something they can carry it all around with? The backpack comes in so different colours, including stark black, silver and black—so there’s something for everyone, including you and your cyber-goth squad.

Solid Perfume
Fischer, Fischersund 3 & shop.grapevine.is

From packaging-free shampoo to a special perfume section, Grapevine-favourite Fischer serves up a sensory, highly aesthetic shopping adventure. Tolelł, basically, everything they offer would be a stunning gift, but there’s something about the personal, long-lasting nature of perfume that really makes our heart melt. All of Fischer’s scents are vegan, alcohol-free, paraben-free and made with organic ingredients—more importantly, said ingredients will remind the recipient of your eternal love and superior taste every time they use it. While we’re fans of all their scents, we’re particularly enamoured by n.k, which, among other things, is supposed to smell like “Arctic wind blowing through hair in a damp pine forest”. Mom’ll love it.

Solid Perfume
Fischer, Fischersund 3 & shop.grapevine.is

From packaging-free shampoo to a special perfume section, Grapevine-favourite Fischer serves up a sensory, highly aesthetic shopping adventure. Tolelł, basically, everything they offer would be a stunning gift, but there’s something about the personal, long-lasting nature of perfume that really makes our heart melt. All of Fischer’s scents are vegan, alcohol-free, paraben-free and made with organic ingredients—more importantly, said ingredients will remind the recipient of your eternal love and superior taste every time they use it. While we’re fans of all their scents, we’re particularly enamoured by n.k, which, among other things, is supposed to smell like “Arctic wind blowing through hair in a damp pine forest”. Mom’ll love it.
Roað Eyvindarson

Roað Eyvindarson is a journalist, husband and dad to the most wonderful little girl in the world. Bearing the same first name as Roald Amundsen and one Roald Dahl, he feels under constant pressure to excel in life. Roað–Eyvindarson, not Dahl—is also a publishing director at Brittinger, Iceland’s largest magazine publisher, and editor-in-chief of Sygnir.is

First thing in the morning

Sex. No, not really, just decided to throw that out there to get your attention. No, my perfect day starts at the gym—World Class Laugar—at 6:15 a.m. I’m an early riser and going to the gym is a great way to get the blood flowing. After practice, I’d enjoy a cup of black coffee. I’ve been drinking coffee since the age of four and can’t imagine life without it. Like someone once said: “I’m not addicted to it, we’re just in a committed relationship.”

Lunch

Lunch is with the hubby at Kafinn. It’s a diner-like restaurant located on the docks at Grund and it’s one of my favourite places in Reykjavík. Someone described it as, “the complete opposite of a pretentious hipster hangout” and that’s exactly what I like about it. Just a bunch of old sailors, people coming from AA-meetings and the occasional tourist. After having seafood soup, which is sublime by the way, it would be fun to take a stroll around Grundi. There are so many cool places there.

In the afternoon

My daughter started kindergarten this fall and it would be great to pick her up and get to spend some quality time with her. Take her to nòi, play football and go visit my parents. My mother is a crazy cat lady who sometimes thinks she runs a shelter for lost or abandoned animals.

Early evening

Coffee with friends at Mosfellshaka-kant. Everyone should have a Bjarman, Snorri and Bjössi in their life. They beat yoga and therapy.

Dinner

Indiana or Thai takeaway from ThaiRoslin or Kuala Thai with the hubby, our daughter and her two mothers. I recently found out that she loves Ruster Paul as much as she loves Peppa Pig, so maybe we’ll all watch an episode together. Going with the family to the old-fashioned restaurant Laugus would also be a great idea. I’ve loved it since I was a kid. The creamy “gratin au geller” is a delicacy, the checked curtains an absolute hoot.

In the heat of the night

Do you realize I was at the gym at 6:15 am so I’d probably have to be a coke addict to be awake this late? So, at this point, I’ve probably gone to sleep feeling great after a wonderful day.

Vital Info

Useful Numbers

Emergency: 112
On-call doctors: 1770
Dental emergency: 076 0505
Taxi: ReykTaxi (888 5522) 888 561000

Post Office

The downtown post office has moved to Naustiði 1-3 D3, is an indoor swimming pool at Laugavegur 30 E5, the downtown pool at Lækjargata 2a D3, the downtown pool at Hlemmur, Ingólfstorg, by Naustiði 1-3 D3, the downtown pool at Naustiði 1-3 D3, the downtown pool at Lækjargata 2a D3, the downtown pool at Lækjargata 10 E3, the downtown pool at Ingólfsstræti 20 E4, the downtown pool at Bankastræti 7 E4, the downtown pool at Bankastræti 12 E4, the downtown pool at Lækjargata 10 E3, the downtown pool at Lækjargata 2a D3, the downtown pool at Lækjargata 2a D3, the downtown pool at Barónsstígur, is an indoor swimming pool with hot tubs and a diving board.

Opening Hours - Bars & Clubs

Bars can stay open until 23:00 on weekends and until further notice.

Opening Hours - Shops & Banks

Most shops: Mon-Fri 10-18, Sat 10-16, Sun closed. Banks: Mon-Fri 09-16.

Swimming Pools

Sun closed. Banks: Mon-Fri 09-16, 22:00 from 06:30-20, Sat from 06:30-18, Sun from 10-18.

Public Toilets

Public toilets in the centre can be found inside the Reykjavík City Hall and the National Museum.

Public Transport

Most buses run every 20-30 minutes. Fare: 490 ISK adults, 240 ISK children. Buses run on 07-24:00, and 10:00-14:30 on weekends. More info: www.bus.is

Museums & Galleries

The National Museum: Open Mon-Fri 10-18, Sat-Sun 13-18

American Bar

The American Bar is an English Pub in the centre of Reykjavík.

Venue Finder

Venuess

The venues on the right (i.e. B) tell you position on the map or the next page

Venues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Opening Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bar &amp; Restaurant Hverfisgata 26</td>
<td>Monday-Sunday 9-18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Get the bigger, more detailed version of The Reykjavík Grapevine City Map at your nearest hotel or guesthouse, with selections from our Best-Of awards, vital info, downtown bus stops and a wider view of the city.

The Map

Dining

1. Austur-Indiafélagið
   Hverfisgata 56
   Still going strong 20 years on. Austur-Indiafélagið is an institution. Make a meal out of the delicate salmon pollock. Keishi mappas and kuchas and share it family style. Keep your eyes peeled for the vegetarian and vegan dishes as well.

2. Gaeta Gelato
   Hafnarstraeti 1-3
   With big portions and a tasty menu, this hip restaurant offers everything you might desire, from crispy broccoli to big bowls of mussels to a great leg of lamb and a taste of lobster. Try and get a seat upstairs: it’ll be like dining under a starry sky in the most romantic, dim-lit set-up.

3. Gaeta Svinís
   Hafnarstraeti 4
   This old-school burger and beer joint is right downtown—near Lundholl— but feels like a real neighbourhood bar. Its unassuming exterior hides a cozy, no-frills dining room, where you’ll mostly be surrounded by locals for once.

4. Valdis
   Grandagarður 21 & Frakkastígur 10
   This beloved ice cream parlour— which has a Grandi and downtown location— makes everything in-house each morning, and you can tell. If you like liquorice, try Týrský Pókur. While it looks like liquid cement, it tastes heavenly. The spot doesn’t have a large seating area, so take your cone on a stroll along the harbourside or enjoy it in a parked car.

5. Bastard Brew & Food
   Vegamótstígur 4
   This downtown drinking hole is something of a bear and bar-food palace. It’s an English pub style environment, without the sense of history, but with eleven beers on tap, a great happy hour, and the phenomenally good ‘Fat Bastard’ burger on its menu. It’s a firm Grapevine tap, a great happy hour, and the palace. It’s an English pub style.

6. Noodle Station
   Laugavegur 153
   Billingue clouds of onion sandwich are any month-waiting introduction to Noodle Station. Choose beef, vegetable or chicken, and add an extra spice or flaky chilli sauce until your nose runs, your tongue throbs and your gums howl. It’s a bar-style steaming and cheaper prices (for Reykjavík) attract prudent solo travellers.

7. Grandi Mathíóll
   Grandagarður 16
   Brandi Mathíóll has an immediately comfortable feel, with various stools, benches and couches scattered throughout the space. There are nine concessions and a bustling, social feel as people meander between the vendors, who shout out names as their orders are ready. Tip: Vegan food from Spis and friend chicken from KOKI. Everyone’s happy!

8. Vitabar
   Bergþorvarsgata 21
   For a piece of good ol’ Icelandic fish, there’s no better spot than Salka Valk. The restaurant serves up a steamed fillet in their Fish Of The Day meal, with the fish options depending on what is the freshest available. They also have potentially the best plokkfiskur in the city, some stellar soups, and—quite recently—a pizza menu.

9. Bojarins Beztu
   Tryggvagata 1
   Icelandic have a weird obsession with hot dogs—trust us, you won’t understand until you’ve been here. It’s universally agreed though that the tiny stand Bojarins Beztu serves the best one. Pro-Tip: When they ask what toppings you want, say ‘ALL!’ This is the only way to eat it.

10. Mama
    Laugavegur 2
    Nothing tastes better than ethics, which is why we love to try the rainbow salad and ‘niçecram’ bowls at Mama, a plant-based restaurant with big dreams. The company is proudly environmentalist—they hope to use their profits to transform the land so that the kitchen can become self-sufficient. The restaurant also describes its accurate deep-fried shrimp offerings as a whole host of yoga sessions and breathing workshops. Have your plant-based prayers been answered?

Drinking

12. Röntgen
   Hverfisgata 12
   Röntgen is a party bar in the purest sense, with a rowdy dance floor, delicious cocktails and a fanbase that’s just growing and growing. Run by the legends behind Húrra (KRF), Röntgen unexpectedly grabbed the runner-up for the Best Goddess Bar category at the 2020 Best of Reykjavík awards. We stan.

13. Lebowski Bar
    Laugavegur 20a
    This fully carpeted bar honouring the “Lebowski” Lebowski (not The Dude, man) is a nice place that offers two vibes: start the night nice and cozy, with the right nice and costs, with an artisinal White Russian, and end it on one of the rowdiest and most underrated dance floors in the city. Yup, Lebowski is a great place to hang at, but that could just be, like, our opinion man.

14. Jungle Cocktail Bar
    Austurstræti 9
    The verdant Jungle Cocktail Bar came in like a tropical storm last winter. Devoted to the elevation of all things cocktail culture, some sky Jungles stranger offerings over the past months have included a kale cocktail, but there’s no shortage of leval-headed concoctions like the signature “The Bimbashé” (tequila, rhubarb & vermouth) along with any classic you can name.

15. Port 9
   Yehóshuastígar 9
   Cosy and tucked away with secretive vibe, Port 9 is a true hidden gem, hosting a delicious wine list as well as potentially the most intimate atmosphere in Reykjavík. It also has a nice balcony—the ideal locale for sipping some Pinos in the summer sun.

16. Mengi
   Óðinnagata 2
   Mengi’s concert room is more white cube than dive bar. The programme encourages new collaborations and experimental performances, so even if you were to Steve and love the work of the musicians you’re seeing, you might be treated to something brand new on any given night.

17. Luna Flórens
   Grandagarður 25
   Luna Flórens is Iceland’s only “gypsy bar.” Part flower-child, part spiritual and with a whole lot of whimsy thrown into the mix, this cosy and hand-crafted bar is so intimate it makes you wanna spend the day musing by the legends behind Húrra (KRF), Röntgen unexpectedly grabbed the runner-up for the Best Goddess Bar category at the 2020 Best of Reykjavík awards. We stan.

18. RVK Brewing Company
    Skiploth 31
    Yes, there is a bar on Skiploth, and yes, it is one that you need to check out. The RVK Brewing Company has slid…
under the radar since it opened, but now, we’re here to bring it out of the shadows. The brewery and beer hall offers a varied list of brews, most of which they make themselves locally. Come and experience your new beer addiction.

19. English Pub
Austurstræti 12
True to its name, the English Pub offers many different kinds of lager on tap and a whiff of that genuine UK feel. Try the famous “wheel of fortune” where one can win up to a metre of beer with a single spin while a steady team of troubadours engage the crowd in classic sing-alongs every night. The only thing missing is the salt & vinegar crisps.

Shopping
20. Hildur Yeoman
Laugavegur 7
Hildur’s got a fresh new boutique on Laugavegur. As well as selling her own designs—women’swear characterised by flowing shapes made from fine fabrics with colourful, distinctive, busy prints—Hildur Yeoman’s boutique also features sunglasses by Le Specs, jewellery by Vanessa Mooney, French tea, and other interesting trinkets.

21. nomad.
Snæfellsstígur 8F
A relative newbie to the Laugavegur scene, nomad was a surprise runner-up for the Best Design Store at the 2020 Best of Reykjavík awards. They have a fantastically curated selection of books, lamps, candles and more. Plus, the owner is a photographer and often has exhibitions on the lower floor.

22. Wasteland Reykjavík
Ingólfsstræti 5
For super à la mode downtown Reykjavík looks—i.e. cheerleader uniforms, Guy Fieri t-shirts, and astronaut-esque jumpsuits—this second-hand store is the go-to.

23. Lucky Records
Rauðarstígur 10
Lucky Records is the punky underground horse of the Reykjavík record scene. It’s one of those shops that is easy to get lost in—expect to easily spend an entire afternoon perusing their selection.

24. Melabúðin
Hagamál 39, 107
For foodies looking for artisanal deli meats, fresh figs, rare cheeses and all sorts of unexpected, hard-to-find treats, Vesturbær’s beloved Melabúðin should satiate your desires.

25. Pastel Flower Studio
Baldursgata 36
Pastel Flower Studio is only open on Fridays and Saturdays from 13:00 to 18:00—so plan accordingly. The studio uses cut, dried, and fresh flowers to create unique arrangements that reference classic Icelandic nature in an unexpected and innovative way. Trust us: You won’t find a florist in the city that’s in any way comparable.

26. Street Rats Tattoo
Hverfisgata 37
Kristófer, a.k.a. StreetRats Tattoo, has proven himself to be a fresh, experimental artist whose works have become a somewhat coveted symbol in the city. So if you’re looking to get your travel tattoo, go there. It’s way more interesting than a Vegvisir.
Ultraflex: fashion icons

Collaborating comes easily to Kari and Katrín, who work together like spandex and leg-warmers. Speaking of spandex, fans have probably been wondering where Ultraflex sourced the iconic vintage clothes featured in their music videos. “Oh, we have done so much shopping,” Katrín says, naming HUMANA in Berlin as one of their favourite spots. Ultraflex say they also borrowed a lot of clothes from the band CYBER, who are good friends of theirs.

Favourite tracks and future plans

When it comes to their favourite track on the album, Ultraflex agree on the aforementioned “Work Out Tonight.” Production wise, “Work Out Tonight” is my favourite,” Kari says. “The beat and the bass is just so good. It’s just really groovy.”

“If there’s one song that best describes Ultraflex it’s ‘Work Out Tonight’,” Katrín agrees. She also names “Man U Sheets” and “Papayas” as other favourites.

In fact, ‘Visions of Ultraflex’ has so much vision that it’s no surprise the band are already working on new music. “We have a new theme for our next album,” Katrín says. “I don’t know if we are gonna—are we gonna reveal it, Kari?”

Kari laughs and shakes her head. While we wait, fans of Ultraflex can look forward to more upcoming music videos from the band, who will be releasing a video for every song on ‘Visions of Ultraflex’.

The pair admit they weren’t really sure what to expect when they started this project, but they’re very pleased with the result. “It’s much better than we thought it would be,” Kari says. “It’s going really well and we’re having a lot of fun with the project.”

The writing and recording process for “Visions of Ultraflex” all happened before the pandemic hit, but many of the singles were released while Katrín was in Iceland and Kari was in Germany. “I think we’ve done a really good job of working together from different countries,” Katrín says. The pair explains that they hold daily Skype meetings each morning. They clearly run a tight ship.

“Working together

Inspired by Soviet aerobics videos, Ultraflex’s debut album ‘Visions of Ultraflex’ is sure to get you up and moving. You only need to check out the band’s defining single “Work Out Tonight” to be lured into their pop disco world. This track is a certified bop, with its whirlwind of techno beats, groovy synths and dreamy vocals, plus the music video increases the amount of upbeat Soviet energy to a level almost off the scale. Reminiscent of an 80s home video, it offers a combination of cool irony and chic aesthetics, featuring cycling shorts, vintage track jackets, gym socks, neon high heels and blue eyeliner. The band’s too-cool attitude and detached facial expressions will make you feel like you really are at the gym—you’ve never seen someone swim sarcastically in a lake until now.

An album to sweat to

Ultraflex is comprised of Katrín Helga Andrésdóttir (a.k.a. Special K and a member of Reykjavíkurdætur) and Kari Jóhannsdóttir (a.k.a. Farao). The dynamic duo broke onto the scene in May with their dance debut “Olympic Sweat,” which, like “Work Out Tonight,” was accompanied by an equally dance-y music video. This single preceded the release of their debut LP which came out on October 30th.

“Production wise, ‘Work Out Tonight’ was the humour, especially in the lyrics,” Kari says. (See the track “Pull of Lust” for reference: “You’re not really my type but this is your night / Can’t find the guy that I like and you’re the second best.”) Kari also compliments her bandmate on her eye for visuals. Katrín has proven her talent for aesthetics in her solo projects, as well as with Ultraflex.

“Kari is a producer and a very successful one,” says Katrín. “She’s a DJ and she DJs a lot of obscure dance.” Katrín describes Kari’s production as “musical joyfulness”. Holding a mug of warm oat-milk matcha in her hands, she adds that Kari is also the “master of matcha”.

Ultraflex: fashion icons

The dynamic duo broke onto the scene in May with their dance debut “Olympic Sweat,” which, like “Work Out Tonight,” was accompanied by an equally dance-y music video. This single preceded the release of their debut LP which came out on October 30th.

“I think our main goal was to have as much fun as possible,” Kari says. She’s all smiles, dressed in a comfy sweater: a toned-down version of the moody neon-clad sports star she portrays on film. “We decided we wanted to make danceable music, disco, club stuff; and for the visuals we had this idea to take inspiration from soviet aerobic videos that I was hung up on at the time.”

The pair admit they weren’t really sure what to expect when they started this project, but they’re very pleased with the result. “It’s much better than we thought it would be,” Kari says. “It’s going really well and we’re having a lot of fun with the project.”

Working together

The writing and recording process for “Visions of Ultraflex” all happened before the pandemic hit, but many of the singles were released while Katrín was in Iceland and Kari was in Germany. “I think we’ve done a really good job of working together from different countries,” Katrín says. The pair explains that they hold daily Skype meetings each morning. They clearly run a tight ship.

“I think Katrín brings a lot of the humour, especially in the lyrics,” Kari says. (See the track “Pull of Lust” for reference: “You’re not really my type but this is your night / Can’t find the guy that I like and you’re the second best.”) Kari also compliments her bandmate on her eye for visuals. Katrín has proven her talent for aesthetics in her solo projects, as well as with Ultraflex.

“Kari is a producer and a very successful one,” says Katrín. “She’s a DJ and she DJs a lot of obscure disco.” Katrín describes Kari’s production as “musical joyfulness”. Holding a mug of warm oat-milk matcha in her hands, she adds that Kari is also the “master of matcha”.


“If there’s one song that best describes Ultraflex it’s ‘Work Out Tonight’,” Katrín agrees. She also names “Man U Sheets” and “Papayas” as other favourites.

In fact, ‘Visions of Ultraflex’ has so much vision that it’s no surprise the band are already working on new music. “We have a new theme for our next album,” Katrín says. “I don’t know if we are gonna—are we gonna reveal it, Kari?”

Kari laughs and shakes her head. While we wait, fans of Ultraflex can look forward to more upcoming music videos from the band, who will be releasing a video for every song on ‘Visions of Ultraflex’. 
**Music**

**Event Picks**

*Í Sæn Sæn: Hostel Live Sessions*

January 19th, 12th, 17th, 19th & More - Hostel Hostel YouTube & Facebook

This project is a series of live session recordings aptly named ‘Í Sæn Sæn,’ which roughly translates to ‘in bed together.’ Fitting as it perfectly describes both the nature of the project and the current reality we find ourselves in. The live sessions feature Salóma Katrin, RAXEL, Súlmundur Amars, Sandrayat Fay, Superpower! and Dýmbra. There is a huge production team around it and these sessions will be recorded at Loft Hostel. Because of the pandemic, it will be live on the Loft Hostel Facebook page and YouTube channel. Salóma Katrin kicks things off on January 19th. Súlmundur Amars will perform the 12th, Dýmbra the 17th, Superpower the 19th, Sandrayat Fay on the 24th and finally Rakel on the 26th.

---

**Limitless, Effortless, Genreless**

Magnús Jóhann refuses to be defined

*Words: Hannah Jane Cohen  Photo: Art Bionick*

**Single**

Check out ‘Without Listening’ on all streaming platforms.

“Basically, the whole beginning of this whole album process was not a single note of music, it was the cover,” Magnús Jóhann states. He’s referring to his recently released effort ‘Without Listening,’ the cover of which shows a haphazardly constructed half-built house in an industrial wasteland. It’s from a series called ‘Waiting,’ which documented construction after Iceland’s economic crash.

“It’s a photograph that my oldest brother, Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, took that was hanging in my bedroom so it was the first thing I saw in the morning and the last thing I saw before I went to sleep. One day, I thought ‘that might be a nice cover’ and then I had to start writing music because I had found a cover,” he laughs. “As soon as you’ve decided on some aesthetic or visual aspect, you immediately put yourself in some sort of atmosphere that inspired the music.”

**Two-sided tunes**

And like the differently coloured materials peppering the house on the cover, Magnús’s album is a surprising and delightfully contrasting sonic experience. Meandering through a murky area between post-classical, improvisational jazz and dark electronics, you could perhaps call his effort “genre-fluid.” But regardless of what soundscape the pianist is dipping his toes in, there’s an undeniable “Magnús Jóhann” thread about it. One that shows a leftist understanding of sound, transitions and how you can meld them together into endless forms.

“Feeling like the album is kind of two-sided,” he admits. “There’s a jazzier, more instrumental side with drums and saxophone and then there’s this ambient, totally electronic side. The most challenging thing about making it was how do I combine all of these sounds to tell a whole story?” He pauses. “I wanted to create a sonic world to fit them both.”

For Magnús, this collage of sounds is the culmination of a lifetime of musical consumption. Raised in a family of classical pianists, you rock devotees and hip-hop heads, Magnús was exposed to many sounds at a young age. As a teenager, he dove headfirst into jazz and piano, which he later studied at the university level. Nowadays, his work is even broader. Next year, he plans on releasing a film score, theatre score, as well as a collaboration with Sigur Rós’s cellist, cellist Lil Sverrisson. At the same time, he’s producing works for Aubir, Hipshumshup and even played on the most recent Aush release. “It represents different sides of me, but that’s what I represent—a lot of different things. I don’t want to be limited to one thing,” he concludes.

**Introverted music**

Releasing ‘Without Listening’ was a three-year effort for the artist, who began writing the album in late 2017 and then spent the next years recording and refining it. And while, of course, the midst of a global pandemic was perhaps not the best time to release it, Magnús sees a silver lining to the timing. “It’s introverted music,” he explains. “The ideal listening situation is alone at home, so it’s good for your self-isolation or quarantine.”

“It’s introverted music,” he explains. “The ideal listening situation is alone at home, so it’s good for your self-isolation or quarantine.”

---

**The Reykjavík Grapevine**

Balance Records may not be a household name but it’s more or less the flagship of electronic music in Iceland. And what’s more, they are coming up on their ten-year anniversary, which they will celebrate with an anniversary album—a vinyl, of course—which they are currently crowdfunding through the Karolina Fund. If a decade isn’t enough to celebrate, it’s also their 10th album. Möller Records was founded in 2011 by Árni Ólafsson (Stefniug), Magnús Stefán Jóhannsson and Jónas Thórardóttir. In 2012, Audri Sverrisson (Pre- Free) and Frodi Jónsson (Euroboy) joined the team. They have worked with over 100 artists over the past decade. Pretty good for a small homegrown label.
A Cinematic Collection Of Souls

The Icelandic Love Corporation on ‘Psychography’

Words: Hannah Jane Cohen
Photos: Provided by the Icelandic Love Corporation

A teenager lies on the floor feeding herself popcorn with her feet. A woman in a glamorous outfit hopelessly sweeps a room filled with sand. A man presents a plate of burnt kleinur donuts to an empty kitchen. Welcome to ‘Psychography,’ one of the Icelandic Love Corporation’s latest cinematic works, which is being featured at the ‘When The Globe Is Home’ exhibition at the Gallerie delle Prigioni in Treviso, Italy until the end of February.

The grand video

The 18-minute long extravaganza is based on a participatory performance by the group in 2016. While the now-duo has dabbled in many different mediums over the years, this was their first, as they describe it, “grand video.”

“We had this opportunity to make this performance in the countryside at an old farm that used to be a settlement from the Viking Age. It was also occupied by the British army during the war, so there’s a huge saga, or history connected to the land,” Eirún Sigurðardóttir explains. Jóní Jónsdóttir, her partner in the corporation, agrees.

“We had a psychic or medium with us at the start of the project. We wanted to see what a psychic would feel coming into this old house that hadn’t been lived in for years, to see if there were some images or anything that we could start working with,” she says.

The Hidden Woman & The Farmer

Fortunately, the psychic saw a plethora of images, which provided a framework for a few of the characters featured in the film.

“For example, there is a character that we call the Hidden Woman,” Jóní says. “The psychic saw this Hidden Woman that was protecting the land, but couldn’t move away from it.”

“There was also a very damaged, not-so-happy spirit that was locked inside the house. He was so angry and so hostile that the psychic said we should not work in the house and never sleep in the house because things would start to happen,” she continues.

“There is a character in the movie, which is not based on this guy exactly but has a bit of him. It’s this farmer with a big shotgun. He feels trapped inside his own feelings.”

All of these characters exist in different dimensions of the house, somehow locked to the land itself.

“Take the aforementioned girl with her popcorn. ‘She’s trying to get out the window and run away but she gets caught in the net and pulled back in,’ Jóní exclaims. ‘It’s a little bit like our ‘Hotel California.’”

The national costume of the Earth

In Icelandic, the title of the film is ‘Sálnasafn,’ which loosely translates to a collection of souls. ‘Psychography’ is their interpretation of his concept in English. The wordplay brings to mind an intricate connection between the psyche and geography. “Not only the geography of the land but of the soul,” the two conclude. “The landscape of the soul.”

The Icelandic Love Corporation’s ‘Psychography’ will be featured at When The Globe Is Home exhibition at the Gallerie delle Prigioni in Italy until the end of February. You can explore the exhibition virtually on their website.
December 18th-January 14th

Art Listings

Events are listed by venue. For complete listings and detailed information on venues, visit grapevine.is/happenings.

Send your listings to: listings@grapevine.is

Ongoing

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ICELAND
Solastalgia
In this immersive installation, explore a mix of augmented reality with contemporary art, multisensory effects and cutting edge sound design. Entering a mysterious future in a post-human Earth where only a mysterious digital cloud survives, do you still have faith in technology? (Re)
• Runs until January 10th, 2021
Treasures of a Nation
A selection of over 80 works chosen from the national gallery’s collection displays the evolution of art from the national gallery’s collections.
• Runs until January 10th, 2021

REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Electromagnetic Objects
Explore a mix of augmented reality and high art. The “Electromagnetic Objects” are a borderlines between human beings and technology. The images offer questions concerning the boundaries between human beings and technology.
• Runs until January 31st, 2021
• Runs until December 23rd, 2020
• Runs until January 10th, 2021
• Runs until December 24th, 2020

REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM
Bird Artist In Residence
The Reykjavík Grapevine
Issue 10— 2020

This interactive online exhibition curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist invites the viewer to follow instructions set out by 55 artists. Visitors engage with the art in a practical way led by artists from the comfort of their homes. It was first conceived in 1995 and re-launched in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to keep the experience of art alive at home.

REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY
The “Electromagnetic Objects” are a selection of over 80 works chosen from the national gallery’s collection. In this immersive installation, explore a mix of augmented reality and high art. The “Electromagnetic Objects” are a borderlines between human beings and technology. The images offer questions concerning the boundaries between human beings and technology.
• Runs until January 3rd, 2021
• Runs until December 23rd, 2020
• Runs until December 24th, 2020

The Reykjavík Grapevine
Issue 10— 2020

Our Picks

Do It (Home)
Until December 26th – Online event hosted by the Reykjavík Art Museum!

HAFNARBORG
What Meets The Eye
A retrospective of works by local goldsmith and artist Gunnar Hjaltason. He painted in oil, acrylics and watercolour, but this exhibition will focus on his prints. The images depict landscapes, town views of Hafnarfjörður and the Icelandic nature.
• Until Jan. 31st, 2021
Hafnarfjörður: Works from the collection
The exhibition is a selection of works from the Hafnarfjörður collection that all showcase Hafnarfjörður in a unique way. Few towns in Iceland are as picturesque as Hafnarfjörður and the nature surrounding it also offers spectacular points of view. And we’re not just saying that because our editor is from there.
• Runs until March 7th, 2021
FLÁDI
FLÁDI CHRISTMAS MARKET 2020
Your favourite ALL-IN-CAPS gallery is here with a Christmas market.
• Runs until January 3rd, 2021

HAFNARBORG
Core Temperature
Sigurður Árni Sigurðsson presents a series of paintings which dissect just how we view the world around us. Sigurður’s works are known for exploring the limits of our fields of vision and how that forms the basis of our worldview.
• Runs until January 24th, 2021
GALLERY PORT
Christmas Exhibition
50 artists—all beloved by Gallery Port—present their wares for your holiday perusal. Prints, sculptures and more will be on offer for you to buy and give to your friends and relatives, or keep for yourself.
• Runs until December 24th, 2020

GERDARSAÓN KÖNNVÝR ART MUSEUM
SCULPTURE / SCULPTURE
Presenting two solo exhibitions by artists Ölf Helga Helgadóttir and Magnús Helgason. The aim of the series is to explore contemporary sculpture and the development with three-dimensional art, not only as an important part of art history, but also as a living visual language within contemporary art. The series is intended to honor the sculptor Bar úr Helgadóttir (1928-1975), who Óskarshamn museum is named after.
• Runs until February 28th, 2021
THE SWEETEST CENTURY

Since opening our bakery in 1920, we have constantly pushed the boundaries of traditional Icelandic baking methods. Find us in the heart of Reykjavík serving piping hot, fresh pastries made from scratch, every morning from seven-thirty AM.

Not a sweet tooth? That’s OK. Come by for a savory brunch or taste one of our homemade sodas or craft beers.

Iceland On The World’s Biggest Comedy Stage

Pardon our editor-in-chief’s take on Ari Eldjárn’s first Netflix stand-up special

Words: Valur Grettisson
Photo: Hörður Sveinsson

I’m just going to say it and I know that this might result in the stand-up community in Iceland (and maybe one eccentric historian) dissociating me—and maybe I deserve that—but here goes: Icelandic stand-up has been a goddamn tragedy throughout the years. But don’t despair, there is one man working hard to get us on the world map. This is, of course, Ari Eldjárn, who just premiered his first Netflix special, ‘Pardon My Icelandic.’

Iceland comedy history in 30 seconds

Stand-up comedy in Iceland has more or less been an odd slapstick situation throughout the years from Ómar Ragnarsson, who just danced while reciting rhymes like he was strung out on amphetamines, to Spannagöflur, who made tacky political jokes that were more like a series of dad jokes than commentary, to the boozed up community in Iceland (and probably one eccentric historian) dissociating me—and maybe I deserve that—but here goes: Icelandic stand-up has been a goddamn tragedy throughout the years. But don’t despair, there is one man working hard to get us on the world map. This is, of course, Ari Eldjárn, who just premiered his first Netflix special, ‘Pardon My Icelandic.’

Imperialists... am I right?

But Ari Eldjárn is different. His comedy—rather than going for niche Icelandic political jobs or Monty Python-inspired riddles—is more about Scandinavian stereotypes in general. He made headlines as the first Icelandic comedian to get his own Netflix stand-up special, and while cynical readers might say everyone and their grandparents get Netflix stand-up specials nowadays, we want to state that Iceland does have a population of 360,000 people, so one of them getting a special is like 400 Netflix specials per capita compared to the U.K. Now it seems pretty big right?

So let’s talk about ‘Pardon My Icelandic’. Ari’s warm and friendly comedy translates pretty well to the worldwide screen. His humour, which in this special revolves around Scandinavian quirks, brilliantly nails Iceland’s Scandi neighbours, like the robotic emotionlessness of the Finns and the unbearable tone shift at the end of every sentence in Norwegian.

Most importantly though, he unveils what most of the world has somehow missed, which is that Danish people are an absolutely insufferable bunch of pompous softies that speak the most ridiculous language in the world. But, you know, imperialists, right?

With his observations, Ari unveils the characteristic funny-but-extremely-petty national soul of Icelanders, which is usually lost in most of the cutey international media attention the country gets.

We could be imperialists too

But to be critical, Ari’s stand-up is not perfect. In the middle of the one-hour long special, he does seem to lose track for a moment though he does later regain his vigour. The part about how Danish people make up strange jokes about Iceland is perhaps too niche for an international crowd. And nobody in Iceland cares about Himmelbjerget anymore. That mountain is more of a tragedy than a joke.

But overall, Ari’s show reminds us that he is truly the comedy king of Iceland and he sails his first special pretty safely to harbour. A little too safely, actually, and that could be a criticism in itself, but who can blame him for playing it safe on the biggest stage in the world?

He does give one hope that comedy in Iceland does not only have a bright future, but that it could actually conquer the world! Which is also a weird quirk in Icelanders; we are the world’s smallest imperialist-wannabes. You can run with that in your next show, Ari.
Áslaug Magnúsdóttir wears a lot of hats. When she talks, she’ll transform from a shrewd businesswoman to a staunch activist to a forward-thinking consultant to a good old fashioned fashion-devotee—often mid-sentence. “I was at a stage in the fashion world known for co-founding Moda Operandi, the luxury direct-to-consumer website that more or less changed the game for high-end retailers, as well as her early work at Gilt, another game-changing website that brought luxury flash-sales to the online world, you can’t help but desperately want to know Áslaug’s next move. She has a finger firmly on the pulse of fashion. If there’s anyone who can predict the next wave, it’s Áslaug.

Today, she’s wearing a sweatshirt from her new brand Katla, which debuted earlier this year with a mixture of everything from cozy separates to gorgeous flowing sundresses. The print is a play on the traditional Icelandic butter logo; the word smjör being printed is a play on the traditional Icelandic word for butter.”

Katla’s inception, Áslaug has ensured that every step—from designs to consumer life—has a foundation in sustainability. For design, Áslaug decided to forgo the focus on seasons and trends, which she says, “I didn’t really ring true,” she says. “I pause. “That’s a message that needs to be heard.”

An ethos of transparency

No doubt, Áslaug is one of them. From Katla’s inception, Áslaug has ensured that every step—from design to consumer life—has a foundation in sustainability. For design, Áslaug decided to forgo temporary trends and instead focus on pieces that would stand the test of time. Sustainability did not have to become a liability; in fact, it was easily compatible with this ethos. “I wanted to create something that was beautiful, that I wanted to wear, that’s fashion, but at the same time this timeless element and has quality. It lasts, and you can wear it again and again,” she explains. “We’re not making gowns that you’re going to wear just once. It’s things you’ll keep in your wardrobe for a long time.”

In production, Katla is careful to use environmentally-friendly fabrics or completely animal cruelty-free textiles, a rule, rather than the exception. As for manufacturing, the brand has opted out of the aforementioned overproduction model, instead favouring a mixture of on-demand and small-batch manufacturing.

“We try to move as much as possible to on-demand, which means that we are not building inventory, we are making the garments as [orders] come in,” Áslaug reiterates. “I realise that for that to be a feasible business model, you have to be able to do it really fast, so we partnered with manufacturers in the US that can do that in a two to three day turnaround…and we have tracking numbers on all the items.”

She promptly points to a patch on the sleeve of her sweatshirt. It has a QR code, and above that, an embroidered number that says KF01. “You can go and type that on the site and see the history of the garment. Where did the garment come from? Who manufactured it? What are the environmental certifications tied to the fabric?” She says, smiling. It’s clear that now we’ve come to a facet of Katla that is particularly proud of—a personal flair that distinguishes Katla from the pack.

But perhaps what most distinguishes Katla from the rest of the sustainability-driven brands is its resale/returning program. “We tell customers ‘please don’t throw the garment away if you decide not to use it, send it back to us, we will pay for your shipping, and we will give you a 20% credit for the original purchase price towards your next purchase’ so that’s an incentive to send it back. And then, if it’s in good enough condition, we resell it,” she explains. “Then, you can see in your tracking number the digital passport of this garment. We don’t use peoples’ names, [but it shows] the first buyer was in Reykjavík then it went to New York.”

“It provides another level of transparency,” she continues. “We’re not just saying it’s sustainable. We really want to show you why.”

Áslaug’s growing interest in sustainability over the years has also mirrored an internal interest to reconnect with her country, which she’s also sought to showcase in Katla’s designs. “I had been working in New York and London, in big cities, and barely ever going out into nature. Áslaug says, “I had been working in New York and London, in big cities, and barely ever going out into nature.”

“Then I started a few years ago coming back [to Iceland] for longer periods and reconnecting with nature. It has been an important part of my life as a child and I lost touch with it. I found that it grounds me. It makes me stronger to be in nature. So I kind of rediscovered Iceland in a way.”

She brought her newfound enthusiasm to her work in Katla. “Iceland is one of the countries at the forefront of sustainability in terms of our energy consumption. People are very aware and have this love for nature here. So I thought it was a good time [for Katla] and there’s nowhere in the world you can get more beautiful photographs!”

She bursts out laughing. “This is where I’m from! It’s time to embrace it. When I was young I was trying to get out of Iceland, and now I’ve finally learnt how to love it in another way and bring that to the world.”

And perhaps, there’s nothing that better represents this journey—both external and internal—than the butter logo. It’s an iconic national reference and one that has strong associations for Áslaug.

“This was in my home. We had this in our fridge everyday,” she says. “The sentence [Áfram með smjör]—I thought it was such a clever Icelandic saying, and it’s so relevant and it’s so relevant for what we’re doing.” She smiles. “Take action! Møy!“
Goth isn’t dead, people. It’s alive and thriving in downtown Reykjavík in the form of Rex Pistols, who recently dropped ‘What Love Is,’ a soundtrack for the lace-gown-wearing introspective romantic heroines of the world.

To satiate our synthcore goth needs, we sat down with Rex herself to go through the album track by track.

‘What Love Is’ is an exploration of love in all its forms and how it has shaped my emotional world, my psyche and how I navigate life. Ultimately, it’s an album of love songs, but mostly not centred around romance. The album was conceptualised, written and recorded over the course of months—partly before lockdown, partly during—where love was all I could think of. I found it and I lost it over and over, while my deepest friendships prevailed as the most important love relationships I have.

Don’t Be Afraid of my Heart
A call to my friend and lover who could not let themselves catch up to my love in time. It was a relationship where there was love, but just different kinds. Not unrequited, just out of sync.

Water Dance
Abandoning myself to my deepest fears and desires in a dark, cavernous watery canyon. I wrote this song in my head, humming to myself while floating alone in the hot tub at my old gym, which was in a super dark grey room.

Pray For Love
My complete frustration of repeated unrequited romance, deceit and disappointment. I have had only a small handful of romantic relationships, and this was me being fed up with it.

Draumur
The loves I meet in my most realistic dreams that disappear the moment I wake. I’m a very active dreamer. I meet everyone I know in my dreams and they feel so real. It can make waking life very confusing, especially when it comes to the way I feel about people.

Lunar Palaces
An orbiting fantasy world for one who does not believe in the afterlife. I imagined this place in my dreams as well, and it looked like a cross between the ivory tower in The NeverEnding Story and the moon kingdom of Sailor Moon.

Laws of Passion
My unbridled urgent desire to devour another body, my ravenous sexual hunger that requires immediate release. We were two months into lockdown and I was horny as fuck.

Cosmic Intimacy
The purity of my connections with my friends that no time or space can come between us, where we converge mentally in perfect sync, where we meet each other with no judgement, just unconditional love and acceptance.

Glittering Moon
An ode to the truest love in my life, my best friend in the universe, who is always with me no matter where we are. The title of the album also is derived from the name of a video art piece we made together based on one of the funniest moments we’ve ever had together.

White Gold
A farewell to someone beloved, in the moment when they began to leave their body. The entire album started from this song, which came to me the night I learned that my grandmother was dying. If the album is a package, this is the ribbon around it.

Don’t Be Afraid… Reprise:
Just a reminder: believe that our love won’t tear us apart.
Here are some deals that'll keep your wallet feeling happy and full.

## 1,000 ISK And Under

### American Bar
- Every day from 16:00 to 19:00.
  - Beer 800 ISK, Wine 900 ISK.
- Cocktails 1,500 ISK.

### APOTEN
- Every day from 15:00 to 18:00.
  - Beer 800 ISK, Wine 900 ISK.
- Cocktails 1,500 ISK.

### Hard Rock Café
- Every day from 16:00 to 20:00.
  - Beer 800 ISK, Wine 900 ISK.
- Cocktails 1,500 ISK.

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Tapas Barinn
- Every day – All day.
  - Beer 890 ISK.

### Deig / Le Krok
- Every day – All day.
  - Doughnut, coffee & bagel - 1,000 ISK.

### Havana Bar
- Every day – All day.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Makarō Bar
- Every day – All day.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### GÍG
- Every day – All day.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

## Under 2,500 ISK

### Sushi Social
- Every day – All day.
  - Burger, french fries & soda - 1,390 ISK.

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Fjallkonan
- Every day from 16:00 to 18:00.
  - Wine 900 ISK.
  - Beer 890 ISK.

### Gló
- Every day from 17:00 to 18:00.
  - Beer 800 ISK.
  - Wine 900 ISK.

### Vínbúðin
- Monthly - 1,290 ISK

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.
  - Wine 900 ISK.

### Free
- All Icelandair Hotel restaurants

## 1,500 ISK And Under

### Hambergara-húfa Tómasar
- Tuesdays – All day.
  - Burger, french fries & soda - 1,390 ISK.

### Shalimar
- Monday – Friday 12:00 – 14:30.
  - Curry - 1,290 ISK.

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Lemon
- Every day – All day.
  - 2fl. Juice + sandwich - 1,600 ISK.

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Lemon
- Every day – All day.
  - 2fl. Juice + sandwich - 1,600 ISK.

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Lemon
- Every day – All day.
  - 2fl. Juice + sandwich - 1,600 ISK.

## 2,000 ISK And Under

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Lemon
- Every day – All day.
  - 2fl. Juice + sandwich - 1,600 ISK.

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Lemon
- Every day – All day.
  - 2fl. Juice + sandwich - 1,600 ISK.

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Lemon
- Every day – All day.
  - 2fl. Juice + sandwich - 1,600 ISK.

## 2,500 ISK And Under

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Lemon
- Every day – All day.
  - 2fl. Juice + sandwich - 1,600 ISK.

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Lemon
- Every day – All day.
  - 2fl. Juice + sandwich - 1,600 ISK.

### Sólon
- Opening hours: Sunday – Thursday 11:00 – 14:30.
  - Beer 800 ISK.

### Lemon
- Every day – All day.
  - 2fl. Juice + sandwich - 1,600 ISK.
The Father Of Icelandic Christmas

Brian Pilkington brings the Yule Lads to life

Words: Iona Rangeley-Wilson
Photo: Art Bicnick

Yule Lads have a much more rooted in Icelandic history, the troublemaking brothers are the Yule Lads and the Yule Cat; though steeped in history, they have been renewed and redefined by Brian's books.

Brian first came to Iceland in 1976. Now, he spends his days in his studio in Skerjafjörður, writing stories, painting landscapes and creating wonderful folkloric illustrations—and particularly spectacular holiday images. Brian has written countless books about Icelandic Christmas. Amongst his best-known are 'The 13 Yule Lads of Iceland' and 'The Yule Cat–A Seasonal Makeover'. Whilst the earliest mention of the Yule Lads can be traced back to the seventeenth century 'Poem of Gryla', the pictures Icelandic children associate with these characters today are entirely Brian's invention.

A Christmas calling

Brian was first attracted to Icelandic Christmas stories as a kind of artistic calling. "When I first came to Iceland I was obviously very aware of what was going on at Christmas time and I realised no one else was doing anything with these characters anymore," he explains, sitting amongst his piles of books and paintbrushes. "So I figured somebody had to sit down and start doing drawings and write books about them. And if someone else was doing it, then it fell to me."

The Yule Lads aren't as friendly as more international Christmas characters like Santa Claus. Whilst Santa leaves presents in children's stockings, the Yule Lads harass and steal: they peep through windows, lick spoons, bowls and pots, slam doors and steal skyr and sausages. Their mother, Gryla, likes eating naughty children, whilst the Yule Cat's child-based tastes fall on those who have not been gifted any new clothes. The characters are more comparable with Dickens's Scrooge than any jolly, spectrocular holiday images, Brian doesn't like anything "too sweet and saccharine" and finds these Icelandic characters more appealing precisely because they're imperfect and therefore realistic.

In fact, Brian sees his Yule Cat illustration as a kind of self-portrait. "Because I'm grumpy and vain, too," he jokes, "and he's got a beard and moustache and goatee like mine. So we're basically the same person."

If you look closely at the front cover of 'The Yule Cat–A Seasonal Makeover', you'll see Brian's reflection in the red bauble hanging from the Yule Cat's neck: bepectacled, holding a paintbrush, glinting in line with the Yule Cat's disgruntled frown. There's something oddly relatable about the mischievous nature of Iceland's Christmas characters, then. It's not a tradition that aspires to perfect sweetness: the wry darkness is appealing.

Nostalgia & reinvention

Of course, writing for children is an inherently nostalgic act that fits well with the nostalgia of folklore—that's another reason why these "ready-formed characters" are so charming to someone like Brian. He turns back to childhood and to old, traditional children's stories simultaneously. Then he readjusts and reinvents them: making the Yule Lads and the Yule Cat new was an excavation as well as an invention. Jóhannes úr Kötul's 1910s poetry book 'Jólín Koma' established the thirteen canonically Yule Lads as we know them today, but they had lain untouched since then. Jóhannes's book had tiny, black and white illustrations—lovely in their own right, but nothing close to the colour and liveliness of Brian's pictures.

"There was a big element of having to create these people for the first time," says Brian, and he made sure he perfected them. "I re-assessed him and gave him more colour, lightened him up and made him more cute." Brian Pilkington projected these characters back into the public eye, turning the pencil sketches of ancient poems in the lovely, colourful, characterful illustrations that Icelandic children know and love today.
DJ Dóra JúlíJAgnarsdóttir (28), a.k.a. DJ Dóra Júlia, is a DJ, radio host and art history master’s student.

**Wearing:**
- Outfit and scarf by Hildur Yeoman
- Bag from flea market in London
- Shoes by Melissa
- Jewellery by Gucci, Vanessa Mooney and Hendrikka Waage

**Describe your style in 5 words:**
First off, coordinates. I love everything match-y. Then, comfy—I am not going to wear something that doesn’t make me feel good. But also, I’m always a little glamorous. Last, I’m a bag-lover and a jewellery-lover. I started doing fashion interviews like this when I was 16-17 and my answer about my style is still the same: I wear what I want when I want! Sometimes I wake up and want to wear a pink dress so I wear a pink dress! Even if it’s just a Monday morning at home.

**Favourite stores in Reykjavík:**
If I got this question a few years ago, I would have said that I usually only shop when I go abroad, which isn’t really mindful. But now I really appreciate the Icelantic fashion scene. It’s been coming out strong. I love Hildur Yeoman; she’s a creative genius! I also love pop-up shops like Sif Benedicta’s right now. You have to keep your eyes open. I haven’t been shopping a whole lot this year but I definitely appreciate Icelandic fashion more than ever. You have so many talented women here. I love Yeoman, Katlaforce, Sif Benedicta, Hendrikka Waage, and others. I also love—it’s not a clothing store—but Nomad On Laugavegur. My favourite item of this year was a cosy candle from there. They also have amazing books.

**Favourite piece:**
This Yeoman set is one of my favourites because I bought it this summer when I had a lot of DJ gigs lined up so it was a symbol of hope for me that I’d be able to work. I love all my clothes though. I try to be really mindful when I’m shopping that it’s going to be something I can use and hopefully next generations can too.

**Something I would never wear:**
I don’t think so. I’d never say never!

**Lusting after:**
A bright orange coat from Saks Potts. It’s been on my wish list for a couple of years and I’m hoping to buy it for myself one day! But right now, I’m kind of just lusting after a vaccine.
A pandemic is no dampener on festive spirits

Words: Shruthi Basappa
Photos: Art Bicnick

Christmas Dining

Various restaurants

In stark contrast to the decadent jólahlaðborð extravaganza of the pre-Covid years (think 10-course menus spanning quail to langoustine, wines and spirits to match and languorous evenings stretching late into the night), this year’s pandemic-tinged festivities are a tad sober in spirit. Nonetheless, festivals stir up a passion for the pastoral even in the most Scrooge-like hearts. In a year to forget, it is hardly a surprise that we strive for a Christmas to remember.

The Christmas Buffet 101

A steadfast tradition in Iceland, the Christmas buffet is no stranger to change, evolving from a traditional buffet, to its fine dining format in recent years. Where staff were once ferried on private boats to Viðey for their annual festive feast, Covid Christmas is a staid but not tame affair.

Conversations with friends and family quickly reveal that the jólahlaðborð has indeed adapted—think at-home dinner kits by in-house chefs or restaurants catering to a new normal with spiffy take-away menus and shorter set courses for on-site dining, custom goodie boxes and the virtual online party replete with entertainment by local celebrities in lieu of dancing the night away. While this does rob the joy of the traditional guess-who-kissed-who-they-shouldn’t-have games, virtual beer tastings and cook-alongs are something we could all get behind.

In keeping with the Grapevine tradition of handpicking a selection that reflects various sensibilities, this year, we sought out four restaurants that have been pushing the envelope in the pandemic, making quick-footed changes, following ever-changing protocols and restrictions with none of the limitations dampening that Christmas spirit.

The Non-Traditional One

Where: Makake

A Korean inspired all-you-can-eat brunch, this is perfect for those craving a ticket to lands afar. The menu is extensive and the kitchen handily suggests ordering 2-3 dishes at a time, allowing you to pace yourself between the tteokbokki and the japchae. The latter are sweet potato noodles stir fried with generous slivers of fresh ginger and the former are chewy rice cakes that are all bite and a textural treat. The time in-between dishes is perfect for grazing over the banchan, an essential part of any Korean meal; the mayak eggs are particularly good.

Soft boiled eggs are marinated overnight in a sweet rice syrup, soy sauce, garlic and other seasonings, perfect to top over steamed rice, with a thimble of cabbage kimchi, spicy and funky, or laced with intervals of turmeric hued pickled daikon. The hotteok are made to order and arrive piping hot, with a brown sugar sauce ladled over the pan-cooked stuffed bread. Makake sneaks a bit of gochugaru into their stuffing, their surprise heat a nice foil to the miso in that sugar sauce. Service is warm and attentive, the format ideal for a pandemic treat, where fewer people, small dishes and a long afternoon all serve as a reminder that good dining experiences are still to be had.

The Traditional One

Where: Grand Brasserie

At the Grand Brasserie, chef Úlfar Finnbjörnsson has crafted a smart, perfect for at-home decadence with his Christmas platter. This is old-school, Icelandic festive food done well, tugging at all the right strings. The anise-crusted salmon subtly evokes liquorice, the dung smoked version is delicate and, paired with the laufabrauð, makes for a snappy bite. The reindeer terrine is studded with pistachios and the goose liver pate is velvety smooth. These are high quality ingredients treated with respect and the elegant morsels are an ideal precursor to your Christmas feast. Orders are on a 48-hour notice, so hurry up while you can.
Traditional, Yet Contemporary

Chef Gísli Mattheís Ásbúnsson is known for taking the deeply Icelandic and making it oh-so-of-the-moment. And he does it yet again with this year’s take-away menu. A small yet satisfying affair, the starters are really the stars here (a warm, cardamom scented braised pork cheek with barley is perfectly lovely too). The laufabrauð is a traditional recipe, culled from a sous-chef’s grandmother. This one is chock full of cumin, the best kind if you ask us. Wispy layers of mandarin-hued cured salmon are draped over chunky batons of horseradish-dressed rutabaga, the raw on raw is a contradiction of textures and flavours. The hangikjöt is doubly smoked, ribboned with fat and is mellowed momentarily by the muscat creme. The winner-repeater however is the sild. The underrated herring comes into its own at Christmas, and here it is reminiscent of the Russian ‘herring in a fur blanket’ except, lighter, fresher and almost spring-like. Pink with beets, brightened with fresh horseradish and sourcream and peppered with cress, this is a dish we came away wanting to recreate.

A Little Kiss From Asia

While we are firm fans of the Grillmarket X-mas menu, we decided to shine light on its sister Fishmarket, who more than holds her own. Special mention has to be made of the staff, who weren’t just attentive but followed safety protocols to the T. With a focus on wild caught produce, this year’s menu stays true to the restaurant’s love affair with flavours of the East. Devoid of farmed salmon’s pronounced fattiness, the wild salmon is lightly cured, lightly charred. There is wild duck served two-ways and roast deer with trimmings. But the highlight of the evening remains the wine service. The festive menu can be paired with maverick South African winemaker, Pieter H. Walser’s Blankbottle Winery—none of the bottles mention the varietals or blends except for the vintage. A fitting pairing for the year this has been.
How old is too old to be sleeping with a stuffed animal?

If you can read this you're too old.

Boys like me so much they don't want to date me. What should I do?

Either you're so hot that boys don't wanna date you because they're only interested in marrying you (in which case, my advice is to just choose a hotte and lock him down).

However I highly, highly doubt this is the case. It's more likely that you're just a little bit...average. To combat this, you should try to make yourself more attractive and interesting. I could tutor you on how to be hotter but the classes are pretty pricey and I can just tell from the way you typed your question that you deffo can't afford it. I can tell from the way you typed your question. The stars have something very special in mind for you, Virgo. They wouldn't tell us what, but we're pretty sure it involves buying a one-way ticket to a generic yet quaint European country with a monarchial system and somehow getting in the way of a certain prince or princess. Get ready for your emotional barriers to be broken down and to learn something poignant about the true meaning of Christmas. Because you're worth it.

Baby, I hate to say it, but it's time for some tough love. There are two possible explanations for what's going on here. Either you're so hot that boys don't wanna date you because they're only interested in marrying you (in which case, my advice is to just choose a hotte and lock him down).

However I highly, highly doubt this is the case. It's more likely that you're just a little bit...average. To combat this, you should try to make yourself more attractive and interesting. I could tutor you on how to be hotter but the classes are pretty pricey and I can just tell from the way you typed your question that you deffo can't afford it. I can tell from the way you typed your question. The stars have something very special in mind for you, Virgo. They wouldn't tell us what, but we're pretty sure it involves buying a one-way ticket to a generic yet quaint European country with a monarchial system and somehow getting in the way of a certain prince or princess. Get ready for your emotional barriers to be broken down and to learn something poignant about the true meaning of Christmas. Because you're worth it.

For advice, send your quandaries to grapevine@grapevine.is

Questions & Answers: Megan Massey

Bingeing Every Vanessa Hudgens Christmas Movie Ever

Words: Two Sagittarii & An Ari

Aries

You're not special for not liking Christmas, Gemini. You've announced this every year to seem edgy and every year no one has cared. Unlike Emma Roberts in 'Christmas with the Kranks', you can't beat them, you might as well join them. You secretly love 'The Polar Express' and you know what? That's okay. The hot chocolate scene is pretty lit, and if you're honest with yourself you'd rather watch that than 'The Nightmare Before Christmas' (which you've been playing on repeat since Halloween in an attempt to uphold your witchy aesthetic).

Virgo

The stars have something very special in mind for you, Virgo. They wouldn't tell us what, but we're pretty sure it involves buying a one-way ticket to a generic yet quaint European country with a monarchial system and somehow getting in the way of a certain prince or princess. Get ready for your emotional barriers to be broken down and to learn something poignant about the true meaning of Christmas. Because you're worth it.

Gemini

The best way to get in touch with your inner Gryla is to blast Ariana Grande's 'Greedy'.

Cancer

Hanukkah HELP! What can you, a shikshah goddess, do to turn from a Macca-don't to the star of all your friends? It's easy, just use your Goy-YUM charm to marry a nice Jewish boy like Joseph Gordon-Levitt or Seth Cohen. Mazel Tov and welcome to the family.

Libra

The hottest star of Xmas is to blast Ariana Grande's 'Greedy'.

Scorpio

Scorpio, just because you can sell your hometown to a mall developer doesn't mean you should. Get ready to be visited by Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future. It's about time we saw some character development.

Taurus

I bet a quasi-pagan like you is awaiting Yuletide whilst lamenting Christmas consumerism, but maybe it's time to admit that if you can't beat them, you might as well join them. You secretly love 'The Polar Express' and you know what? That's okay. The hot chocolate scene is pretty lit, and if you're honest with yourself you'd rather watch that than 'The Nightmare Before Christmas' (which you've been playing on repeat since Halloween in an attempt to uphold your witchy aesthetic).

Leo

Yes Leo, you were right. Despite what your bitchy roommate says, you ARE Cameron Diaz in The Holiday. And despite what those bitchy Hollywood bigwigs say, you WOULD kiss Jude Law.

Sagittarius

For a born and bred Sagittarius like yourself, the holidays are merely an excuse to drink, eat treats and reconnect with childhood flames. This year is no different, except your alcohol tolerance is off-the-charts, you've eaten way too many sweets to care and your childhood flame is in quarantine in Boston.

Capricorn

Realizing that you've already put a lot of energy into organzing Christmas festivities—you even got your lights up before your neighbours!—treat yourself by getting plastered at the family dinner and calling out your racist relatives. In front of their kids.

Aquarius

It's that time of year again: time to remind everyone, both in person and on social media platforms, that Christmas actually has pagan roots and is derived from the Roman holiday of Saturnalia. We assure you, people are grateful for this reminder and do not at all roll their eyes every single year when you bring this up.

Pisces

Too scared to tell your family that you stopped celebrating Christmas years ago, you will once again buy a round of gifts for your relatives, send thank-you cards and dutifully report for family dinner in the most hideous Christmas sweater you can find. You can always tell them next year, right?
“Are you underwater!?” my mum’s WhatsApp pings through on the last wisp of 3G available in the Sapphire Ice Cave.

I’m not—but she’s right, I could be. Carved into dimples by the wind, the intensely blue ceiling looks more like the ripples of a lake than any form of ice I’ve ever known or seen before. Jess, Art and Tinna, our guide from tour company Local Guide of Vatnajökull, have all disappeared around the corner. I hold back, unwilling to dip my not-particularly-waterproof shoes into the glacial stream that twists into narrow tunnels somewhere beyond them.

Race from Reykjavík

Sitting in the Grapevine offices just over a week ago, wrapped in a blanket and gazing passive-aggressively at the broken radiator in the corner, I asked myself the question any sane intern would eventually ask themselves: I may have spent two and a half months in Iceland, but have I really seen enough ice? And without a visit to the ice caves of the Vatnajökull glaciern, the answer would of course have been no.

This was the existential gripe our resident photographer Art sought to fix when he drove us interns geokkum east to the Vatnajökull glacier. He spared no horses, fuelled by the bare essentials of Route 1 travel: black coffee and sheer, steely determination. Plus a mild to moderate amount of Taylor Swift playing on the bluetooth speaker, intermittently drowned out by the sound of studded tyres skidding through the snow. To be fair, he said he didn’t mind.

Now I am, for all intents and purposes, alone in an ice cave. It’s probably not where I expected to be on a Saturday afternoon in November. A hole in the ceiling surrounded by icicles lets the outside light through like a chandelier, the walls are glowing a deep blue, and the wind which made it difficult to walk down by Jökulsárlón has disappeared completely. There is only silence, and the faint trickle of water.

Gals on tour

These caves, Tinna explained, change every year, formed by the meltwater canals that run off the glacier in the summer. This is the second year the Sapphire Ice Cave has been accessible, but it has changed shape since last year, shifting one hundred metres or so further back into the glacier.

Eventually the torchlights return and Jess and Tinna reappear. They are shortly followed by Art, who frantically asks me to shine my torch against the ice to help him get a photo, then puts his foot in a stream of glacial meltwater. For some reason, all I can think of is The Tundra Rap from The Mighty Boosh: Ice flow, nowhere to go, Lost in the blinding whiteness of the tundra...

The sun has almost disappeared when we return to Local Guide’s gigantic Ford—they call her Kata—we thudding back over the rocks towards the glacier lagoon, Jess and I sit in the back eating Haribo Peaches and wonder aloud whether we think the hotel will have cocktails. By the time we reach Art’s rental car it has started snowing. The wind blows the flakes towards the windscreen and in the headlights they look like fireworks.

The hotel, thank goodness, had cocktails—and more importantly a two for one happy hour deal on prosecco (it was Jess’s birthday). With a glass in each hand, we headed to our hotel room, put on our hotel-issue dressing gowns and had both passed out from ice-cave-prosecco induced exhaustion by 10 p.m.
DON'T QUOTE ME ON THAT

“I wear what I want when I want!”

The legend, the DJ and the colour bomb of life itself, Dóra Júlíus, describing her own style. Page 51

“I have had only a small handful of romantic relationships, but mostly a series of doomed love affairs, and this was me being fed up with it.”

The goth-queen of Iceland, Rex Pistols, about her new album, 'What Love Is.' Page 40

“Sex.
No, not really, just decided to throw that out there to get your attention.”

Roald Eyvindarson describes his perfect day with a healthy dose of clickbait. Page 25

GIVE THE GIFT OF WOW

NEW RIDES COMING IN 2021

FlyOverIceland.is

ICELAND

Glacier Walks & Ice Climbing
FROM SKAFTAFELL, VATNAJÖKULL N.P.

Book online or call our sales office from 9:00am - 4:00pm
mountainguides.is • info@mountainguides.is • Tel: +354 587 9999