Iceland and Icelanders

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1. Introduction

Iceland and Icelanders are a part of multimedia material in Icelandic, which The Sigurður Nordal Institute published 2004: **Carry on Icelandic: Learn Icelandic and enjoy it!** Carry on Icelandic is tailor-made language course in Icelandic for the needs of those who visit Iceland to study. Nína Leósdóttir, teacher in Icelandic language wrote the culture material - about Iceland and Icelanders. The material is based on various sources but most of the statistical information is from the Statistics Iceland's website. Guðrún Laufey Guðmundsdóttir would update this document annually until 2017 when Ingibjörg Þórisdóttir and later Branislav Bédi took over the task. The latest update was in January 2023 but some information is based on source from earlier years. We publish this document as a cultural complement to language learning and with hope that it will be of use to somebody who wishes to read about Iceland and Icelanders in one document, but also for amusement to anyone interested in this topic.

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Iceland, an Island in the Atlantic

Iceland is the second largest island in Europe and the third largest in the Atlantic, 103.000 km2 in size, half way between New York and Moscow.

The country lies at the meeting place of hot and cold currents, as well as hot and cold air that meet regularly around Iceland. This makes the country susceptible to climate changes.

When pack ice from Greenland is out to sea, or by the beaches, it will be a cold year. The ice does not come near Iceland’s shores in a normal year, but during so-called “ice-pack years” it can be carried to the northwestern, northern, and eastern parts of the country.

Summers are cool and winters mild. The average temperature in Reykjavík in January is approximately 0°C and 12°C in July. On the northern side of the country, it is normally colder and it often snows heavily there during the winter.

Because of the northerly latitude of the country, it is light for the whole day for two to three months a year, in summer. In the spring and the autumn, the evenings are light and long. On the other hand, from the middle of November to the end of January, it is very dark – there is no daylight but for three to four hours in the daytime.

Icelanders talk a lot about the weather (www.vedur.is), as it can be rather variable; it can even snow during high summer. The Icelandic language is rich with words concerning weather conditions, not least of all about snow and snowfall.

A Few Words About Snow and Snowfall

snjór: snow; snær: snow; hjarn: crust of snow or snow that does not melt in summer; mjöll and nýsnævi: new-fallen snow; fönn: drifted heap of snow, snow-wreath, also snow that does not melt in summer; lausamjöll: powder snow; krap: slush
snjókoma and fannkoma: snowfall; kafald: thick fall of snow; bylur and hríð: snowstorm; drífa: snow-drift; él: a sudden fall of snow or hailstorm, or hail; fjúk: drift, drifting snow-storm; hraglandi: sleet, cold drizzling shower; kóf: thick fall of snow; ofanbylur: snowfall in a wind; skafrenningur: drifting snow; snjómugga: a small snowfall; hundslappadrífa: very heavy snowfall in calm weather, large snowflakes.

A Democratic State

Iceland is a democratic state based on a representative government and the three traditional branches of power.

The legislative power is in the hands of the ***Alþingi*** or Parliament, called the legislative assembly. Sixty-three representatives are elected to sit in it by general elections every four years.

The executive power resides jointly with the President and the national government.

The judicial power is comprised of two judicial levels, the District Court and the Supreme Court. All cases go before a judge of the District Court, but a party who is not satisfied with the outcome may appeal to the Supreme Court. Judges in Iceland do adjudicate in all matters, one judge in the District Court (three if the matter is felt to be of special importance) and three in the Supreme Court (five if the matter is felt to be of special significance). In addition to these judicial levels, hearings are held in the Labour Court, to which one may bring a case that arises from a dispute between a trade union and an employer. Its decisions may be referred to the Supreme Court.

The President holds restricted formal authority. He gives his assent to all laws and regulations and has the power to refuse to do so and then the matter is put to a referendum. This has happened three times. First in June 2004, when Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson (president 1996-2016) refused to give his assent to a law regarding the media. The government withdraw the law instead of putting the matter to a referendum. The second and third time was in January 2010 and February 2011 when the president refused to give his assent to a law regarding the Icesave accord. In both times the matter was put to a referendum where it was rejected by the nation. Currently (2023) the President of the Republic of Iceland is Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, inaugurated on 1st August 2016 and re-elected for another four-year term on 28th June 2020. He is the 6th president. Information about the President and his office can be found here https://www.forseti.is/en.

To form a new government. The one who has the authority from President to form a government (most often the exiting Prime Minister or the leader of the largest party), must obtain the support of the majority of the parliamentarians. As no party has, at a any time, obtained a majority of the Parliament, most governments are formed by coalitions of two or more parties.

Government and Administration

In Iceland, there are only two administrative levels, local and national. The third branch, district authorities, is almost exclusively concerned with the collection of official fees for the national authority.

Many rural communities are small, with as little as 50 residents. In past years, many of the

smaller rural communities have joined together in order to save on management costs and make various improvement in efficiency. At the same time, more matters have been moved to local authorities, such as supervision of the elementary schools, responsibility for matters concerning the handicapped, and part of the Social

The Political System

The political system now alive in Iceland formed in the first half of the last century, but a number of developments have taken place in past years. Althingi, the Icelandic Parliament, is comprised of 63 Members elected for a period of four years and representing six constituencies. In the general elections in September 2021, 30 women and 33 men were elected to the Parliament.

Representatives of eight political parties hold seats in Althingi: Centre Party (Miðflokkur) 2 Members, Independence Party (Sjálfstæðisflokkur) 17 Members, Left-Green Movement (Vinstrihreyfingin – grænt framboð) 8 Members, People's Party (Flokkur fólksins) 6 Members, Pirate Party (Píratar) 6 Members, Progressive Party (Framsóknarflokkurinn) 13 Members, Liberal Reform Party (Viðreisn) 5 Members and Social Democratic Alliance (Samfylkingin) 6 Members.

Web pages of the Political Parties:

- Centre Party
- Independence Party
- Left-Green Movement
- People's Party
- Pirate Party
- Progressive Party
- Social Democratic Alliance
- Liberal Reform Party

Updated information about current political parties can be found here https://www.althingi.is/english/members-of-parliament/political-parties/.

As well as these party organizations, The Women's Party ("Kvennalistinn") also ran for election, between 1983-1999, with the main goal of improving the position of women. In 1999, a coalition was formed made up of an alliance of The Social Democratic Party, The Women's Party, and part of The People's Alliance, that joined forces under the name of The Alliance ("Samfylkingin"). In the same year, a new coalition party was created between the left, the Green Left Movement, which focuses on traditionally leftist policies alongside environmental issues.

In the Parliament election 2009 The Alliance got 29,8% of popular support and The Green Left Movement 21,7%, these two parties formed a coalition government after the election. The Independent Party lost 13% of the popular support they got in the election 2007 and got 23,7% of the votes and The Progressive party recieved 14,8% of the votes.

In April 2013 fifteen parties ran for Althingi. The winner of the election was the Progressive party with 24,4% of the votes as well as the Independence party with 26.7%. These two parties formed a coalition government in May 2013. The Alliance only got 12,9% of popular

support loosing almost 17% of their previous support and the Green Left Movement also lost a lot of support, only receiving 11% of the votes. Two new parties won a seat in the parliament. Bright Future received 8,3% support and 6 parliamentarians and the Pirate Party got 5.1% of the votes and 3 parliamentarians.

After a large public demonstration in April 2016, the prime minister resigned, and election was brought forth half a year. In October 2016 12 parties ran for Althingi. The Independent party got 29% of the votes, The Left Green Movement 15,9% and The Progressive party 11,5% but the Alliance received only 5,7% support. Two newer parties came out strong, The Pirate Party with 14,5% and the Reform Party with 10,5% of the votes, Bright Future got 7,2%. Other parties got less support and no parliamentarian. In the beginning of January 2017 the Independent party, The Reform party and Bright Future formed a coalition government.

Popular Discussion of National Affairs

There is a strong level of general interest in politics in Iceland. People will gladly debate politics together at home, work, and in cafés, not to mention the hot pots (jacuzzi/whirlpool with hot water) at the swimming pools where lively political discussions often occur. This general level of participation is also evident in the media: everyday, lots of articles about burning issues by people of all backgrounds appear in the big daily papers – social issues, educational issues, the environment, foreign affairs, or particular community matters.

One might say that all these debates make little progress, with people vehemently shouting over the top of each other without acknowledging their opponent's point. Still, this opportunity for the public to air their views (in the papers f.ex.), as well as their willingness to do so, is probably unique.

Democracy in a Small Nation

Democracy in a small nation of only 376,248 inhabitants (in January 2023)[1] is unusual in many respects. One can take as an example the relatively high proportion of citizens who are actually involved in the government and administration of the country, as well as individual communities.

Each parliamentarian represents barely 3,600 people, while each community leader is accountable to 400, on average. Furthermore, besides the elected representatives there are many people who work on boards and committees on behalf of the state and communities.

National Security and Defence

No army of its own. Iceland has never had its own army and had never taken up arms against others when the last World War broke out, at which time Iceland was dragged reluctantly into the whirlpool of the war. On the 10th of May 1940, only one month after German forces occupied Norway and Sweden, British forces occupied Iceland. Iceland's strategic military importance was obvious: from there, a force might control vital shipping lanes between Western Europe and North America.

The Icelandic government protested the occupation, thereby stressing the nation's neutrality. However, there was very strong and general support for the American cause in the war, as well as broad understanding of military necessity which was behind the occupation.

[1] Statistics Iceland, January 2023, https://statice.is/statistics/population/inhabitants/overview/)

American forces took over from the British in 1941, after agreement was reached between them about the military protection of the island. It was stipulated in the agreement that the forces must depart immediately upon the conclusion of the war. The Americans did not keep to this part of the agreement, instead requesting the Icelanders to grant them use of three military bases in the country for a period of 99 years. There was an unanimous view that the American request should be rejected, but an agreement was reached which allowed the American air force use of the airport in Keflavík.

This agreement caused a great deal of dispute. Its supporters thought that the World War threw light on the clear strategic importance of the country and that this meant that Iceland could not remain passive while a new international balance of power was forming. Great opposition to the agreement existed both in the Parliament and amongst the general population. Many of the opponents were those in favour of Icelandic neutrality who feared for the future of such a small nation as Iceland if it developed closer ties with America, inevitable if some kind of permanent military cooperation was established. Those who believed in communism opposed supporting America, which they saw as the greatest opponent of left-wing policies. Despite these initially heated discussions regarding foreign affairs in Iceland, the agreement was approved by the Parliament.

Iceland in NATO / The American Military

When preparations were made to establish the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Iceland was offered membership, debate ensued about the line Iceland ought to take in foreign affairs. Iceland was the only nation without its own military or defence. Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority of the Parliament was in support of membership, and the move was carried.

When world affairs again became unsettled due to the Korean War (1951), a defence agreement was made with America on behalf of NATO which allowed a few American troops to be stationed in Iceland. This decision formed the basis of a direction in military affairs.

Many people were dissatisfied with the decision made by the government and protested "Iceland out of NATO, get the army out!" Various rallies were held outside the base.

The American military base was located in Reykjanesbær, a short distance from Keflavík. The base was closed in September 2006.

International Cooperation

Iceland joined the United Nations in 1946 and took part in the establishment of the OECD, Council of Europe, NATO, and other international organizations. More recently, Iceland has gained membership of GATT, UNESCO, EFTA, and EES.

Iceland is not a member of the European Union but on the 27th of July 2010 negotiations for membership of the EU started. Until now the Icelandic government has been against membership due in large part to the fear that the membership of such a small nation as Iceland to a large European economic grouping would weaken its sense of nationality and culture. Iceland controls rich fishing grounds which form the main basis of Iceland's economic survival: many people are concerned that membership of the European Union could lead to a reduction in Icelandic control of these fishing grounds, thereby threatening the nation's income.

Still, many others think that membership would come with clear advantages and that

non-membership may lead to an economic and political isolation which could endanger the nation's rate of economic development.

In June 2013 the Icelandic government decided to put the negotiations for an EU membership on hold and finally withdrew the application in March 2015.

The Reagan-Gorbachev Summit in Reykjavík

The leaders of the superpowers of the ninth decade, Ronald Reagan (then President of the United States) and Michael Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, held a meeting in Reykjavík in 1986, during which a decision about the disarmament of the nations was taken.

The superpower summit saw each side commit to ending the Cold War, one that had existed between East and West since the close of the last World War.

Rapid Social Change, Changing Work Patterns

Iceland was amongst the poorest nations of the world during the latter part of the nineteenth-century. Agriculture was main type of employment from the period of settlement through to the twentieth century. Understandably, agriculture is sensitive to environmental change and difficult years (through cold or natural disasters) have often brought famine.

The vast majority of people used to live in the country and the farm formed the cornerstone of society. The first changes in Icelandic social patterns came with industrialization: the mechanization of fishing ships began, and, at the beginning of the twentieth-century, trawling was introduced. There followed changes in work and residential patterns. Whereas fishing had previously been seasonal work, people now moved out of the countryside and into villages where they could take part in the many occupations connected with the fishing industry.

But even more changes in work practices and demographics were occasioned by World War II. It is quite certain that, due to the economic changes caused by military occupation, the War marked the beginning of modernization in Iceland.

Iceland was occupied by the British in 1940, who were replaced by the American military in 1941. The occupation was of enormous economic significance for the nation: roads were laid, airports built and so on, and a variety of services were called for by the army itself. There was, in other words, a strong demand for labour and many Icelanders were able to get new and well-paid jobs. In addition, due to an increase in demand in European markets, the fish price rose. Ironically, these wartime factors all worked to the prosperity of the nation.

These changing social conditions have had an influence on all aspects of Icelandic society, and migration from the countryside to Reykjavík is higher than ever. Rural society has, in a short time, turned into village-based communities and most Icelanders now live in urban areas.

Indeed, only 3% of Icelanders now live off the land whereas the number was 83% in 1860. The largest agricultural sector is livestock, although new areas of farming have developed in recent years, such as fur farming, fish farming and forest cultivation.

Handicrafts and cottage industries continued into the twentieth century, but with mechanization there followed a real increase in the level of work done by industry. Most people today work in food, tourism, construction and large-scale industries, as well as for the software companies. Attempts have been made to create more varied forms of

employment, including through an increase in large scale industry – a controversial measure.

Yet the sea remains one of the most valuable of Iceland's natural resources and fish products are its most important exports. As such, the Icelandic economy has been very dependent on the fishing industry, with fish products used to making up some 40% of the nation's export earnings, but due to globalization and tourism, it is now tourism which counts for about 42% of total export (in February 2019).

The fishing grounds around the country form one of the basis of the nation's good standard of living, placing Iceland amongst the highest income nations of the world. Whether people are as unanimous in their views about the exploitation of this resource, and access to it, is another matter.

Currently (data according to Export.gov in February 2019), the pillars of the Icelandic economy are aluminum smelting, fishing, and tourism. Iceland's main material exports are aluminum products and fish products, and main service exports are tourism related services. In 2017, tourism accounted for 42% of total exports of goods and services, while marine products were 17% of total exports, aluminium products another 17%, and manufacturing products other than aluminum accounted for 6%. Main material imports to Iceland in 2017 were industrial supplies 27%, capital goods (except for transport) 21%, transport equipment 19%, fuels and lubricants 12%, consumer goods 13%, and food and beverages 8%[2].

3. Population and Habitability

- The Population of Iceland
- Reykjavík and its Surrounds
- A Few Towns
    - Akureyri
    - Egilsstaðir
    - Ísafjörður
    - Vestmannaeyjar

The Population of Iceland

The number of residents in Iceland is about 376,000 (in January 2023)[3] of which 16,3% are immigrants (data according to Statistics Iceland (in November 2022)[4]. A great majority of residents live in the capital city area. In the past years, the population has been increasing continuously, as is the case for the entire southwest corner of the country. This has led to an enormous disturbance in population patterns, as numbers of people decrease in other parts of the country. Over 60% of Icelandic residents live in the capital city area, whilst in the northeast there are less than 9% of residents, and about 7,5% in southern Iceland. In other parts of the country the percentages are lower still. Updated information about population

[2] Further inromation can be found on the export.gov website see information about export here https://www.export.gov/article?series=a0pt0000000PAtzAAG&type=Country_Commercial__kav

[3] Statistics Iceland, January 2023, https://statice.is/statistics/population/inhabitants/overview/

[4] Statistics Iceland, November 2022, , https://statice.is/publications/news-archive/inhabitants/immigrants-and-persons-with-foreign-background-2022/

by regions can be found on the Statistics Iceland website[5].

There is a strong culture of single-family dwelling in Iceland. Most people choose to live in a single-family house or a terrace house as well as in apartment blocks. Amongst other things, this has seen the town spread over a rather large area in relation to the number of residents. There is little in the way of rented premises and rent in the capital city area is very high.

Reykjavík and its surroundings

The southwest corner of Iceland is the most densely populated region and the location of the capital Reykjavík, the northernmost capital in the world. Reykjavík is situated on the southeast coastline of Faxaflói. The city's climate is mild and, compared with some other parts of the country, there is rather little difference between summer and winter. It is also rather rainy, with an average of 200 precipitous days per year.

The source of the settlement in Reykjavík can be traced back to when Ingólfur Arnarson, the first Norse settler in Iceland, established himself in the area. His story is related in Landnámabók (The Book of Settlements), estimated to be from the early part of the twelfth century and the oldest source of information about the settlement of Iceland:

When Ingólfur saw Iceland, he threw his high-seat posts overboard for good luck. He declared that he would establish himself at the place where the beam came to land.

He sent his slaves to find the posts, set up his farm where they were found, and named the place Reykjavík. Archaeological excavations of the place he is said to have established his farm do lend support to the traditional view that it is the location of Reykjavík's first residents.

The organized building of an urban area in Reykjavík began in the mid eighteenth-century. The town was granted a trading license in 1786, at which time the number of residents was 167. At the beginning of the twentieth-century, their number was 5,000. Today, Reykjavík is by far the largest urban area in the country, with about 240,000[6] inhabitants and 60% or more of the nation living in the Capital Region, which includes Reykjavik city and other surrounding towns.

Kópavogur, which was established after World War II, is practically growing alongside Reykjavík, and the general urban area extends through the town Garðabær to Hafnarfjörður, an old fishing and trading town that lies a few kilometres to the south.

About 50 kilometres south of Reykjavík is Reykjanesbær, nearby Reykjanesbæ is Keflavík Airport, the largest airport in Iceland. The airport was built by American troops during World War II and began operating in 1943. Situated alongside Keflavík Airport was the American military base, the base closed in september 2006.

Development around Reykjavík is spread over lowlands on the beach, and the town continues to get larger at the expense of the countryside. Many people have moved from

[5] Statistics Iceland, January 2023, https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Ibuar/Ibuar__mannfjoldi__2_byggdir__Byggdakjarnarhverfi/MAN03250.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?rxid=f9406794-3f95-42d8-b74e-c21f48025a46

[6] Statistics Iceland, January 2023, https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Ibuar/Ibuar__mannfjoldi__2_byggdir__Byggdakjarnarhverfi/MAN03250.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?rxid=f9406794-3f95-42d8-b74e-c21f48025a46

the country to the city in past years and there appears to be no break in the level of new development.

A Few Towns

- Akureyri
- Egilsstaðir
- Ísafjörður
- Vestmannaeyjar

Akureyri

Akureyri is the capital of northern Iceland and the third largest town in Iceland, with about 19,000 residents (January 2023). Akureyri lies on the west side of the head of the fjord Eyjafjörður. At the innermost section of the fjord, the “Akureyri Puddle” or “The Puddle” is, by nature, one of the best harbours in the country. Certainly, above all else Akureyri owes its thanks to the good harbour for its existence but Akureyri is an important centre of the fishing industry.

It is uncertain when settlement and commerce began in Akureyri, but the main trading centre of the north, which was at Gásar 14 km north of the town, has existed since at least 1400. The settlement has, little by little, moved farther up to the head of fjord. One cannot speak of a permanent settlement before the middle of the eighteenth-century. Initially, it was established as a trading centre: there is still a lot of trading done there as it is close to a large country population.

There is a great interest in gardening in Akureyri. Gardens decorate the town and, alongside tall trees (by Icelandic standards), they give a beautiful appearance to the town in summer.

Akureyri is sometimes called “the school town”, and educational and cultural life has long been strong there. It has two secondary schools, a college of art, a school of music and a university. There is an active theatre, various choral groups, and a symphony orchestra. It is safe to say that the cultural and artistic life of the town is in bloom.

Sporting life is varied: two football clubs are run in the town, as well as swimming, ice-skating, and golf clubs to name but a few. Furthermore, Akureyri is the best skiing centre in the country.

The church is located at a high point of the town, and the steps leading to up it are the longest church steps in Iceland.

Egilsstaðir

With approximately 2,600 residents (in year 2022), Fljótsdalshérað is East Iceland's most populous municipality. Egilsstaðir is the largest urban center there and the administrative and transportation centre of the eastern part of Iceland.

The ring road around Iceland passes through the town, and the distance from Egilsstaðir to Reykjavík via the southern or the northern stretch of highway one is practically the same.

Egilsstaðir is located in the Fljótsdalur district, on the eastern end of Lagarfljót. There are many stories about “kynjaskepnur”, that is, strange animals or unknown phenomena, in Lagarfljót. One of these stories concerns the Lagarfljót Worm, or “Lagarfljótsormur”, that is thought to live in the river and show itself only very rarely. The legend of the worm is first mentioned in the Icelandic Annals of 1345. When his hump surfaced out of the river, it was

thought to bode great news. More recently, gasses that are forced up out of the water have been discovered in two places and it is thought that this may offer an explanation of the Lagarfljót Worm.

At the southern end of Lagarfljót lies Hallormsstaðaskógur, the largest forest in Iceland. A forestry station was established there in 1903, where trees are cultivated and experiments with foreign varieties of trees are carried out.

Ísafjörður

With approximately 2,700 residents (January 2020), Ísafjörður is the largest town in the West Fjords. The town lies in Skutulsfjörður, the most westerly of the fjords that run in a southerly direction from Ísafjarðardjúp. High, steep mountains enclose the fjord from both sides.

Ísafjörður has a very long history of trade. In 1569, merchants established a permanent habitation on the spit of land on which the town is now placed, and we have documents from the early seventeenth-century about a trading house made out of timber. Some eighteenth-century houses are still standing: these have now been protected by law. There are not many old houses like these in Iceland and they add something special to the appearance of the town.

Ísafjörður is still the main trading centre for the people of the West Fjords; it is a place where children can attend school and provides various other services. Ísafjörður has long been an important fishing town.

There is a high proportion of immigrants in the West Fjords and in Ísafjörður you can find a Multicultural Centre.

Vestmannaeyjar

The Vestmannaeyjar form a cluster of islands off the south coast of Iceland. Population is about 4.400 (in June 2022) There are thought to be a total of 15-18 islands and 30 skerries and rock pillars. The islands were all formed by volcanic eruption and are all connected to the volcanic system which has its centre on Heimaey Island. Four eruptions are known to have occurred in Vestmannaeyjar since Icelandic settlement, the first in 1637 and the last in 1973, when there was an eruption on Heimaey Island which destroyed a quarter of the town.

Most of the islands have steep-sided cliffs down to the sea and are difficult to approach and land, except by experienced climbers. Many of the islands have vertical sides, but grass does grow on their tops. Birds and eggs are something of perk for the residents, and each year there is a large bird hunt, especially of the puffin bird or “lundi”.

Vestmannaeyjar town has ca. 4200 residents and is located on Heimaey Island, the largest town on the cluster, and is, amongst other things, the most important fishing town in Iceland.

4. Environment and Geography

- Environment, Geography, Natural Resources, Issues, and Focus
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    - Exploitation of Natural Resources

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Environment, Geography, Natural Resources, Issues, and Focus

Natural Resources and sentiments

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Environmental Issues in Focus
Environmental issues have not been as prominent in Iceland as has widely been the case in the other parts of Europe in past years. For a long time, Icelanders felt themselves to be threatened by environmental groups like Greenpeace and their campaigns against whaling. More recently, environmental issues have come into focus, not because of pressure from foreign environmental groups, but because of shifts in the local outlook regarding the exploitation of the nation's natural resources.

Exploitation of Natural Resources
As well as its profitable fishing grounds, Iceland has valuable resources in the form of geothermal energy and hydro-electric power. People disagree about the utilization of these resources, with dissent between those who wish to utilize and sell electric power to the electric industry, or even for export, and others who wish to keep the nation's natural life untouched and believe that these resources can best be utilized in other ways, such as through tourism. They point out that the world's wilderness regions are disappearing and

for this reason it ought to be possible to profit from tourism rather than damage the countryside for the sake of the power industry.

The power plant at Fljótsdalur, in the so-called Eyjabakki region north-east of Vatnajökull, had a great deal of opposition from environmental groups, outdoor clubs, and other interest groups.

Amongst other things, the environmentalists argued that the district formed a unique wilderness pearl of Europe and that thousands of geese traveled to Eyjabakki each year, staying there until they were able to fly again. Furthermore, the district was a suitable environment for reindeer.

Both local and foreign environmentalists have likened the district to the Yellow Stone National Park in America, and other national parks.

The National Anthem on the Highlands

The general public feel that the manner in which Iceland's natural resources are utilized is of great importance. In September 1999 a group of conservationists came together by the site of the planned reservoir called "Eyjabakkalón" to highlight their concerns in action. The group protested the construction of a power plant through performance art.

Stones which had been arranged on the ground were turned over, revealing that they had been inlaid with the Icelandic national anthem, one word on each stone. Each participant placed their stone in the correct order, as marked out by goose feathers. In all, there were 68 stones, and one is able to read the Icelandic national anthem along a three-kilometers stretch of countryside. This work of art was probably the longest in Iceland.

Electricity Supply Throughout the Country

Geothermal power plants located throughout the country provide Icelanders with the necessary electricity and drive the power-greedy industry.

Electric lighting was first illuminated in Iceland in 1899, and five years later the first power station was built in Hafnafjörður. The process was continued with the construction of power stations in most of the nation's large towns.

99.9% of Icelanders have access to electricity from the main electricity grid running across the entire country: those not using the main supply are people who live in remote areas who have their own generators instead.

Geothermal Energy

Iceland has a plentiful supply of geothermal energy and, with the exception of the east and southeast regions of Iceland, pools and hot springs are located throughout the country. Some of the hot springs gush, of which "Geysir" in Haukadalur is the most famous. Indeed, the international concept of a geyser is drawn from the name of this hot spring.

The most voluminous hot spring in Europe, the "Deildartunguhver" in Borgarfjörður, produces 180 litres of hot water (97°C) per second. It provides the hot water that is used to heat houses in Akranes and Borgarnes.

This kind of hot water supply is now used widely throughout Iceland, providing 80% of the population with hot water for washing and central heating. Geothermal heat is also used for cultivation purposes. Greenhouses are heated by geothermal energy, where various varieties of fruit and vegetables are grown, for instance peppers, mushrooms, tomatoes,

cucumbers, even bananas, as well as all kinds of plant life. Geothermal heat is sometimes used for fish farming.

From the earliest times, hot pools and spring water have been used to wash and bathe. For instance, “Snorralaug” in Reykholt is thought to have been built during the thirteenth-century on the initiative of the chieftain Snorri Sturluson.

The largest swimming pool in Reykjavík, Laugardalslaug, is located by the “Washing Pools”, that is “Þvottalaugarnar”, where the women of Reykjavík once washed their laundry. This was before hot water was supplied to houses, and it was the hot water around the “Þvottalaugarnar” that, in 1928, was first used for central heating.

Vegetation

- Vegetation
- Soil Erosion
- Conservation and Soil Reclamation

Vegetation

Iceland is a barren country. Only a small part of it is inhabitable and a mere one-fourth of the country is covered by vegetation. This is due to the fact that the climate is unsuitable for vegetation, and to volcanic activity, glacial movements, and over-grazing. About 60% of the country is over 400m above sea-level, but between 200-400m there is a large reduction in the level of vegetation, and at 700m above sea-level the land is at its most barren.

Icelandic vegetation is typically made up of short plants such as heather and birch. There are no large forests in the country, although there is considerable interest amongst Icelanders in forestation and soil reclamation. The largest forest in Iceland is Hallormsstaðaskógur in Hérað.

For those interested in Icelandic plants, it is worth visiting the Botanical Garden in Akureyri. Most of the local plant types are cultivated there. Another beautiful, although somewhat smaller, botanical garden is located at Laugardalur in Reykjavík.

Soil Erosion

As a result of both the forces of nature and human activities, there has been significant soil erosion and deforestation over the centuries. It is thought that at the time of Norse settlement about 60% of Iceland was covered by vegetation, a figure which now stands at about 25% with only 1% forestation.

The country has been over-exploited: sheep and horses have grazed on the land without pause, leading to serious damage to vegetation. However, much is being done by the Icelandic Government and various organizations to halt this trend and there is considerable public interest in soil reclamation.

Conservation and Soil Reclamation

Iceland’s first conservation laws were passed in 1956. The intention behind the law is to create a greater harmony between people and nature so that unnecessary harm to life and land is avoided and so that the sea, land, and atmosphere are kept free of pollution.

The Act makes provision for the protection of certain areas from human damage with an

eye to allowing the natural life to thrive on its own terms. Those areas which are unique or have historically enjoyed protection are also covered, and special institutes work in accordance with the laws.

About 80 places are now designated as conservation areas. Here people have the possibility of enjoying wild and untouched nature.

Amongst Iceland national parks are Þingvellir, Snæfellsjökull and Vatnajökull National Park that was established on June 7th 2008. The Vatnajökull National Park is the largest national park in Europe, covering around 12.000 km^2, or 11% of Iceland.

Besides these protected areas, there are many areas which are kept free for other reasons, such as those places protected by the State Land Reclamation Service and State Forestry Commission. Special forestation areas have also been designated.

There is a lot of public interest in forestation and soil reclamation and a lot has been achieved in this area. However, much work remains if the job is to be done well.

Animal Life

- Little change in its animal life due to the isolation
- Icelandic Sheep
- Bird life
- The Icelandic Horse
- Whales

Little change in its animal life due to the isolation

Due to the isolation of the country, there has been little change in its animal life. Most of the animal species have been introduced and it is thought that only one type of mammal, the fox (locally called “tófan”), had its home in Iceland prior to human settlement. The other mammals have been brought to Iceland since settlement. These include the sheep, which has often kept people alive during difficult times, and the horse, most likely the best-known of animals in Iceland.

Reindeer were introduced to Iceland in the eighteenth-century and now number around 5000. They are the only type of deer to be found in Iceland and live on the heath lands to the north and east of Vatnajökull.

The rivers and lakes of Iceland abound with a rich stock of fish and salmon and trout fishing are popular sports. The bird life is rather diverse in the country and along the coastline. The coastal waters are home to great biological diversity, and here too Icelanders have often sought life-saving sustenance.

Icelandic Sheep

Despite rapid changes in Icelandic work patterns, the Icelandic sheep still has an important place in Iceland. The sheep accompanied the early Icelandic settlers more than 1100 years ago and has had to endure variable days spent in inhospitable country. But its particular cost-effectiveness and its ability to survive even when there is little food, has meant that it has often kept people alive during difficult times.

Although the nation no longer builds its profits from agriculture and sheep herding, sheep products remain an important part of the economy. Icelandic wool is endowed with special qualities, which make it manageable and strong, and clothes which are made out of

Icelandic wool are particularly good cover against both cold and wet conditions.

Icelandic wool has long been used for making clothes, but it was also once used to make a type of homespun cloth called "vaðmál" which, together with wool and sheep skin, was the largest Icelandic export until stockfish took over in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-centuries. Icelandic wool products are now amongst those items which overseas visitors seek out when they visit.

Lamb meat is also important. It was the main feature of the Icelandic diet over the centuries, eaten either fresh, smoked (called hung meat, that is "hangikjöt"), salted or pickled in sour whey: the entire animal was used. Today, traditional foods such as liver sausage, blood pudding, sheep's head, and soured ram's scrotum are still considered delicacies and are amongst the most favoured dishes at the Icelanders' annual traditional feast called the "Þorrablót".

For many years, Sunday dinner in Iceland has meant a roast leg of lamb with caramel potatoes and green peas, rightly called Icelanders' national dish.

Bird Life

Icelandic bird life (www.ni.is) is extremely varied, especially amongst its sea birds. The most common variety of sea bird is the puffin, "lundi", which in Iceland numbers in the millions. About half of the world's puffin population nests in Iceland, especially on the islands off the coast. In total, about 370 bird species can be seen in Iceland, and about 75 species lay their eggs in Iceland annually. The best-known area for bird watching is around Mývatn, which is home to one of the largest duck nestling grounds in the world.

Egg harvesting and down collecting were once good sources of variety, and access to such areas was considered to be something of a bonus. Today, egg harvesting is pursued more out of fun rather than for profit, although the gathering of down from the eider duck remains a line of work for some.

Some birds are closer to Icelanders' hearts than others. For instance, the golden plover (in Icelandic, the "lóa") arrives in Iceland in early spring and is thought to announce the coming of summer. This much-loved bird has attracted the praise of poets, and all Icelanders know this verse in particular:

The plover has arrived to send away the snow,
She is able to send away the gloom,
She's said to me the whimbrel arrives just now,
Sun shine in the dale, fields in bloom.

(trans. Kári Gíslason)

It is impossible to discuss Icelandic bird life without making some mention of the raven, "hrafn". Also known as "krummi", this bird has long held a place in the national consciousness. For example, Óðinn, the ancient Nordic god, owned two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, who flew around the world to collect news for their master.

Indeed, the raven is the one bird known to all Icelanders. It features in many poems and stories and has always been prominent in Icelanders' minds and hearts. The raven makes its nest in cliffs and crags, often in the vicinity of farms, where it often becomes something of a friend of the household. There are many tales about ravens that relate the bad consequences that follow for those who treat ravens poorly.

The Icelandic Horse

The Icelandic horse (www.sogusetur.is) is the only breed of its kind. It has been bred continuously since Icelandic settlement and, due to the country's isolation, it has not been crossed with other breeds. The horse has adapted to the cold conditions: in winter, its coat is thick and rough, but in spring it sheds its winter coat to become soft and shiny. The Icelandic horse is rather small, agile and spirited and is sometimes thought to be a pony. It is considered a good riding horse and the only one able to do all five riding strides: the slow trot, amble, trot, gallop and walk.

Whilst the Icelandic horse is small, it is nevertheless strong and vigorous. Travelling in Iceland was once very difficult and so the horse has long been called "man's most useful servant". It is safe to say that all transportation in Iceland took place with the aid of these helpers.

The horse continues to play an important role in the lives of many Icelanders. While, in modern society, it has ceased to be the most useful servant, horsemanship is now a popular sport that is pursued by a great many, be they from the country, towns, or the city. There is a large number of horses in Iceland, and those with a mind to overgrazing and the environmental damage they cause see them as a nuisance. Others, who enjoy horsemanship, find it pleasurable to see so many. There are horses on most farms and separate areas for stables are found in almost all urban areas. The Icelandic horse retains some kind of a connection with a rural way of life that is in fast retreat in the face of rapid technological change and urban development.

Whales

As witnessed by the many tales about them, whales have long fascinated man. As well as being in fear of these giant kings of the deep, people have been enchanted by them. Many stories describe the heroic struggles between man and whale, probably the most famous of which is Moby Dick, a novel by the American writer Herman Melville.

Keikó

The most famous of the Icelandic whales is the killer whale Keikó. About thirty years ago, a killer whale was caught in waters around Iceland so as to become a performer in an American ocean zoo. It was here the whale was named Keikó and, amongst other things, performed in Free Willy, a film about a whale who was caged in an ocean zoo but managed to regain his freedom. The movie had a strong influence on popular opinions about whaling and many organizations were established to protect whales. Keikó's own story was so like that of Willy the whale that the decision was made to return him to his original environment, off the shores of Iceland. Preparations began for this enormous project and, in September 1998, the killer whale was transported by plane to Heimaey Island in the Vestmannaeyjar. In the summer of 2002 Keiko travelled across the North Atlantic to the cost of Norway were he stayed until he died in December 2003.

There was a lot of debate about this matter in Iceland, and many believed that things had gone rather too far, others pointed out that Keikó's story revealed that money can be made from whales without whaling: around the world, there is now great interest in whales and this can be exploited in a different way.

Whale Watching

Whaling was practiced in Iceland from the Middle Ages until at least 1986, when Iceland banned whaling except for the purposes of scientific research. In 1989, all whaling was ceased, but in October 2006 it was allowed again.

Today, whale watching trips are becoming ever-more popular, and make up a specialized branch of the Icelandic tourism industry. Those who lead the whale watching trips are opposed to whaling. Others point out that whaling and whale watching can co-exist very well.

Rivers and Lakes

Iceland does have a great many rivers. On the one hand, there are glacial rivers (they have their origin in the glaciers) that are characterized by turbid waters. On the other hand, there are freshwater rivers with clean water. Because of the high level of precipitation in Iceland, the rivers tend to be quite heavy. Icelandic rivers are a popular location for salmon fishing.

A recipe for Salmon:
Boiled Salmon in a Spice Sauce

One very distinctive feature of the Icelandic landscape is the large number of waterfalls. The most famous of these is Dettifoss (44m), one of the most voluminous waterfall in Europe. Gullfoss (32m) and Skógafoss (60m) are other well-known Icelandic waterfalls.

There are a large number of lakes in Iceland, most of them small. The largest is Þingvallavatn in the Árnessýsla district (84km2). It was formed as a result of a fault in the earth's strata and lies in what may be described as a large graben. There are two islands on the lake, Sandey Island and Nesjaey Island, and many summerhouses are built on and around the lake's shores.

Mývatn, in the Suður-Þingeyjarsýsla district in the north of Iceland, is known throughout the world for its magnificent landscape and rich bird life: this includes one of the largest nesting areas for ducks in the world. All the Icelandic species of duck lay eggs in the area, among them the "húsönd" (the golden eye duck, lit. the house duck), which nests in no other part of Europe. The lake is surrounded by lava on all sides, and the shoreline is very jagged. A large amount of fishing is done on the lake, that has an abundant and diverse wildlife.

"Bra bra" is the Icelandic equivalent of "quack quack" or the duck-like sound children (and some adults) might make. Once, a grandmother in Reykjavík was baby-sitting her little granddaughter, who was from Mývatn. "Tomorrow we're going to look at bra bra," said the grandmother to the child, who became excited about seeing the "bra bra". So the day came, and the grandmother went down to the Pond in Reykjavík with the little one from Mývatn. "See the bra bra!" said grandmother, and pointed to a bird which paddled about the pond. "Bra bra?" said the child, surprised. "As far as I can tell, it's the Green Head Duck."

Fire and Ice – Volcanoes and Glaciers

- Is Old Katla About to Wake?
- Geysir
- Not Just Cold Ice
- Vatnajökull
- Eruptions in Eyjafjallajökull

Is Old Katla About to Wake?

"Of late, watch has been kept on disturbances in Mýrdalsjökull, with scientists saying that there is clearly an increase in the geothermal activity under the glacier. They believe it is certain to erupt in the near future."
News of this kind is almost commonplace in the Icelandic media, as nearly all of the country has been formed by volcanic eruption and, during Iceland's recorded history, eruptions have occurred on an average of once in every five years. Active volcanoes number in the hundreds.

Iceland is amongst the most active volcanic countries of the world. During Iceland's history, volcanoes have often been responsible for great damage to dwellings and farming lands. Extensive destruction was caused by the 1973 eruption on Heimaey Island (in the Vestmannaeyjar), forcing one quarter of the town to be abandoned and business activities to be halted for almost an entire year.

Of all the volcanoes in the country, Hekla in the Rangárvellir district is the most famous. It is believed that Hekla has erupted about 20 times since Icelandic settlement, the first in 1104 when it laid waste to Þjórsárdalur. During the twentieth century, the volcano erupted six times. Its eruptions consist of both tephra and lava, and they have caused enormous damage to vegetation over the centuries. During the medieval period, Hekla was feared because it was thought to be the entrance to hell. It last erupted in 2000.

Geysir

Geysir is an inactive geyser in an area of great geothermal activity in Haukadalur in the Árnessýsla district. It could shoot water up to 70-80 metres high and spurt for up to 10 minutes at a time. The hot springs and area around it are protected.

It is thought that if Geysir's water level was lowered by half a metre, it might spurt one to two times in every twenty-four cycle. If it were lowered by about two metres, the geyser could spurt at half-hour to one-hour intervals and from eight to ten metres into the air.

Scientists are urging that more research into the geothermal area be undertaken before any decisions about possible interference with the geyser are taken.

Another geyser located nearby, Strokkur, gives a performance every few minutes, shooting a tower of water and steam 30 meters into the air.

The international term, geyser, is derived from Geysir's name.

Not Just Cold Ice

Ice is an inseparable part of the north, be it at sea or on land. Glaciers cover about the same amount of land as the lava which has erupted since the end of the Ice Age (about 11%). The largest glacier in Iceland, indeed in Europe, is Vatnajökull. It is thought that several large volcanoes lie under it.

Other large glaciers are Hofsjökull and Langjökull, in the Icelandic highlands. Snæfellsjökull is also well-known: its sides are covered with lava which has erupted during the recent epoch.

Through Icelandic eyes these glaciers are not just cold ice but are seen in something of a fantastic light, as is illustrated by the many folk tales which have been spun about them, both before and now. Snæfellsjökull has been a popular subject amongst authors. The novel

by the French science-fiction writer Jules Verne, Le voyage au centre de la terre or Journey to the Centre of the Earth (1864, and translated into Icelandic in 1944 under the title Leyndardómar Snæfellsjökuls), is well-known. The book is about a fantastic journey into the glacier.

Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss is an Icelandic saga written in a fantastic or exaggerated style. It tells of Bárður, a man descended from "stone dwellers", who flees Norway and settles under the glacier. In the end, he descends into the glacier and becomes a spirit of the land, or landvættur.

Further, Kristnihald undir jökli (Christianity Under the Glacier), written by the Nobel Laureate Halldór Kiljan Laxness in 1968, has been made into a movie by Guðný Halldórsdóttir. Indeed, film directors have taken glaciers into their service and photographers and advertisers make their way eagerly to glaciers and other pearls of the Icelandic landscape.

It is popular to go on mountain and glacier tours on specially equipped trucks and, in the embrace of the mountains, to enjoy the peace and beauty.

Vatnajökull

Vatnajökull is on the south-eastern side of Iceland. At its highest point, it is 2010 metres high. The glacier is the largest glacier in the country, indeed Europe, and one of the largest glaciers on earth outside the polar regions. The highest point in Iceland is at Öræfajökull, which moves south out of Vatnajökull: Hvannadalshnúkur, which stands at 2110 metres high.

A very large number of glacier tongues move out from the edge of the glacier and the nature in the area surrounding the glacier is praised for its awesome characteristics and unique kind of beauty.

It is thought that several volcanoes lie under Vatnajökull and great calderas have been found under Bárðarbunga, in Kverkfjall and Grímsvötn. In 1996, an eruption caused an incredible flood which resulted in a great deal of damage to the roads and bridges in the district. In December 1998 was an eruption that lasted 10 days. The volcano's plume of ash was clearly visible from Reykjavík, which is about 200km distance from the glacier. An eruption in Grímsvötn occurred in May 2011. It lasted only a few days but was powerful and the ash cloud stretched over a large part of the country as well as the North Atlantic and caused enormous disruption to air travel.

The last volcanic activity in Vatnajökull began on the 16th of August 2014 and on August 31st a fissure eruption started at Holuhraun plain north of the glacier. On February 28th 2015 scientists declared an end to the eruption.

Eruptions in Eyjafjallajökull

In March 2010 an eruption began at the Eyjafjallajökull volcanic system. The tephra fall was insignificant but small lava flows occurred near the eruptive site on Fimmvörðuháls, a neck between Eyjafjallajökull and Mýrdalsjökull. A second eruption started on 14 April 2010 that was more powerful and the ash plume rose to nearly 9 kilometers. Thick layer of ash fell on some farms and the thick ash mist made life difficult for the inhabitants of the area. The ash clouds also caused disruption to air travel in Europe. In the end of May the eruption produced no further lava or ash and in October 2010 the eruption was stated officially over.

There have been connection between Katla volcano and Eyjafjallajökull and today volcanologists monitor Katla carefully.

5. Fishing

- The Riches of the Sea
- "Life is Salt Fish"
- The Quota System
- Quota Sales
- Nobody Takes Another's Fish out of the Sea: The Cod War with Britain

The Riches of the Sea

The fishing grounds around Iceland are some of the richest in the world. The continental shelf, on which warm and cold ocean currents meet, is very wide (that is, about 758,000 square kilometres in size). The blend creates an ideal environment for the success of the food cycle necessary for the growth of fish stocks.

There are a large number of hatching and food gathering areas on the Icelandic continental shelf (which are used by those fish which can be processed). No fewer than 293 fish species have been observed in the Icelandic fishing grounds. Whilst about ten species make up the bulk of the catch, some forty species of fish are caught.

These ocean riches form part of the delicate balance of the ocean ecosystem, and Icelanders are aware that not only natural catastrophes and changes in the climate can seriously effect it. Poor management of these resources will also have an impact.

"Life is Salt Fish"

The sea has long been the food chest of the Icelandic people, and the most important export product since the fourteenth-century. The percentage of the work force engaged in the fishing industry is still very high, although only 5% of urban workers are employed by the fishing industry. Outside of the capital city area the proportion is about 6%, and some 30% in the West Fjords, while the percentage in and around the capital is the lowest (2%).

Fishing enterprises and fish processing can be found throughout the country, with coastal villages more or less deriving all their income from ocean fishing. In order to carry on ocean fishing one must obtain a quota, a requirement that has proved to be one of the nation's most controversial regulations in a very long time.

Whereas fishermen once sought their catch in sailing vessels and row boats, the Icelandic fleet has now become hi-tech in all aspects of its operations. The fleet became mechanized at the turn of the last century and developments in the frozen preservation of the catch, together with a renewal of the trawler fleet after the last World War, has placed Iceland amongst the foremost fishing nations of the world.

The Icelandic fishing fleet, with some 1700 ships (including about 50 trawlers) is considered one of the best in the world. The fishing industry makes up a very significant part of the nation's wealth, which was a major reason for the decision to claim a 200 mile exclusive fishing zone, even though it entailed a conflict with Britain. The claim made it possible for Iceland to govern fishing practices within its boundaries and a fishing quota was quickly set.

Icelanders on Distant Fishing Grounds

Not all were agreed that it would be desirable for Icelandic fishermen to visit grounds outside Icelandic waters. When they began fishing in the so-called Smuga ("Hiding Place" or no-man's land) in the Barents Sea, the Norwegians reacted very strongly: the Icelanders were taking fish from their fish stocks. Various people (among them Icelandic fish experts) believed that Icelanders had been aggressive in their Smuga-fishing, displaying a degree of hypocrisy. In the end, agreement was reached with the Norwegians and Russians whereby Iceland was given a limited quota on the Barents Sea in return for a small herring quota in the Icelandic fishing grounds.

After the "Smuga-fishing", restrictions on distant fishing areas were released and Icelanders now go to literally all the oceans, operating vessels and fish processing across the world. In South America and Africa, Icelanders have created profitable niches for themselves by offering consultation on ocean fishing practices and similar services to locals.

For a while Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Norway and the EU have been in a dispute called "The Mackerel war" regarding Iceland's and the Faroe Islands' overfishing of mackerel in the EU fishing areas.

Significant technological developments in aspects of fishing and fish processing have gone hand in hand with this expansion, with the high-tech world strengthening in recent years. The Icelandic fleet lands about 1,3 million tons of fish each year.

The Quota System

In 1998, the Year of the Sea, the Department of Fisheries released its environmental statement. The statement included the following:

"The Department of Fisheries aims to harness the resources of the sea in a profitable way based on the best available scientific arguments. This will safeguard biodiversity and ensure that the ocean ecology is not threatened."

People have realized that ocean resources are limited and, as such, human exploitation of and access to the ocean cannot go unchecked.

So as to ensure the protection of the fish stocks, in 1984 the quota system was introduced and in 1991 all fishing fleets were set a quota (of which each ship was given an annual share).

There has been some discussion about this quota right, which one may sell, lease out or use oneself like any other possession: therein lies the problem. Debate has arisen about the effect of this management system on fishing practice as the measure may not be what it appears; not least because, recently, many have made enormous profits by selling fishing quotas which were allocated to them without a fee.

The Debate

Those who oppose the quota system criticize ichthyologists for not acknowledging the effect that the quota system has on the environment. They argue that it is necessary to fish a great deal in order to create better conditions for the growth of the fish stock, i.e. by ensuring sufficient food for the fish. Otherwise the fish stocks will starve. One ought not to build a larger fish stock than the sea can support – this applies, for example, to the cod fish. Others believe that there is nothing to suggest that there is a food shortage in the ocean and that, in any case, the cod is very hardy and can go for a long time without much food. It makes economic sense to allow the cod to grow in the ocean: it is a long living fish and great

profits can be made if it is given a chance to grow larger. There are many who are unhappy about the exclusions which have come with the quota system. The quotas are bought and sold, and it is not possible for any person to run a fishing vessel. To many, it seems that there are just a few people who are getting the most out of the common resources of the nation. Others say that such talk reveals their jealousy.

However, most are in agreement that it is necessary to promote a more democratic debate than has been carried on to date. Otherwise, fish institutes will become ivory towers, sensitive to criticism.

Quota Sales

In 1948, the National Parliament passed a law concerning the scientific protection of the fishing grounds located on the continental shelf. This is generally considered to mark the beginning of Icelandic claims for the control of the fishing grounds around the country. Upon the agreement reached with the United Kingdom, and their recognition (in 1976) of the exclusive 200-mile Icelandic fishing limit, it was possible to govern the fishing in most of fishing grounds around Iceland. In 1991, all Icelandic fishing fleets were given a quota, with each ship allocated its annual share. The quota rights can be sold, leased out, or used in the same way as other possessions.

Quota sales have increased since the beginning of the quota system, with ownership of quotas resting with ever fewer people. This is due, in no small part, to the wave of mergers which has hit the Icelandic fishing industry in recent years. This has brought about considerable improvements in efficiency but, at the same time, has placed more restrictions than before on the access to the fishing grounds.

Large-scale fishing enterprises buy quotas from the smaller operators and unemployment follows in the villages from which the quotas are taken. The new rich who have profited from the quota sales are called, both in jest and in earnest, “Counts of the Sea.”

Nobody Takes Another’s Fish out of the Sea: The Cod War with Britain

Icelanders have not only quarreled amongst themselves about the crucial resources which they draw from the ocean. For a long time, foreign nations have sought access to Icelandic fishing areas, among them the British. The Icelandic struggle to have sole use of the fishing grounds around Iceland took shape at the beginning of the twentieth century, when it became clear that ocean resources were not inexhaustible. With this in mind, since 1901 when it was decided that it would be three miles, the exclusive fishing zone was extended in stages.

After the Second World War, just as Iceland was developing its fishing fleet, the Icelandic fishing grounds were subjected to very high use by the fishing nations of Europe. The consequences were soon evident. Indeed, the ocean fish stocks were so drastically reduced that it was clear that they would be in a perilous state unless radical steps were taken. The first of these came in 1948 when a law regarding the scientific protection of the fish stocks on the continental shelf was passed. At the same time, the United Nations began to revise national regulations concerning the continental shelf and the extent of territorial waters off the coast.

Iceland continued to extend its territorial waters in stages with little gratification on the part of the British who sent naval vessels to escort their fishing ships. There were frequent clashes at sea between the British and Icelanders, and Icelandic patrol boats were equipped with special cutters which could cut nets from the fishing vessels. The dispute

went as far as a break in relations between the nations in 1975, when the territorial limit was extended to the current practice of 200 miles. Negotiations between the two nations (facilitated by the Chairman of NATO and a Norwegian Minister) took place in 1976, since which time things have been calm and quiet.

With the signing of the United Nation's international treaty of the sea in 1985, the international regulation of the fishing boundaries came to a close and Iceland's 200 mile exclusive economic zone was granted.

Now Icelanders fish in different oceans of the world, far beyond their own territorial waters.

6. History and Language

- Culture
- The Origins of the Icelanders
- Old Norse Religion
- Norse Discoveries
- The Establishment of the Parliament (Alþing)
- The History of Christianization
- Dark Ages?
- A Struggle for Independence in the Nineteenth-Century
- To Amerika
- Pure Icelandic?
- The History of Icelandic
- Foreign Influence
- Cleaning the Language
- The Formation of New Words
- The Ancient Literary Inheritance
- Heyday in Medieval Iceland
- Bringing the Manuscripts Home

Culture

For a long time, Icelanders have held fast to old ways, to their language, nationality, and liberty. Over the centuries, their struggle for such values has attested their sense of tradition. The preservation of Icelandic language and literature has long been one of the Icelanders' greatest concerns, and the struggle for sovereignty and independence from Danish rule persisted until victory was gained. Icelanders won their independence and national sovereignty again in 1918, after nearly seven centuries of foreign rule, first under the Norway, then Denmark. In 1944, the Republic of Iceland was constituted. To many it now seems as though Icelandic culture is under a new threat, so-called "Americanization." Others think such concerns absurd – Icelanders are simply keeping up.

The Origins of the Icelanders

The Viking Age (800-1066) is the most famous period of Scandinavian history. At that time, the Norse seafarers took control of all the sea passages around northern and western Europe, as well the water trade routes in the east and southwards to Russia. They even

went as far south as the Mediterranean Sea. On their voyages around the oceans, they discovered and settled uninhabited islands, among them Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

Norse Origins

In The Book of the Icelanders (Íslendingabók), the first Icelandic historian, Ari Þorgilsson the Wise (1068-1148), relates the following:

Iceland was first settled out of Norway […] at the time […] when Ivar Ragnarsson Shaggy Breek killed the English King Edmund the Holy. That was seventy winters into the nine hundredth year after the birth of Christ, as described in his saga. There was a Norseman called Ingólfr, who can truly be said to have first travelled to Iceland when Haraldr the Fairhaired was sixteen winters old and a second time a few winters later. He settled in the south, in Reykjavík. (the Icelandic version of Íslendingabók which can be found in Volume 1 of the Íslenzk Fornrit series, this excerpt on pages 4-5.)

There are reports of seafarers who came to the island before Ingólfur's voyage and who stayed there over the winter. One of these was Flóki Vilgerðarson, also known as "Hrafna-Flóki" or Raven-Floki. He was a Norwegian viking who used the raven as his sailing guide, on account of which he acquired his nickname. He had intended to settle in Iceland but returned to Norway after a difficult winter. It was Hrafna-Flóki who gave Iceland its name.

According to The Book of Settlements (Landnámabók), Ingólfur Arnarson established himself in Iceland in 874. However, it is the Irish monks who are thought to have been the first men to settle the country in the eighth and ninth centuries, although there are few remains or remnants of their settlement. Most indications are that the majority of settlers came from Norway, but there is also talk of the mixing of Norse and Celtic blood when the Norsemen went on Viking raids.

Place names throughout the country bear witness to the Norse origins of the Icelandic people, and some places are named after the Norse gods, such as Þórshöfn (Thor's harbour) and Þórsmörk (Thor's pasture), while other place names point to the nation's Celtic origins, for instance Bekansstaðir (Beecan's place), Njálsstaðir (Nial's place) and Írafell (Mount Irish).

Genetic Research into Icelandic Origins

Not everyone is as convinced of the supposed Norse origins of the Icelandic people, and some believe that recent research into the genetics of men on the one hand and women on the other lends support to their doubts. The research has concentrated on genetic mitochondria which are inherited in the female line alone, from mother to child. Since almost all of the inherited genetic mitochondrion of Icelanders has been passed directly from women of the settlement period, it is possible through comparative research to work out their origins.

The first results to come out of the research, which is one of the most extensive genetic research projects ever conducted in one country in order to investigate its origins, and done by DeCode in collaboration with the University of Oxford, indicate that 63% of Icelandic female settlers were of Celtic origin and had ancestral lines traceable to the British Isles. On the other hand, only about 37% of them were of Nordic origins. However, the research into male Y-chromosomes (inherited via the male line) revealed that a much greater percentage of male settlers were of Nordic origins, or 80%, and 20% have origins which can be traced to the British Isles.

Old Norse Religion

The religious beliefs of the early Icelandic settlers can be divided into two main categories; that is, belief in pagan gods and belief in other supernatural forces. In turn, the gods were divided into two families, the Æsir and the Vanir, and the supernatural forces were made up of "landvættir" (guardian spirits of the land) and "náttúruvættir" (spirits of the nature). Some people only believed in their own strength and abilities, whilst others formed a group which followed what has been called "a blend of faiths". Helgi "magri" (the lean) for instance believed in both Christ and Þór. A number of the settlers were Christian.

Belief in the Pagan Gods

Ásatrú, or the idea of pagan worship, is a nineteenth-century term used to describe religious belief in the pagan gods.

The Icelandic settlers who believed in pagan gods followed many gods, or Æsir, and it appears that they pursued their beliefs through idolatrous sacrifice and mystery plays.

The Æsir lived in Ásgarður, and each god had its own home.

Freyr was the male god of fertility, Týr represented bravery and could grant men victory in battle. Loki the Crafty played many nasty tricks on the gods and was, amongst other things, to blame for the death of Baldur, the white god.

But the greatest of all the gods was Óðinn. He was the foremost god of poetry and the god of sorcery and rune craft. He was also the god of the dead and of war. The symbols of Óðinn included two ravens and a spear. He was one-eyed, having sacrificed his other eye for wisdom. However, belief in Óðinn is not thought to have been widespread in early Icelandic, farm-based, society.

Another of Æsir, Þór, was the son of Óðinn and Jörð (Earth) and appears to have been worshipped widely. His symbols include a hammer, called Mjöllnir. Þór drove about the heavens in a chariot harnessed with two he-goats, and brought with him thunder and bolts of lightning.

The goddesses were no less praised than the male Æsir. The supreme goddess was Frigg: she was the goddess of marriage. Freyja was the goddess of fertility, and was often invoked during child birth. There were many other male (Æsir) and females (Ásynjur) gods.

According to Ásatrú, the gods were in constant struggle against the giants living in Jötunheimar (the Giants' Land). Amongst them there were various monsters, such as the Miðgarðsormur (the Middle Earth Serpent) which lay in the ocean around the world biting its own tail, and Fenrisúlfur (the Monster Wolf), who showed mercy to no-one. The gods used tricks to chain the wolf and Þór came close to killing Miðgarðsormur when he rowed out to fish.

In the end, the giants united in an enormous campaign against the gods. There followed a great battle in which most of the gods fell and the giant Surtr (the fire giant) burned down the entire earth. This is the history of the gods and the world, also known as Ragnarök, the fate of the gods. But after the world fire, the earth rose a second time, fresh and green out of the sea. From then on, the best gods and people lived in the ancient homelands of their forefathers.

The written sources of Old Norse religion are the Eddukvæði and Snorra-Edda.

Norse Discoveries

In the latter part of the tenth-century, the Icelanders made their way westwards by sea in search of land. There, Eiríkur "rauði" (Erik the Red) found a country which he named

Greenland, “and said that men would wish to go there if the land had a good name.” (from Ari the Wise, Íslendingabók) According to Landnámabók (The Book of Settlements), he explored Greenland for three years but then returned to Iceland. The following summer he settled in Greenland. Although 25 ships left with him on the voyage from Iceland to Greenland, only 14 made it to the end of the journey. The others perished at sea or turned back. The settlers established themselves on Greenland’s west coast, and the settlement was a continuation of the one in Iceland. Sailing to Greenland fell away at the beginning of the fifteenth century and when explorers arrived two centuries later they found only ruins. What the fate of the Greenland settlers was remains a mystery.

Shortly after the settlement of Greenland, Bjarni Herjólfsson was on his way there when he was driven off course and sighted land on the east coast of North America. Leifur Eiríksson, later named Leifur “heppni” (the Lucky), undertook an expedition to these lands and named them Markland, Helluland, and Vínland (that is, Forest Land, Table Land, and Wine Land). The Vínland expeditions did not prove to be the basis of a settlement on the mainland of America, but the explorers did construct cabins for themselves and were settled there while they explored the country.

It is thought to be certain that Helluland is Baffinsland and that Markland is Labrador, but scholars are divided about what area Vínland refers to. However, support grew for the view that Vínland is Newfoundland after ruins were found at L’Anse-aux-Meadows at the northern point of Newfoundland, Nordic remains which seem to point to a Norse settlement there.

The travels of the Norse people to Greenland and Vínland is described in Grænlendinga saga (Saga of the Greenlanders) and Eiríks saga rauða (Saga of Erik the Red).

The Establishment of the Parliament (Alþingi)

Icelanders took their outlook and ideas about legal procedures from Norway and held their assembly according to the Norwegian model. The Viking assemblies in Norway were brought together in various parts of the country, but in 930 the first national parliament in the world was established in Iceland, that is, a single legislature for the entire country. When this development occurred, representatives from all parts of the country were brought together at Þingvellir. They passed a common law and an institution was established which alone could amend it. There is no other example of a similar state having come into existence by the time of, or during, the Middle Ages. The other states of the time were royal kingdoms.

The meetings of the Alþingi were held every summer, to which people came from all over the country and enjoyed various kinds of national celebrations: as well as legal business, all kinds of entertainments were held and trading carried on.

Although the Alþingi was held for only two weeks each year, it was nevertheless a very important institution: laws were passed and novel legal matters were dealt with. There were also four courts, one for each Quarter of the country. A fifth court was added a little later, which functioned as a kind of high court.

At first, the laws were preserved in the memories of just a few people. A designated Law Speaker had the task of reciting, at the Law Rock, one-third of the laws each year. With the introduction of writing culture to Iceland, the laws were the first things to be written down in Iceland. These laws are known as the Hafliðaskrá (that is, Hafliði’s Code) and were written down during the winter 1117-1118. These laws are usually said to mark the beginning of a writing culture in Iceland. The Hafliðaskrá is no longer extant, but the nation’s early laws were later given the name Grágás (lit. Grey Goose) which are preserved in manuscripts.

The state which was constituted by the Alþingi of 930 was maintained for about 330 years, or until the Icelanders yielded their sovereignty to the Norwegian king, after a difficult civil war between the large chieftain families.

When Norway came under Danish control in 1380, Iceland too became part of the Danish kingdom, a situation which remained until 1944.

The History of Christianization

In the year 1000, it so happened that the Icelandic nation was divided into two factions: pagan worshippers and those who embraced the Christian religion. There was tension amongst people and both sides rode to the Alþingi, most likely prepared to fight. Wise leaders of the both sides persuaded the Law Speaker Þorgeir "Ljósvetningagoði" to settle the matter. There is a famous account of this in the Old Icelandic literature. Þorgeir declared his decision: the country would adopt the Christian belief as it was essential, in order to guarantee peace, that all people have the same religion.

These events occupy a very important place in Icelandic history, and a lot has been written about the Christianization in all the most important accounts of the history of Iceland.

Adam of Bremen was the first of the medieval authors to record the Icelandic conversion to Christianity in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (from 1073-1076). The most important Icelandic source concerning the Christianization is Ari Þorgilsson the Wise's Íslendingabók (from 1122-1133). There the conversion is described as an important episode in the history of the nation and its people. Another source is the thirteenth-century Kristni saga. The conversion is mentioned in a few of the Icelandic family sagas, such as Laxdæla saga and Njáls saga, as well a number of other works.

Most indications suggest that the Christian mission to Iceland began just a short time before 1000, and that few missionaries were at work. The mission was organized by the Norwegian king with the help of Anglo-Saxon and Saxon clergy. The mission was, first and foremost, directed at the Icelandic chieftains ("goðar", sg. "goði"): its aim was particularly political in nature. As the chieftains took such decisions on behalf of their followers, the mission lead to the conversion of groups rather than changes in the beliefs of particular individuals. Although the adoption of Christianity at the Alþing marks a watershed in Iceland's history, it should be regarded as one part of a long-term development. The mission continued and gradually church and Christian culture developed in the country; a long time passed before Christianity took root with the people.

Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði´s Speech

And then he began his speech when men came there, and said that the situation of men had come into a useless state if people were not to have the same law in the land, and he spoke to men in many ways that they should not let this happen, and said that that could lead to such disagreement that it was certainly to be expected that manslaughter would come about between men, and the land would become desolate. He told about how the kings from Norway and Denmark had had war and disagreement among themselves for a long time, until the landsmen made peace among them, whether they wanted it or not. And that course was brought about, so that they immediately sent each other presents and the peace held while they lived. "And now it seems to me advisable," said he, "that we not allow those

to determine the matter who most want to fight one another, but that we mediate between them, so that each may have some of his wishes and that we may all have one law and one custom. This may come true, that if we tear the law asunder, we may also rend the peace." And he ended his speech such that both sides agreed to it, that all should have one law, the one that he decided to announce.

Dark Ages

Reformation

In the middle of the sixteenth-century, the Danish king made a decree to the effect that all who were then part of the Danish kingdom should become Lutheran. Opposition formed to the new religion, with the Catholic Bishop Jón Arason of Hólar leading the Icelanders who refused to obey the king's command. However, the back of all opposition was broken when, at Skálholt in 1550, Jón Arason was beheaded together with his two sons. These events have always been thought to mark the beginning of the Reformation in Iceland.

Tyranny and Thinkers

The common Icelandic occupation was agriculture, although fishing made up an important second source of income. Different types of restrictions, including on the movement of the labour force between fishing villages and farms (the so-called "vistarband" or residency law), had a negative effect on the country's economic development. Towards the close of the eighteenth-century, various preparations were made in order to change the nation's economy, in transport, agriculture, and the postal service, but these went poorly.

Natural disasters and disease have dealt harsh blows to the Icelandic people. According to a census of 1703, there were at the time 50,000 Icelanders all told, but this number was cut by a third (down to 35,000) after the plague which raged in the years 1707-1709. About half a century later, in 1783-1784, the worst volcanic eruption and earthquakes in the nation's history hit, with great loss of life and property.

Despite the bitter difficulties which the nation experienced during the time, it was at this period that it received two of its greatest intellectuals, the Reverends Hallgrímur Pétursson and Jón Vídalín. Hallgrímur is famous for his Passíusálmar (1666, Psalms of the Passion of Christ). The work, which includes fifty psalms, describes and interprets the passion of Christ in a clerical way. These psalms have been printed more often than any other Icelandic book, and have been translated into many languages. Bishop Jón Vídalin was an important and excellent orator and wrote, amongst others, a book of family sermons called Vídalínspostilla (1718-1720), sermons collected for reading out on Sundays and at yearly festivals. This book enjoyed great popularity through to the last century and has gained a lasting place in Icelandic literary history.

At the time, the nation got to know the printing press, which Bishop Jón Arason brought to the country in 1530. There were many books printed at Hólum in Hjaltadal during the late 16th and the 17th century, one of them was the Bible in Icelandic, printed in the year 1584.

Danish Oppression

The seventeenth-century has always been thought to represent a dark age in the nation's history, with the Danish blamed for it. Their poor government and oppression, together with religious orthodoxy, witch-hunting and poor seasons lead to the difficulties which afflicted the nation during this period. This historical view is now subject to some revision. For instance, the point has been made that the Danish governed in a manner which was

consistent with common attitudes to government in other nations during this era. Likewise, the religious orthodoxy was considered to be very restrictive and to have held back progress, yet it is now pointed out that during the seventeenth-century the Danish stood at the forefront of the sciences and that Icelanders who studied in Copenhagen really gained a great deal from it.

A Struggle for Independence in the Nineteenth-Century

In the first part of the nineteenth-century, in the wake of the political movement to the south in Europe, national sentiment began to stir amongst Icelanders. The increased interest in Icelandic and in earlier Icelandic literature worked to stimulate this nationalism still more, and Icelanders began to push for the restoration of the Alþingi (Parliament) and for national independence.

Poets took an active part in the struggle for independence, and many of the best-known of Iceland's national poets come out of this period. The most notable is Jónas Hallgrímsson, one of Icelander's most loved poets.

An important step on the road to independence was made in 1874, when Iceland gained a Constitution of its own. The first national holiday in Iceland was given to mark this occasion. The celebration was held at Þingvellir in August that year: thousands of people came to join in the celebration of this significant turning point in the nation's history.

Following on from these constitutional rights, the influence of the Alþingi grew alongside the acquisition of legislative authority and control of the nation's appropriation bills.

The next step came in 1904, when Iceland gained home-rule. Home-rule meant that the nation got a Minister who was resident in Iceland. The first Icelandic Minister was Hannes Hafstein who, as well as being a politician, was a well-known poet.

The year 1918 is important in the history of Iceland for the reason that the nation then obtained its sovereignty. With that Iceland became a sovereign nation, although it retained its allegiance to the Danish crown. The struggle was maintained, and in the year 1944 a referendum about the link to Denmark was held. 97.86% of eligible voters cast their vote on the issue, with 97.36% voting to end the laws maintaining the connection to Denmark.

Following this, the Republic was established at Þingvellir, by the river Öxará, on 17th of June 1944. Icelanders chose this date in honour of their greatest nineteenth-century nationalist, Jón Sigurðsson (1811-1879), who was born on June 17th. Sveinn Björnsson (1881-1952) was the first president of the new republic.

So the Icelandic people's long and severe struggle came to a successful end.

To America

In the last quarter of the nineteenth-century, many Icelanders who were poor and in great difficulty fled their native shores and headed westwards in the hope of a better life. The first group exodus west departed in the year 1873, although some Mormons had earlier made their way to Utah and a few individuals to Wisconsin in the United States. In addition, small groups travelled to Brazil. After this, people began to stream westwards by sea, and in the period to 1914 a total of 15,000 Icelanders migrated to the west. This was a great loss for such a lightly populated nation.

Far into the twentieth-century, there was a distinctive community of Icelanders in the west. Those who moved west across the sea are normally called West Icelanders.

Today, those Canadians who are either of part or complete Icelandic origin number close to two hundred thousand. They are no longer looked upon as West Icelanders, rather

Canadians.

A special museum about the westward journeys has been established at Hofsós in Skagafjörður.

Pure Icelandic?

It has been a matter of honour to Icelanders that they possess an ancient language which has changed very little, making it possible for them to read and understand their early literature. Their efforts to protect their language, clear it of foreign words and the focus on new words formed out of existing Icelandic word stems have come from this.

The Icelandic language is a matter close to people's hearts: people debate whether it is right to say something this way or that, there are language features on the radio and in the newspapers, and specialists work actively to translate each specialist term in their area, in so-called word-clusters. Many people think this language policy is going too far, often talk of a "language police" in this respect, and point out that the finest people do not dare to open their mouths in the fear of speaking incorrectly and at risk of being admonished by more qualified speakers.

It is safe to suggest that most agree that the Icelandic language should be preserved with as little change as possible, whilst they realize how difficult it can prove to prevent the use of loan words in a period of computer growth and technological development. Technology brings an English language influence which people find concerning and against which opposition is attempted, but it is perhaps more difficult still to stand in the way of cultural influences which, in the opinion of some, have become substantial.

Some new word formations (Neologisms)
Sjónvarp: television (lit. vision-cast);
útvarp: radio (lit. out-cast);
tölva: computer (lit. counter);
helgi: weekend (lit. holy)

A few loan words
Djús is used for the 'proper' Icelandic ávaxtasafi ("juice"),
að fila e-ð for að njóta e-s ("to feel something"),
bæ-bæ for bless ("bye-bye"), and
okei for allt í lagi ("okay").

The History of Icelandic

At the time Iceland was settled (in the ninth century), that part of the north which is called Scandinavia formed one language area. The language of those who lived there was often given the one name, the Danish tongue. It gradually branched out dialectically and differences grew. Now one may speak of the Nordic languages, that is, Norwegian, Icelandic, Faeroese, Danish, and Swedish, which all belong to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language tree.

It is hardly possible to speak of Icelandic as a separate language existing during the first centuries of settlement as there was very little difference between Icelandic and the

languages spoken by the Scandinavians of Norway or the other Norse settlements. The oldest Icelandic written sources (from the twelfth century) suggest that very little difference then existed between Icelandic and Norwegian. The changes began to increase in the thirteenth- and fourteenth centuries, especially because of the simplification of the Norwegian system of verb conjugation and noun declension.

But changes have also occurred in Icelandic. The phonological system has undergone significant changes as has, to a lesser degree, the system of inflection, although the Old Norse system has been preserved in Icelandic in all its major aspects. It is in the Icelandic vocabulary that most of the changes have taken place. These changes have occurred, in particular, because of changing work patterns during the last century, although foreign influence has also been something of a factor.

Most expressions and figures of speech have their origins in old work patterns, customs, games and sports, and habits. They may seem strange to young people who have no knowledge of the conditions of the old rural society, but they certainly embellish the nuances of the language. Many of them raise amusing images of what people once did.

Phrases and Proverbs

"Að sigla milli skers og báru", or to sail between the skerry and the wave, means that one tries to carry oneself well with both of the opposing sides, or proceed carefully in one's relations with people. In the expression, "bára" means "brotsjór" (that is, a breaker). People had to be careful not to collide against the skerry and to keep clear of breakers. For this reason, people are said to go carefully if they sail between skerry and wave (breaker). For example, "Dísa sigldi milli skers og báru þegar hún tók ekki afstöðu í deilumáli vinstúlkna sinna": Dísa sailed between skerry and wave when she did not take sides in her girlfriends' disagreement.

"Að leiða saman hesta sína," or to lead their horses together, means to debate, quarrel, or fight. Horse fighting was a popular sport in early times: men would bring together their stallions to fight and watch the spectacle for amusement. The phrase normally refers to a strong disagreement. "Nemendur leiddu saman hesta sína á málfundi um náttúruvernd": the students lead their horses together in a public discussion of environmental protection.

"Að tefla í tvísýnu," or literally to play in risk, means to take a risk or put something in danger. People are said to play in risk when they play an uncertain or risky move in chess, but can be used if one's opponent is not on their guard. "Menn tefla í tvísýnu er þeir fara illa búnir á fjöll í slæmu veðri": People play in risk when they go ill-prepared into the mountains in poor weather.

Foreign Influence

With Christianization in the year 1000, many more foreign words (from the international language of the church) were introduced into the language and the Icelandic vocabulary was substantially increased. Examples of words from this time are: "prestur" (priest), "kirkja" (church), "biskup" (bishop). A considerable number of personal names were added to the vocabulary (i.e. of Christian origin). As a result of the influence of foreign literature during the middle ages, words such as "kurteis" (courteous), "kurteisi" (courtecy), and "riddari" (knight, rider) were introduced.

From around time of the Reformation (1550) until late into the nineteenth-century, Icelandic relations with foreign nations were to a considerable degree confined to those

with the Danish. As a result, Icelandic was affected by Danish. A lot of church material was translated out of Danish and German, the highest level of government was in the hands of the Danish, as was trade. This all had a part in the increasing Danish influence on the Icelandic language. A Danish linguist, Rasmus Christian Rask, who came to Iceland in the year 1813 considered the language so strongly influenced by Danish that he thought that if nothing was done barely anyone would understand Icelandic in 100-200 years.

But while the language came to be shot with Danish during this period, the greatest part of the vocabulary held together unchanged. This was because there was little change in work patterns and the fact that Old Icelandic literature and poetry was constantly alive amongst the Icelandic people.

Cleaning the Language

At the time of the Danish influence, many authors did their best to speak and write good Icelandic, but in the nineteenth-century there was a systematic effort to enforce a pure language policy which, amongst other things, consisted of clearing Danish loan words out of Icelandic and crafting new words for foreign concepts out of Icelandic stems.

This pure Icelandic policy went hand in hand with Icelanders' struggle for independence, and indeed was a tool in that struggle. It was important for a nation which wanted independence to be able to show its unique national status, not least through its language.

The Formation of New Words

In order to drag foreign influences out of the language, there is a determined programme of new word formation. New words are formed from indigenous word stems. An example of such a word is "þota", for the English word *jet plane*, formed from the verb "að þjóta", to dash or whistle past like the wind. Those who criticize this method point out that words formed with Icelandic stems will normally be longer than the English words they aim to replace, and that it is easier just to use the English.

As an example, one may point to the words "geisladiskur" and "geislaspilari" which were formed for the English words *Compact Disc (CD) and CD Player*. A different method by which to revise the vocabulary is to revive old words and give them a new meaning. Words such as "skjár" come about in this way: it now means "sjónvarpsskjár" or "tölvuskjár" (for the English word *screen*) but originally was used for a kind of plastic film placed in a window instead of glass.

Despite these efforts, many foreign words have taken hold in Icelandic, with the words which have gained full acceptance in the language adapted to the Icelandic system of inflections. Examples of such words are "jeppi" (*jeep*), "appelsína" (*orange*, derived from the Danish word "appelsin"), "banani" (*banana*), "sápa" (*soap*), and many more.

Although one might say the vocabulary is in a process of constant renewal, in essence it always remains the same.

The Ancient Literary Inheritance

Icelandic literature has its roots in a period before the writing age and even before settlement. Before writing culture developed, the oldest sagas and poems were preserved in an oral tradition. Literary culture was brought to Iceland in the wake of Christianization (1000), a change which was accompanied by a considerable amount of book-making.

Icelanders had another form of letters before the advent of writing culture, the so-called runes, or a special alphabet which the Germanic nations formed on the basis of the Roman

and Greek models and which were meant to be inscribed on trees and cut into stone. Scholars believe that poetry was not preserved much by rune carvings, rather by memory.

With the arrival of writing culture, Icelanders began to record the old sagas and poems which had lived in people's memories from generation to generation and which the Icelandic settlers had brought with them from their original homelands. The oldest Icelandic literature is made up of sagas and poems about the heathen gods and heroes.

The ancient poetry of the Icelanders is usually divided into two categories: *eddukvæði* and *dróttkvæði*. The *dróttkvæði* are contemporary poems, mainly concerning kings, whilst the *eddukvæði* are deeply rooted in the heathen beliefs. The latter are closely related to worship of the Ása gods and, together with Snorri Sturluson's instruction book about poetic composition, are a significant source of Old Norse religion.

Heyday in Medieval Iceland

There was a great increase in Icelandic saga writing during the thirteenth-century. At that time, the Íslendingasögur (literally the Sagas of Icelanders but generally referred to as the family sagas in English) were written, without doubt the best-known and most popular of all Old Icelandic literature. Family saga events occur in the period from settlement to the middle of the eleventh-century, but were put down in writing much later, in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-centuries.

The family sagas are about the lives of Icelanders and are, for the most part, set in Iceland. They illuminate the hostilities and conflicts between people; human status and honour were the most important social factors of all. The style of the sagas, their narrative skill, and their use of characterization have secured their popularity over the centuries, not just amongst Icelanders but throughout the world. The most famous of them is Brennu-Njáls saga, or Njáls saga as it is also called. Njála (the more informal name which Icelanders have given the saga) is, like other Old Icelandic literature, written on vellum made from calfskin.

From Njála

Gunnar Hamundarson lived at Hlidarendi in Fljotshlid. He was big and strong and an excellent fighter. He could swing a sword and throw a spear with either hand, if he wished, and he was so swift with a sword that there seemed to be three in the air at once. He could shoot with a bow better than anyone else, and he always hit what he aimed at. He could jump higher than his own height, in full fighting gear, and just as far backward as forward. He swam like a seal, and there was no sport in which there was any point in competing with him. It was said that no man was his match.

He was handsome and fair of skin and had a straight nose, turned up at its tip. He was blue-eyed and keen-eyed and ruddy-cheeked. His hair was thick, blond, and well-combed. He was very courteous, firm in all ways, generous and even-tempered, a true friend but a discriminating friend. He was very well off for property.
(Translation by Robert Cook. The Complete Sagas of Icelanders. Volume 3. Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson Publishing, 1997, page 24.)

Thus, Gunnar Hámundarson, one of the greatest heroes of the Icelandic family sagas, is described in Brennu-Njáls saga.

Bringing the Manuscripts Home

Árni Magnússon (1663-1730) was an antiquarian, an historian interested in Iceland's past, and a collector of manuscripts. He collected every manuscript and text which he came across. He moved his collection to Copenhagen, part of which was lost in the fire of Copenhagen in 1728. Árni bequeathed his collection to the University of Copenhagen. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum (The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies) and the Arnamagnæanske Kommission in Copenhagen are named after him.

Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum works in connection with Háskóli Íslands (The University of Iceland). Among other things the institute preserves and has the supervision of the manuscripts and texts which have been brought back to Iceland from Denmark.

Icelanders considered the manuscripts to be Icelandic national treasures and have worked hard to get them back to their home in Iceland. At first, the Danish refused completely but negotiations between the countries about the return of the manuscripts took place in 1961. The delivery of the manuscripts began in 1971, when a frigate from the Danish fleet sailed to Iceland with two of the most prized Icelandic manuscripts, Flateyjarbók og Konungsbók Snorra Eddu. These manuscripts are now preserved at The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, together with other Icelandic manuscripts which have been returned home from Denmark.

Konungsbók eddukvæða preserves poems about the ancient gods and heroes. The first of them is the poem (in Icelandic, kvæði) Völuspá, a saga of the world which describes the fate of the world and of man. The poem is spoken through the words of a prophetess who tells of the creation of the world, of war in the world of the gods, and the events which lead to the destruction of the gods and the world, the so-called Ragnarök which reaches its climax when the world burns. The final chapter of the poem describes how the world rises anew. After Völuspá comes the great ethical poem Hávamál. The first part of the poem has been called the Gestaþáttur, (literally the guests' story), which describes a man who makes a unannounced visit and how best he should behave. Then the poem discusses the importance of wisdom and friendship, and other things.

From Hávamál

Young was I once, I walked alone,
and bewildered seemed in the way;
then I found me another and rich I thought me,
for man is the joy of man.

(Translated by Olive Bray)

The delivery of the manuscripts ended in 1997. With the successful release of the manuscripts, animosity towards the Danes did, for the most part, disappear. The manuscript issue has created a precedence for nations who have tried to get their own cultural artefacts and relics out of the hands of former colonial rulers.

7. Economic Affairs

The nation's large economy is built, in particular, on the back of rich natural resources like the fishing grounds around the country, hydro-electric power and geothermal energy. The nation is a welfare state, with a mixed economy, and private enterprise blooms.

The Icelandic economy is very dependent on the fishing industry, with fish products being the most significant national export, making up about 40% of all its exports. Only about 3% of Icelanders make their living from agriculture, the largest part of which involves livestock farming. New farm enterprises have developed in recent years, such as fur farming, fishing farming, and forest cultivation. The proportion of the work-force in industry has grown steadily throughout the twentieth-century, especially in the food industry, construction industry and large scale industry which provides almost 40% of Iceland´s export income. Pharmaceutical industry and Software enterprises have also developed substantially as well as tourism, and attempts have been made to create a greater variety of occupations and increase large scale industry.

Economic growth was at an average around 4,3% from 1997 to 2005 and increased fast until 2008. That economic growth is more than the rate which has been experienced by the world's industrial nations over the same period. Purchasing power increased by around 27% from 1995-2003, which is an increase of about four times that of nations comparable to Iceland, the purchasing power kept increasing until January 2008.

In September 2008 three of the country's major commercial banks collapsed and the Icelandic economy went through a serious financial crisis.

The inflation rate has been a problem in Iceland for a long time. In the last decade particular emphasis was laid on creating stability in economic affairs. The result of these steps were positive and the inflation rate stayed between 1.5 to 2.5%. However in the last years the inflation rate have been rising again up to 4,6% on average 2006 and up to 19% in January 2009, since then the inflation rate has decreased and the inflation been as low as 1% on average in the year 2014 and 1,6% in the year 2015.

The employment situation has been good and employment opportunities are varied. The unemployment rate was often about 3,0-3,5% and in the year 2007 is was as low as 1,0%, while the average unemployment rate in Europe was around 7%. After the financial crisis in September 2008 the unemployment rate increased rapidly up to 9%, but has since then gone down and was around 4% on average in the year 2015.

Despite the stable growth in the people's prosperity, many are of the view that all are not benefiting equally from it. The national cake is not evenly divided, with disadvantaged groups such as the old and handicapped getting a small share. There are many things in the society which indicate that the gap between rich and poor is increasing.

Icelandic notes and coin

8. Social Affairs

- Social Security

- Public Health
- Equal Rights

Social Security

The beginning of social security appeared in Germany in the latter part of the nineteenth-century. In Iceland, one may trace the origins of social security back to the year 1889. At that time, a law was passed concerning a relief fund for old aged and sickly common people. Just after the turn of the century (1900), a law was passed concerning accident insurance for sea men and little later a law on the old age pension came into being. The first national health system for all was established in 1909.

Now the Government's Social Security Department ("Tryggingastofnun ríkisins"), set up in 1936, supervises the nation's social security system.

Public Health

In the second part of the nineteenth-century and throughout the twentieth-century, Icelanders' average lifespan increased greatly. In the mid nineteenth-century, the average lifespan of Icelandic men was only 32 years, and for women about 38 years. In the middle of the twentieth-century, these statistics had become 71 and 75 years, and in 2015 the average male lifespan was 81 and for women 83,6 years. Great strides in areas of health care together with improved living conditions, a more secure employment situation, and better diet have combined to create this considerable change.

Emphasis is laid on ensuring access by all the general public to the public health service without consideration of the wealth or circumstances of the individual and family. Social security is thought of as a safety net which guarantees access for all.

The health system is expensive and the costs associated with it have been increasing in recent decades. An increase in the average age of the population is responsible for this as well as steady improvements, and more expensive equipment, in diagnosis and treatment.

As in many other countries, there has been a lot of debate in Iceland about the cost of the health care system. The ideas and processes adopted by the authorities do not always coincide with the views of those who work in the field or those who seek medical care. There is a lot of discussion about cost cutting, and the authorities' attempts at rationalization have been criticized. However, health care in Iceland is amongst the world's best.

Equal Rights

As regards human rights, Icelandic women were in a similar position as their sisters in nearby countries through to the last century. The Women's Rights Association of Iceland was established in 1907. A year later women were, for the first time, eligible to run for town council elections. In 1915, women gained a conditional right to vote and, with the Constitution of 1918, they gained voting rights and eligibility for election fully commensurate with men. Soon after, demands began for equal pay for equal work, but that struggle has proved to be both long and difficult.

However, as a result of women gaining franchise many important steps have been taken to increase equal rights for women. It has been stressed that equal rights must be a concern of both sexes, in that both the sexes benefit from an improvement in equal rights in society. Attempts are made to make it possible for both men and women to co-ordinate their family lives with work. With paternity leave, non-discriminatory job application procedures,

management plans in equal rights, and efforts to increase the participation of women in politics, work has been done to guarantee real equality between men and women. Even though all this work has been done there is still discrimination in the job market as well as in politics.

9. Education

- Modernization
- The School System
- University Studies
- Educational Levels
- Genealogical Profits?

Modernization

Few countries in Europe have undergone as many social changes in such a short time as Iceland. Enormous changes in people's way of life and culture have occurred alongside the modernization and industrialization of the last century.

It was not until the twentieth-century that Icelandic society began to compare with the societies of other European nations in some way. Before then, Iceland had been a traditional agricultural society for centuries.

With new social patterns there came new tasks and new issues. During the last century, Icelanders quarrelled among themselves about economic matters and foreign affairs policy and with other nations about fishing grounds and the storage and preservation of Icelandic manuscripts.

To learn about Icelandic society, culture, and its social system, it is worth examining the leading public issues and concerns of contemporary Iceland more closely. Here, as is often the case, the difficult and major issues which concern a large proportion of the people converge.

Amongst the most controversial issues in Iceland these days are the economic situation, environmental issues and the European Union.

The School System

The standard compulsory period of education is ten years. The general rule is that children will begin primary school education ("grunnskóli") at the age of six, and compulsory education usually ends at sixteen.

Since 1996, rural communities have carried the main responsibility for primary education, but before then the responsibility lay with the State. Standardized examinations are held in set subject areas in all the nation's primary schools in grades 4, 7, and 9/10, with the Ministry of Education having the duty to ensure that they take place. A special institute overlooks the management of the standard examinations, their composition, marking, and processing.

At the end of primary school, the vast majority of students begin studies at high school level ("framhaldsskóli"). The are a number of subjects from which to chose, both academic and vocational. All those who finish primary school have the right to begin high school. Those who have not finished primary school education, or have for some reason not

completed the standard exams, have the choice of commencing studies in special school or enrolling in a non-specific course of study at high school. About 70% Icelanders aged 25-64 have the equivalent of a high school degree which is quite low in comparison with other OECD countries.

At the close of high school education, students may continue with further studies or seek employment in the labour market.

University Studies

There are seven schools at university level run in Iceland. These schools are the following:

The University of Iceland

The University of Iceland was established on the 17th June, 1911, the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Jón Sigurðsson. For the first 29 years it was housed in the Alþingi House by Austurvöllur. In 1940, the University was relocated to the university building on Suðurgata.

With the founding of the University of Iceland, the Clerical College, Medical School and Law School joined to each form a faculty of the university and, in addition, the Faculty of Humanities was added. Later, more faculties were added and in the summer of 2008 Iceland University of Education was combined with The University of Iceland. Today the University has five academic schools, and 25 faculties. In addition, there are about 80 research centres at the University.

It is now possible to complete about 400 different final exams at the University of Iceland, and each year there are about 3000 individual subjects offered by the University.

About 13.000 students are enrolled at the University of Iceland, thereof about 500 doctoral students. Permanent teachers and other staff, including the staff of institutions, number ca. 1500, and 2400 part-time teachers also work at the University.

The University of Akureyri

The University of Akureyri commenced teaching in 1987 with instruction in two streams: industry and nursing. The University now offers a varied selection of study programmes leading to the first university degree together with advanced studies in a few disciplines.

Reykjavík University

Reykjavík University began teaching in September 1998 under the name of The Commercial College of Reykjavík. In January 2000, the name of the college was changed to Reykjavík University. The University offers around 50 study programmes in four faculties.

Iceland Academy of the Arts

The Iceland Academy of the Arts offers degree programs and is comprised of five departments: the Department of Arts Education, the Department of Design and Architecture, the Department of Fine Arts, the Department of Music and the Department of Performing Arts.

Bifröst University

Bifröst University offers both undergraduate and graduate programs in three academic departments, Business, Law and Social Sciences. About 600 students are studying at Bifröst.

Háskólinn á Hólum - Hólar College
Hólar College is a research, development and educational institution. It has three departments: Aquaculture, Equine Studie and Rural Tourism.

The Agricultural University of Iceland
The Agricultural University of Iceland is an educational and research institution in the field of agriculture and environmental sciences. The school awards B.Sc. and M.Sc degrees in these fields as well as providing vocational and continuing education.

An Increase in the Value of Continuing Education
Rapid changes in all aspects of society have resulted in a constant increase in the value of continuing education. It is now common for people to look for courses of various kinds after formal study has finished, be that in their field of work or in an area of interest. Courses are offered under the supervision of the University of Iceland's Institute of Continuing Education, as well as the various subjects run by amateur or hobby schools, associations, and private institutions.

Educational Levels

Educational levels in Iceland are rising. According to OECD (2000) approximately 60% of Icelanders between the ages of 24-65 have the equivalent of a high school degree and 24% of Icelanders between 24-65 have completed university examinations or a specialized course at university level. In the year 2012 about 71% of Icelanders have finished a high school degree and about 35% have completed university examination. More and more students are now attending universities and according to OECD, Iceland has today one of the highest percentages of students studying at university level.

In recent years, knowledge and research has increasingly formed the basis of the nation's capital gain. Instead of relying almost exclusively on natural resources, such as the generous fishing grounds and plentiful power which can be produced from geothermal and hydro-electric energy, Icelanders are now directing their attention to the new opportunities in biotechnology, software, computer processing, tourism and pharmaceuticals.

In recent years, Icelandic enterprises have made a niche for themselves in various kinds of hi-tech industry. An example of such enterprise is in the production of software and enterprises which produce software for use in the fishing industry.

Genealogical Profits?

There is one thing which spoils the usefulness of the genealogies but which makes them perhaps more interesting still for enthusiasts; namely, the Icelandic genealogies are not always put together correctly. Matters can be complicated in the case of illegitimate children, foster-children or where the identity of the father is mistaken.

One can see reflections of such complications in contemporary Icelandic society. In comparison with other countries, there are proportionally less children born in wedlock. It is more common for parents to be registered as unmarried cohabitants, living together but unmarried. The percentage of single parents is rather high in Iceland and similar to other Scandinavian nations. Also, the number of separations is quite high in Iceland. This means, amongst other things, that many Icelandic families are made up of people living together who, as well as having children of their own, raise children from former marriages.

Icelanders have children at a younger age than in neighbouring countries and it is

common for students to have one and even two children.

10. Names of Icelanders

Icelandic Names

It is perfectly normal in Iceland that no two members of a family of four have the same surname, even though the parents are married. Children's surnames are taken from their parents, most often the father's name (i.e. a patronymic), but the family members do not all have a common family name as is generally the case in other countries. When an Icelandic child is born, it does not take on its father's surname but rather his given name. The name of the child's father (or mother) is given the suffix -son (son) or -dóttir (daughter) depending on the child's gender. Certainly, there are family names in Iceland but they are unusual.

We can consider the following example of the names in an Icelandic family of four:

The father's name is *Guðmundur Sigurðsson* and the mother's name is *Guðrún Þorvaldsdóttir*. It is common for children to be named after their maternal or paternal grandparents. As such, the son might be called *Þorvaldur Guðmundsson* or *Sigurður Guðmundsson*. The daughter might bear the name of her father's or mother's mother, if custom was observed. In the case of her paternal grandmother's name being *Þórunn*, and that her grandchild being named after her, she would be called *Þórunn* and be *Guðmundsdóttir*, that is, the daughter of *Guðmundur*. In this example, the father's surname is *Sigurðsson*, the mother's *Þorvaldsdóttir*, the son's is *Guðmundsson*, and the daughter's surname is *Guðmundsdóttir*.
Given names are always used in preference to patronymic names or family names. One speaks about *Guðmundur* and *Guðrún*, not of *Sigurðsson* and *Þorvaldsdóttir*. A foreigner coming to Iceland who knew the Icelander *Guðrún Þorvaldsdóttir* and wanted to call her would look her up under her given name in the phone directory. There is one phone books covering the entire country, divided into categories after areas. Names are listed in alphabetical order according to given names, with the patronymic or surname coming after.

11. Religion and Folk Belief

- Church and Christianity
- 1000 Years of Christianity
- Folk beliefs

Church and Christianity

Foreigners visiting Iceland are probably quick to notice the many churches around the country. Congregations themselves are responsible for church building and most churches also function as congregational centres, intended to offer various kinds of social activities.

About 72% of people are in the Lutheran-Evangelical Church. This may give the impression that Icelanders are united as to matters of faith, but this is not the case. Icelanders are not particularly church-going people, although during festive times the churches are filled, the children's Sunday Schools are also quite popular and many are active in church choirs.

Icelanders generally regard belief as a private matter but, no less than politics, out of interest people gladly and often discuss religion.

Although the national Lutheran Church is the most attended, there are other congregations in Iceland. About 3,7% of people are in the Catholic Church that can be found in various parts of the country. In addition, there are a cluster of smaller congregations, amongst which one might cite a flock which believes in the Old Norse gods (that is, the "ásatrúarflokkurinn", 1% of the people belong to this group).

1000 Years of Christianity

Christianity was adopted by law in Iceland in 999 or 1000. The church quickly acquired great strength in the political and cultural life of the nation. Two bishoprics, as well as monasteries throughout the country, became important centres of culture and had a powerful part to play in the blooming of Icelandic culture during the period known as the saga-writing age. Icelanders were known throughout the Nordic countries for what appears to have been a pretty general interest in sagas and skaldic verse: saga recitals and poetry have been a popular amusement throughout the ages.

The well-known scholar, Sigurður Nordal, made the following remarks about the spiritual life of Icelanders in 1940 during a lecture on religious matters:

As far as I can tell, Christianity is burning out amongst the general public. If its influence develops in the same fashion in the next 60 years as the past 60 years, it will have its birthday in 2000 standing in about the same position as it was after the advice given by Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði, except that disinterest will be even greater, as in 1000 the Alþing was at least quarrelling about it.

The Celebration of Christianization at Þingvellir in 2000

A festival to celebrate the Christianization was held at Þingvellir in the summer of 2000, marking the passing of 1000 years since Icelanders took on Christian belief. The expectation was that a great crowd of people would come and preparations were made that were appropriate if a substantial part of the people took part in the festivities. A great deal of expense went into making the most brilliant celebration. Yet only a fraction of the population rushed to Þingvellir on the day of the Christian festival and, consequently, the cost per person was enormous. This caused considerable dissatisfaction and a lot of talk followed about the event. A large number of newspaper articles appeared which gave support to the celebration, with those who opposed it divided in their views. So, Sigurður Nordal was not altogether right in his prediction. Certainly, there was quarrelling about Christianity on its 1000th anniversary, although the discussion touched, first and foremost, on the issue of how much was spent on the celebration rather than on the Christian belief a such.

Folk Beliefs

People have long believed in ghosts, and there are many folktales current about them. The same goes for elves and the trolls who are thought to live in crags, hills and mountains. Many believe that it can be dangerous to insult these supernatural beings or creatures (in Icelandic, "verur").

Special elf-stones can be found widely and it is thought to be risky to tamper with them.

As such, there are many examples of plans, such as for roads, which have been altered out of consideration for the elf people. The elves might well avenge any offence, just as many stories relate.

12. The Way of Living as a European

- With the New Millennium
- Life After Work
- Swimming Culture
- Journeys and Flights
- Computers and Mobiles

With the New Millennium

During the half-century since Iceland became an independent nation, the standard of living has improved greatly and is now comparable with the highest in the world.

Great emphasis is placed on the worth of every individual in society: it is important in a small nation, and a difficult land, that each and everyone makes a contribution. Most people work long days and it is common for young people to work part-time while at school. Industriousness is considered to be people's prize quality and energy or motivational drive is probably what people are most praised for. This is, however, not all good: long workdays, surely often entailing suffering where parents have young children, has its dark side. The desire for top quality material goods, the so-called race for the good things in life (in Icelandic, the "lífsgæðakapphlaup") seems to many to have gone too far. It may be interesting at this point to look at the way Icelanders see themselves.

What is Meritorious in Icelandic Eyes?

In the autumn of 1999 a survey was undertaken to discover what virtues Icelanders valued most. The impetus for the survey was the 1000th anniversary of Christianity in the country. An attempt was made to find out the personal position of all. The poll made it clear that Icelanders reckon the following to be the most important qualities: honesty, frankness, a positive attitude, confidence, energy and drive, strong friendships and family bonds, and health. Honesty was the merit which most people wanted to have themselves, and they felt it was what they particularly wanted to see in the character of others.

The results of the survey suggest that Icelanders rely on their own motivational drive or efficiency and prize family and friendship greatly. In both their own conduct and that of others, they most value qualities which concern relationships and a positive attitude to life. According to the survey, they value family ties and bonds of friendship more than, for example, education, health, and career advancement. This goes hand in hand with the intense family and genealogical concern which is distinctive of Icelanders and which manifests, amongst other things, in genealogical research and the large quantity of publication of all kinds of genealogical books. Further, Icelanders are energetic in holding family gatherings, popular with both the young and old.

Throughout the centuries, Icelanders have boasted that they are scholars and authors, that they preserve the old tales, and that they are more cultured and learned than other nations. This is not really consistent with the little value they appear to attach to education.

When questioned as to what people might value most in the characters of others, less than 1 percent nominated education or knowledge. This is clarified somewhat if one looks at answers to more precise questions: it then comes to light that 70% of people believe that education is less important than the desire to do what is expected of you, and 65% believe that a self-educated person is as good as those who have a long schooling behind them. This suggests that Icelanders trust their own common sense and do not think too much of formal education.

One may assume that the smallness of the society and its isolation has some influence on the emphases which were revealed by the survey.

Life After Work

Icelanders have a long work day. After such a day, it is good to relax in the embrace of one's family, meet friends and acquaintances or find oneself something interesting to do for fun.

Some gym work, in one of the many gyms in the country, is a perennial favourite, and amongst all age groups it is very popular to go swimming. Mountain climbing and hikes in the country are very popular as are short trips in God's green country with the effortless health care they afford. In winter, it is always fun to slip on the skis or ice-skates. Recently, it has become steadily more popular to go on winter trips into the highlands and snow-mobile driving is popular.

Cultural life is most colourful. All kinds of courses are offered to help invigorate life. Theatres and cinemas are well attended. An unbelievable number of choirs have been established in the country and there is barely a small town which does not have its own amateur theatre group.

During weekends, young people especially gather at one of the very many clubs to have a good time. Most of the clubs in Reykjavík are downtown, and there are often many there over the weekend.

Swimming Culture

There is a strong swimming culture in Iceland, with swimming pools filled with geothermal hot water throughout the country. Sometimes it is said that, just as the Irish meet in pubs and the French in cafés, so the Icelanders meet in hot pots. This is, perhaps, putting it a bit strongly, but certainly everyone agrees that the pools are very popular.

There are over 100 public swimming pools, most of which are outdoor pools. They are heated by the general hot water supply (that is, from a geothermal source) which makes it possible to use the swimming pools all year round.

Vocabulary

"Bringusund": breaststroke, "baksund": backstroke, "flugsund": butterfly, "skriðsund": Australian crawl, "björgunarsund": life-saving, "að troða marvaða": to tread water.

Journeys and Flights

During their holidays, Icelanders really go in for travel to other countries. Sun-seeking trips have long ranked high in terms of popularity: the Icelandic summer is short and beach life is unknown in the ice-cold country. If the weather happens to be good in Iceland, it is often called "Majorca weather" or "Bongo mild." City Breaks are also popular, spending a long weekend in Paris, Copenhagen or Boston visiting museums, theatres and shopping or

watching a football game in Manchester.

However, inland travel is getting more and more popular. The country is an island and when people speak eagerly of plans to make a circuit during the holidays, they mean that they will drive the ring-road around Iceland. Various types of accommodation are available. The most courageous are happy with just a tent, but considering that all kinds of weather can usually be expected in Iceland, it is best to be prepared for everything. Wind and rain often strike, forcing changes to be made. Others travel with campervans or caravans, and stay in the camping grounds which are to be found throughout the country.

Country Romanticism

Summerhouse ownership is high and people often feel it important to build a good summerhouse for themselves. They keep summerhouses so as to have a chance to escape the city as often as possible. Urban development is, relatively speaking, very new: the country was a rural society long into the twentieth-century and the tie to the regional areas is often quite powerful. In some respects, one can look on summerhouses as a kind of connection with a time past.

Still, the connection with the past and the country is, perhaps, no better demonstrated than in horsemanship. Throughout the ages, the horse was Icelanders' most prized servant and it has proved to be difficult to let that relationship go. Horsemanship, and all kinds of riding trips, are always popular and horse rental has popped up all around the country and has enjoyed a great deal of popularity.

Love of Nature

Icelanders are great nature lovers and many people put up opposition to attempts to tamper with the nation's nature. One may, perhaps, see that the nationalism which was formerly concentrated on literary matters and language (and which characterized Icelandic protectionism and at times a certain amount of narrow-mindedness) is, to a high degree, now focussed on the nation's natural environment. Environmental protection is probably the issue about which Icelanders will most readily agree. This considerable concern for the environment manifests, amongst other things, in the fact that Icelanders often look for all kinds of outdoor activities for their holidays. Hiking and mountain climbing are pursued greatly, and angling in salmon and trout rivers is a popular sport in Iceland.

More and more people set out to see the Icelandic highlands. Highland trips are possible in specially equipped jeeps, whether in summer or winter. Travel in the highlands must be undertaken with care, and one must go with the greatest consideration for the nation's nature, which is most sensitive to any disturbance. Driving outside the road or marked track is strictly forbidden in the highlands. It is a non-negotiable rule that travellers must let people know about their travels before setting off on such trips and provide an exact journey plan to the next police station: this is on account of the unreliable weather conditions and other dangerous environmental factors. If all the regulations are followed, highland travel can be an enjoyable and unforgettable experience.

Likewise, snowmobile trips can be taken both in winter and summer and various trips on the glaciers are offered with a travel guide.

Computers and Mobiles

Icelanders as a people are rather keen on new things. They are interested in new streams and foreign developments and quick to learn about anything new. This manifests, for

example, in the fact that computer ownership is very common in the country and that the internet is widely used. In a recent survey, it was revealed that computers were to be found in roughly 96% of the nation's homes and nearly everyone have access to the Internet.

In daily speech, mobile phones are called "farsímar" or "gemsar", the Icelandic word for a GSM. The word is an old one in Icelandic and means a "gemlingur", that is, a one-year old sheep. However, first and foremost it is the word's phonetic similarity to the abbreviation GSM which has lead to a situation where "gemsi" is the word which is sometimes used for this kind of phone.

Per head of population, Icelanders probably own the most mobile phones in the world. Smartphones and tablet computers are also widely owned as well as Kindle and some Icelandic books are now available online.

13. Arts and Mass Media

Arts and Culture

From the beginnings of the writing age, literature has been a dominant force in Icelandic cultural life while the other branches of art are somewhat younger. Since the earliest times, Icelandic women undertook decorative weaving and embroidery and created many works of art with blankets and covers, and Icelandic men carved on wood and bone and pursued silver work. But it is not until the twentieth-century that all art forms began to bloom, particularly painting.

Painting first came into the public gaze in earnest during the turn of the last century, when Icelandic artists ventured into the greater world to study that branch of art. Whilst

Icelandic painting has been influenced by mainstreams on both sides of the Atlantic, it has at the same time developed distinctive national characteristics.

Significant growth also came in other art forms, such as theatre, sculpture, cinema, and music. The Reykjavík Theatre Company has been operating since 1897: it was resident at Iðnó until it moved to Borgarleikhúsið in 1989. The National Theatre of Iceland, was opened in 1950. The College of Music was established in 1930 and in 1950 The Icelandic Symphony Orchestra began performances, in collaboration with the National Broadcasting Service and the National Theatre of Iceland. The Iceland Dance Company, the Opera, and many other smaller groups have made their mark on cultural life.

Also, the blooming cultural life amongst amateur performers in Iceland is striking. There are amateur theatre groups throughout the country and all kinds of choirs and musical groups.

Literature of the 19. and 20. Century

- Romanticism and Realism
- The First Decades of the Twentieth Century
- Social Realism 1930-50
- Heyday for the Novel
- Modernism 1950-70
- The Book in Contemporary Society
- A Small Note on Poetry
- The Origins of Icelandic Theatre
- The First Steps
- Information about Translations

"Blind is the bookless man" goes an Icelandic proverb. Iceland has long been thought to be a very literary nation. A great number of books are published in the country, not least in the period before Christmas, sometimes referred to as the "Christmas book flood" (that is, "jólabókaflóð"). The number of books published is, per person, higher than any other country. However, doubts have been raised about this great book readership and many believe that reading is dwindling amongst children and young people, popular entertainment having become much more varied. Others point out that the publication of children's books and books for young people is increasing, surely an indication that the book is holding its ground with young people.

Romanticism and Realism

Nineteenth-century literature is characterized by the Romantic movement (brought to the country from Denmark) and by the strong nationalism which was formed by Icelanders' struggle for independence. Many of the nation's most adored poets are from this time and they are always referred to as the "national poets." The most famous and dearly loved of these poets is, without doubt, Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-1845), who composed many of the most beautiful poems to be found in the Icelandic language. He was an energetic campaigner during Icelanders' struggle for independence, helping their fight with poems like Gunnarshólmi and Ísland, poems which, to this day, fuel Icelanders' nationalism.

Realism made its first appearance in Icelandic literature in 1882 when four Icelandic

students in Copenhagen, under the influence of the Danish literary critic Georg Brandes, commenced publication of the periodical Verðandi. Three of these students are considered amongst the most important realist authors: Gestur Pálsson (1852-1891), who was a pioneer of Icelandic short story writing, and Einar Kvaran (1859-1938), a highly influential author at the beginning of the twentieth-century but who fell into obscurity when still a young author. The third author was Hannes Hafstein (1861-1922), who was only twenty-one year old when he published his first poems in Verðandi. Hannes came as a breath of fresh air in Icelandic poetry and many of his poems are still popular. Hannes was a stately man and was admired by many, not merely on account of his poetry but also for his political role. He was Icelanders' first Prime Minister after they gained home rule in 1904. Of the same generation as this poet was Stephan G. Stephansson (1853-1927). He moved to America when he was young, but is one of the most highly esteemed poets to have written in Icelandic.

The First Decades of the Twentieth-Century

1900–1930 is the period of the New Romantic movement in Iceland.

At the beginning of the 1900s, there were about 80,000 Icelanders. Reykjavík was the largest town, with some 6,000 residents. In 1925, the number of residents had grown to 20,000. Rapid social changes made there mark during this time, and political struggles again revolved around the national sovereignty issue. The poets did their utmost to intensify nationalist sentiment amongst the people. Amongst other things, many so-called "turn of the century poems" (that is, "aldamótaljóð") were composed, stressing the unity of the people and an optimistic belief in future progress.

The book market in the sparsely populated Iceland was small. In the first decade of the century, 46 original prose works were published, or about five per year. Books of poetry were more common, with some ten collections of poetry published each year. Under such conditions, it was not to be expected that authors could see their way to devoting themselves to their literary work. As such, many left Iceland's shores with their art, especially to Scandinavia. The best-known of these authors is Gunnar Gunnarsson (1889-1975). He lived in Denmark and wrote his works in Danish. Amongst his works is Saga Borgarættarinnar (1912-1914).

Þórbergur Þórðarson was a contemporary of Gunnar's but lived in Iceland. He has had a considerable influence on Icelandic literature, but few of his works are available in translation. His works include Ofvitinn, Bréf til Láru, Íslenskur aðall and Í Suðursveit.

Women in the Circle of Authors

The first woman to make her livelihood by writing was Torfhildur Hólm (1845-1918). However, it was difficult for women to follow in her footsteps as it was thought that such pursuits were not within the range of women's abilities. In Mánaðarrit Lestrarfélags kvenna Reykjavíkur (1913), the female poet Theodóra Thoroddsen(1863-1954) made the following point about women and literature:

"The situation regarding poetic talent is that, as with most other intellectual talents, we women are considered inferior to men. The cause of this will be left unsaid here, whether our wits should balance poorly in comparison to theirs, as some would have it, or that it has its roots in many centuries of intellectual and physical oppression."

Theodora was known, in particular, for her nursery rhymes.

Nevertheless, one of the most talented poets of the period was a woman. Her name was Unnur Benediktsdóttir Bjarklind (1881-1946), but took the pen name Hulda. She wrote many poems, short stories, and the novel Dalafólk (1936-1939), a mature story with a girl in the main role.

Social Realism 1930-50

Nationalism was still something of a prevailing force in literature of the period 1920-1930, but in the following decade considerable changes occurred. Most of the important authors of the period were supporters of socialism. Authors did their best to write realistic works set in their own time. Emphasis was placed on what light origins and social conditions could shed on characters depicted in the stories, stories in which society was made responsible for the fate of its members and their rebellion against their conditions. Literature during this time often lead to political turmoil in society. This was on account of the criticisms which these works made about the situation of the poor and those with less social influence.

The foremost Icelandic author of the twentieth-century, Nobel Laureate *Halldór Kiljan Laxness*, was the most influential author of the period. The period began about the time that his novel Salka Valka (translated into English under the same title), came out and ended around the time of the publication of Atómstöðin (1948, The Atom Station). In the time between these dates, the author produced Sjálfstætt fólk (1934-1935, Independent People), a work which generated a great deal of cultural and intellectual disquiet. Many were angered by the image which the author drew of proletarian, independent farmer, Bjartur of Summerhouses, and his way of life: it was felt that the author dealt harshly with Icelandic farming culture. Next, he published Heimsljós (1937-1940, World Light) and Íslandsklukkan (1943-46). He also published many other pieces during the period, including poetry, plays, and essays. Those who have an interest in learning about Icelandic literature ought to read work written by Halldór: his novels have been translated into many languages. Halldór Kiljan Laxness received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955.

Heyday for the Novel

During the period known for social realist fiction (1930-1950), there was real heyday for the novel. Radical authors followed the type of subject matter chosen by Halldór Kiljan Laxness and dealt with the “little people” of society and their unjust treatment. Here, one can cite Halldór Stefánsson (1892-1979) and Ólafur Jóhann Sigurðsson (1918-1988), the latter winning the Nordic Council Literature Prize for 1976 for poetry, the first Icelander to do so.

In 1938, the novel Sturla í Vogum by Guðmundur G. Hagalín was published. The novel was looked on as a reply to Sjálfstætt fólk (published in English as Independent People). Sturla, the central character of the novel, is a grand hero in the New Romantic style, the complete opposite to Bjartur of Summerhouses.

One of the most popular Icelandic authors is Guðrún Árnadóttir from Lundur (1887-1975). She wrote a great many novels (which enjoyed exceptional favour) about life in the country, including Dalalíf I-IV (1946-1951). She wrote her last novel, Utan frá sjó I-III in 1970-1972. Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir (1895-1967) is best known for her books for children and youngsters, and her books about Dóra and Vala have been very popular. Yet, between 1941-1967 she also wrote nine novels for a mature readership. They are about women’s inner and outer conflicts during a period of the nation’s history when enormous social changes were taking

place. Dr. Dagný Kristjánsdóttir wrote her doctoral thesis, Kona verður til, about these stories: it is the first doctoral thesis to be written about Icelandic women's literature.

Other authors set their mark on the period, such as Guðmundur Daníelsson (1910-1990), a very productive novelist, and Kristmann Guðmundsson (1901-1983), who lived for a long time in Norway and wrote his stories in Norwegian. After he returned to Iceland, he became a controversial author. His works include Félagi kona (1947) and he was one of the first in Iceland to write a science fiction novel, Ferðin til stjarnanna (1959). Guðmundur Kamban (1888-1945) was resident in Denmark. His best-known work is the historical novel, Skálholt I-IV, which he published in Danish and Icelandic (1930-1935).
Elínborg Lárusdóttir (1891-1976), wrote and published a number of books on mediation and occult subjects as well as novels and Þórunn Elfa Magnúsdóttir (1910-1995) wrote Dætur Reykjavíkur (1933-1938), pioneering amongst works on Reykjavík.

Modernism 1950-1970

The period around the 1950s and on is called the modernist period in Icelandic literature. At that time, there was a real surge in Icelandic poetry which challenged old Icelandic poetic traditions and which, a little later, influenced a similar surge in prose fiction. Short story writers allowed themselves more freedom in form than had, thus far, been customary and used various features of poetic composition. The style of these stories became more poetic and less importance was attributed to an exciting plot, before considered the central feature of a short story.

Thor Vilhjálmsson (1925-2011) is one of the chief pioneers of modernist prose in Icelandic literature. He wrote books about the "modern man" during the seventies and eighties in a very poetical and pictorial way. His modernist novels are Fljótt, fljótt sagði fuglinn (1968, in English Quick, Quick said the Bird) and Óp bjöllunnar of 1970 (lit. "The Bell's Cry"). In 1972, he published the novel Folda, which enjoyed enormous popularity. In the historical novel, Grámosinn glóir (1986, lit. "The Grey Moss Shines"), Thor applies his stylistic talents to full and wonderful effect: the book earned him the Nordic Literature Prize.

Ásta Sigurðardóttir (1930-1971) was an author and artist. She had a strong influence on the direction of modernism with her short story Sunnudagskvöld til mánudagsmorguns (1951, lit. "Sunday Evening to Monday Morning"), which both moved and shocked people.

There was something of a decline in number in literary fiction between 1950–1960, but the most important novel of the decade is, without doubt, Gerpla (1952, published in English as The Happy Warriors) by Halldór Kiljan Laxness. Gerpla is a parody of the Old Icelandic saga Fóstbræðra saga (The Foster Brothers' Saga). Amongst other things, the story reveals how the author deals with the past. The next of Halldór's novels, Brekkukotsannáll (published in English as The Fish Can Sing), was published in 1957, Paradísarheimt in 1960 (Paradise Reclaimed), Kristnihald undir jökli in 1968 (Under the Glacier), and Innansveitarkronika in 1970 (The Bread of Life).

The fate of the generation of people who moved out of the country and into town is well illustrated by Indriði G. Þorsteinsson (1926-2000) in his novels 79 af stöðinni (1955, lit. "Seventy Nine Leave the Station") and Land og synir (1963, lit. "Of Land and Sons").

Jakobína Sigurðardóttir (1918-1994) awoke interest in her unusual narrative techniques in the stories Dægurvísa (1965), which was the first "hópsaga" in Iceland (or story with more than one main character or hero), and Snaran (1968, lit. "The Trap" or "The Noose").

Svava Jakobsdóttir (1930-2004) has developed a good reputation, in particular for her short stories. Her best known story, Legjandinn (1969), has been interpreted keenly as a symbolic representation of the relations between the Icelandic people and the American troops. But she has also been read from the point of view of women's liberation.

Guðbergur Bergsson b. 1932 published his first novel, Músina sem læðist, in 1961 and in 1966 he published the most remarkable book of the decade, Tómas Jónsson: Metsölubók. Guðbergur's stories are generally seen as protests against the traditional constraints of the novel form, including the way time is reckoned and characters delineated. Guðbergur's stories stimulated a lively discussion, even debate, about literature and related topics.

The Contemporary from 1970

Student protests associated with the generation of '68, and with the doubts over bourgeois values and other social issues which marked that generation, had their effect on literature. There was a lot of discussion about peace and environmental matters in these years, and the Vietnam War played its part in this. The struggle for equal rights for women increased in strength and manifested, amongst other things, in the debate about women's place in society. Important articles on this issue appeared around the mid-1980s, including those by the literary scholar Helga Kress. Many of these papers can be found in a collection of her articles published under the title of *Speglanir* in 2000.

After 1970, a new generation of authors came forward, born in a country which was now an independent republic and undergoing rapid social change. The work of these authors was, to begin with, realistic but later they came to lay their emphasis on style, and much of the work by contemporary Icelandic authors is very lyrical. In particular, one might cite authors like:

- Vigdís Grímsdóttir (b. 1953), who has received notice for her particularly lyrical style: her novel *Kaldaljós* (1987) is a good example of magical realism in Icelandic literature;
- Einar Már Guðmundsson (b. 1954), one of the most accomplished novelist of the 1990s: he was awarded the Nordic Council's Literature Prize (In Icelandic, "Bókmenntaverðlaun Norðurlandaráðs") in 1995 for his novel *Englar alheimsins* and a movie based on the story, directed by Friðrik Þór Friðriksson, was released in 2000 and;
- Steinunn Sigurðardóttir (b. 1950), known, in particular, for short stories and novels written in the modernist and postmodernist spirit: her works include *Tímaþjófurinn* (1986) and *Hjartastaður* (1995).

Other well-known contemporary authors are:

- Pétur Gunnarsson (b. 1947), who made his breakthrough (and received great praise from readers) with his first novel *Punktur punktur komma strik* (1976). A continuation of the story came out in three volumes between 1978-1985;
- Fríða Á. Sigurðardóttir (1940-2010) was awarded the Nordic Council's Literature Prize for 1992 for her novel *Meðan nóttin líður*;
- Ólafur Jóhann Ólafsson (b. 1962), who has written both short stories and novels in the spirit of the realistic tradition. His most recent novel, *Endurkoman,* came out in 2015;

- Þórarinn Eldjárn (b. 1949) is a poet and novelist. He has enjoyed great popularity for his poems and, amongst other things, has published funny books of poetry for children. He has written a number of historical novels, the most recent being *Hér liggur skáld* (2012);
- Einar Kárason (b. 1955) is known for his novels about life in Reykjavík's barracks district. Barracks left from the years of military occupation (during World War II) were used as apartments in the years after the war when there was a shortage of housing in the town. Einar makes life in these distinctive areas his theme in a three-part story: *Þar sem djöflaeyjan rís* (1983), *Gulleyjan* (1985), and *Fyrirheitna landið* (1989). The movie by Friðrik Þór Friðriksson called *Djöflaeyjan* (or Devil's Island, 1996) is based on these stories;
- Kristín Ómarsdóttir (b. 1962) is a novelist and playwright. She is counted amongst the most daring experimentalists of Icelandic literature of the last few years. Amongst her works is the novel *Elskan mín ég dey* (1997);
- Gyrðir Elíasson (b. 1961) is a poet and novelist. He has drawn notice for his eloquent style and distinctive use of figurative language. He was awarded the Nordic Council Literature Prize for 2011 for a collection of short stories called *Milli trjánna* (2011);
- Guðrún Helgadóttir (b. 1935) received the Nordic Book Prize for Children's Literature (in Icelandic, "Norrænu barnabókaverðlaunin") for the novel *Undan illgresinu* (1992);
- Hallgrímur Helgason (b. 1959) is an novelist and poet. His works include *101 Reykjavík*, a novel about contemporary society in Reykjavík. A movie based on the story and directed by Baltasar Kormákur, has been made under the same title.
- Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir (b.1958) is a novelist and a lector in art history and theory at the University of Iceland. Amongst her works is *Afleggjarinn* (2007) and her most recent novel, *Ör*, came out in 2016.
- Arnaldur Indriðason (f.1961) is one of the most popular author today. Arnaldur has twice won The Glass Key for the best nordic crime novel and in the year 2005 his book *Silence of the Grave* (*Grafarþögn*) won the CWA Golden Dagger Award.
- Sigurjón Birgir Sigurðsson, Sjón (f. 1962) is a novelist and a poet. His book Skuggabaldur (e. The Blue Fox) won the Nordic Council Literary Prize in 2005.

There are young authors who have stepped into the spotlight in the last decade, such as Gerður Kristný, Andri Snær Magnason, Guðrún Eva Mínervudóttir, Stefán Máni and Auður Jónsdóttir.

A Small Note on Poetry

Period of the national poet

The nineteenth-century was the heyday of the Romantic movement in Icelandic literature. The most distinctive theme of the literature of the period, not least of all poetry, was the Icelandic struggle for independence. Poets took an active part in the struggle by composing intensely patriotic poems. The best known and most loved national poet, Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-1845), was alive during this time. His poems are as alive amongst the people today, with beautiful melodies set to many of them. A selection of his work can be found on a special web site which has been set up by Dick Ringler of the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the United States.

There was a certain amount of growth in nationalistic poetry during the establishment of

an independent Republic of Iceland in 1944 and in the years proceeding. This is exemplified by Snorri Hjartarson (1906-1986) who composed one of the most famous national poems of the period. It begins with the following stanza.

Land, þjóð og tunga, þrenning sönn og ein,
þér var ég gefinn barn á móðurkné;
ég lék hjá þér við læk og blóm og stein,
þú leiddir mig í orðs þíns háu vé.

Modernism in Icelandic Poetry

Icelandic poetry has, from its origins through to the mid twentieth-century, been characterized by alliteration (generally), of the start of odd lines known as "höfuðstafir", and by rhyme. In the years 1945-1965, Icelandic poetry saw poets casting traditional constraints aside and begin to compose unrestricted poetry. Steinn Steinarr, Jón from Vör, Hannes Sigfússon, and Snorri Hjartarson are amongst the most prominent poets of the time. With his collection of poems called *The Time and the Water* (in Icelandic, Tíminn og vatnið), which first appeared in 1948, Steinn Steinarr became the most important pioneer of the modernist movement in Icelandic poetry. The first of the poem reads:

Tíminn er eins og vatnið,
og vatnið er kalt og djúpt
eins og vitund míns sjálfs.

Og tíminn er eins og mynd,
sem er máluð af vatninu
og mér til hálfs.

Og tíminn og vatnið
renna veglaust til þurrðar
inn í vitund mín sjálfs.

The metre is unusual, although it has been composed with traditional rhythm as well as rhyme. Yet the poems overall picture is impenetrable and those who were accustomed to poems "being about something" found it difficult to make out the meaning. Little by little modernism acquired its place in Icelandic poetry and one may say that, with the close of the 1970's, it had gained a respected position in Icelandic literature.

The Origins of Icelandic Theatre

The Herranótt

It has been customary to see the history of Icelandic theatre as beginning at Skálholt around the middle of the eighteenth-century with the so-called “Herranótt”. The “Herranótt” was a kind of play which school boys would perform once during winter. The subject matter of the play is a coronation whereby the best student would, each year, be crowned king. Others played the bishop, priests, lawyers and other high office bearers. While the crown is being set on the king’s head, a speech is read out in Latin, the so-called “Skraparotsræða” (in French, “Sermon joyeux”). Next, the noble men approach the king and recite a congratulatory verse to him in Latin. Later, in 1785, the play (in a somewhat altered version) moved with the school from Skálholt to Reykjavík. The celebration was banned in 1798, when the king in the play got the idea to discard his power as he did not wish to be greater than others, preferring to work for the happiness of the state in cooperation with others.

The authorities thought this to be dangerous, being afraid that it could result in the type of revolution that took place in France.

The first play
The oldest play written in Icelandic is generally reckoned to be Sperðill, composed around 1760 by the Reverend Snorri Björnsson at Húsafell. However, people disagree about whether the play was ever intended for performance. The first Icelandic play which is thought to have been composed for an audience is Bjarglaunin or Brandur (1790) by Geir Vídalín (1761-1823), later bishop of Iceland.

The father of Icelandic theatre
Sigurður Pétursson (1759-1827) has been named the father of Icelandic theatre: he was the first to put together what can be considered to be a mature artistic play in Icelandic. As such, although he wrote only two plays, he was a pioneer of Icelandic theatre. The plays were satires in the style of Holberg and were performed by school boys in the Reykjavík School on 28 January 1799, one year after the Herranótt had been banned. The first play was called Hrólfur or Slaður og trúgirni and the latter Narfi or Sá narratugi biðill, a comedy in three parts. It tells of Narfi, who shows up at Guttorm the lawyer's farm. Narfi claims to be the "assistant" of a Danish merchant. He woos legislator's daughter and reckons that his prospects are most promising if he holds forth in Danish as much as possible. The outcome is a ridiculous gibberish and he is defeated by his rival, Nikulás the labourer. The author deals with Icelanders' upstart ways in the play, ways which lead to everything foreign being thought better and, in the process, which downplay the values which have, for a long time, been the nation's dearest, language and culture. It is thought that with this work Icelanders succeeded for the first time in creating an artistic play.

The First Steps

In the rural society of the past centuries, the inhabited parts of Iceland were decentralized and transport was often difficult. Theatre was tied to schools in that it needed spectators in order to thrive. At the close of the eighteenth-century, urban areas began to form in Iceland and Reykjavík and a number of other towns were granted municipal rights. In the first decade of the nineteenth-century, only about 300–400 people lived in Reykjavík, but little by little Reykjavík came to be looked upon as the capital. It was to there that most positions were moved, including those which were involved in governing the country. With urbanization and the advent of a middle-class, a basis for theatrical life was formed.

The first official performance
In the winter of 1853-54, the first official performance in Iceland was held (i.e. to which tickets were sold). The choice was the Danish play Pak by Thomas Overskous. The play was performed in Icelandic and, for the first time, women took part in the play.

The Outlaws
A turning point in Icelandic theatre came in 1862 with the performance of the play The Outlaws (in Icelandic, Útilegumennirnir or Skugga-Sveinn) by the national author Matthías Jochumsson (1835-1920). The work was produced by Sigurður Guðmundsson (1833-1874), a painter who was very influential in Icelandic cultural life during his brief life (he is, amongst

other things, known for having designed the Icelandic national costume). Events in The Outlaws are drawn from Icelandic national life of the seventeenth-century. The play enjoyed enormous popularity and has been put on stage more often than any other play in Iceland, both in theatres and by amateur theatre groups, in sports venues, depots and storehouses spread far and wide over the country.

New Year's Night
When performed in a reconstructed version in 1907, New Year's Night (in Icelandic, Nýársnótt) by Indriði Einarsson (1851-1939) announced the start of a heyday in Icelandic theatre. The play actually premiered in 1872, ten years after Matthías's The Outlaws. New Year's Night comes next in popularity after The Outlaws. For the first time, a play used elves for its characters (in Iceland, there has been strong interests in elves). In his handling of drama, the play was thought to show signs of the great talent of this young author.

Sorcerer-Loftur and Mountain-Eyvindur
In the wake of the 1907 New Year's Night there came, amongst others, Jóhann Sigurjónsson's (1880-1919) play, Sorcerer-Loftur (in Icelandic, Galdra-Loftur, 1914) and Mountain-Eyvindur (or Fjalla-Eyvindur, 1911), both based on Icelandic folk tales. These plays are amongst the most wonderful plays in the Icelandic theatrical corpus.

Guðmundur Kamban (1888-1945) wrote Vi mordere in 1920: Guðmundur wrote the fictional work in Danish but the play came out in an Icelandic version in 1969, called Vér morðingjar (that is, We Murderers).

The National Theatre 1950
When the National Theatre was established in 1950, Icelanders came into possession of a professional theatre house. The Reykjavík Theatre Company (that is, "Leikfélag Reykjavíkur) had, since 1897, operated at a building called Iðnó. With the establishment of the National Theatre it was thought that the activity of the Reykjavík Theatre Company would fall away, but that was not the experience, rather the existence of two professional theatres. With that, Icelandic theatrical life came into bloom and Icelandic playwriting began to thrive. During the 1960s, 13 new Icelandic plays were premiered.

Most Productive Playwrights
Amongst the most productive playwrights is Jónas Árnason (1923-1998). His plays include musicals with his brother, the musician Jón Múli (1921-2002), which have enjoyed great popularity.

Jökull Jakobsson (1933-1978) was the most productive playwright of the first years of the professional theatre. At the same time, he wrote many interesting radio plays. One of his plays, Hart í bak (1962), was performed more than 200 times.

Ólafur Haukur Símonarson (b. 1947) is the most productive playwright of recent years. He writes realistic plays in which he tries to shed light on the lives of ordinary people.

Information about Translations

Information about the works of Icelandic authors available in foreign translation can be found here and in the following texts:

Knüppel, Christine. Isländische Literatur 1850-1990 in deutscher Übersetzung. Bibliographie anlässlich der Ausstellung Isländische Literatur und Kunst aus Island in der Württembergischen. Stuttgart: Deutsch-Isländisches Kulturforum, 1990.

Mitchell, P. M. and Ober, Kenneth H. eds. Bibliography of Modern Literature in Translation. Islandica XL. Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1975.

Ober, Kenneth K., ed. Bibliography of Modern Icelandic Literature in Translation 1981-1992. Scandinavica Supplement 1997.

Ober, Kenneth H., ed. Bibliography of Modern Literature in Translation: Supplement 1971-1980. Islandica XLVII. Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1990.

Principal Museums

The nation's most significant relics are preserved at the National Museum of Iceland (*Þjóðminjasafni Íslands*), founded in 1863. All kinds of sources of Icelandic cultural history are also stored there, as well as information about national life and customs. In addition, district museums in the country look after relics which relate especially to social ways in the regions. The National Museum of Iceland housed the National Gallery of Iceland (Listasafn Íslands) until it moved to its own building in 1988.

The National Gallery of Iceland is a museum of national artworks with an emphasis on nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, Icelandic and exotic. It has the largest collection of Icelandic works in the country, by all of the greatest artists of the nation.

The National Book Stack (*Þjóðarbókhlaðan*) was established in 1994. It is the largest library in the country and combines the National Library of Iceland and University of Iceland Library. The National Library of Iceland–University Library (Landsbókasafn Íslands–Háskólabókasafn) is a research library and functions as both the national collection and the library of the University of Iceland. Its main tasks are, amongst other things, to keep all material published in Icelandic and to operate as a general lending library which fulfils the need of the University of Iceland as regards Icelandic and foreign scholarly texts. It has special national and manuscript sections.

The artworks belonging to the City of Reykjavík are kept at *Listasafn Reykjavíkur* (the Reykjavík Art Museum). It also houses a splendid exhibition room. Reykjavik Art Museum are in: *Kjarvalsstaðir*, *Ásmundarsafn* (Asmundur Sveinsson Sculpture Museum) and *Hafnarhús*. *Kjarvalsstaðir* is named after the Icelandic painter, Jóhannes S. Kjarval, one of the most favoured artists of the nation. He bequeathed a large part of his work and personal items to the City of Reykjavík in 1968. Special exhibitions of Kjarval's works are held at Kjarvalsstaðir every year. *Ásmundarsafn* is named after Ásmundur Sveinsson, one of the pioneers of Icelandic sculpture. He was among those who introduced Icelanders to a new form of art in the 20th century. His sculptures can be found in public places throughout the country. Ásmundur donated his collection and his home and studio at Sigtún to the City of Reykjavík. There the Ásmundur Sveinsson Museum has been open to the public since 1983.

Safnahúsið was opened in 2015 in an old building which before housed the National Library of Iceland and is considered to be amongst the treasures of Iceland's architectural history. Safnahúsið hold exhibitions which bear upon the cultural history of Iceland.

The Living Art Museum (*Nýlistasafnið* , lit. the new art museum) is a very large collection of artwork and sources that has managed to preserve a special part of Iceland's art history. The collection includes works by most of the members of the SÚM group, the museum has works by many of the most important young artists in the country, and it constantly adds new works. The museum also holds works by 50 foreign artists, among them one of the world's largest collections of works by the German-Swiss artist Dieter Roth. All the works in the museum's holdings have been chosen by the artists themselves, not the museum's experts.

Akureyri Art Museum is one of the youngest art museum in Iceland. Ironically, the idea that Akureyri should have its own museum was suggested in a newspaper article in 1960 by politician Jónas Jónsson, who happened to be the most adamant opponent of modern art of his time. Three decades passed until the idea again came under serious discussion and finally became a reality on Akureyri's anniversary, August 29th 1993.

In addition, there are many smaller museums and exhibition halls throughout the country.

The Mass Media

Mass communication plays an increasingly important role in contemporary Icelandic society. It is supposed to ensure universal access to all kinds of information and disseminate it in different ways. There have been enormous changes in the area of mass communication during the twentieth century. It has increased in volume, with mass media, telecommunication, and computer technology performing increasingly important roles.

The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service (Ríkisútvarp) was established in 1930. It quickly reached out to most of the districts in the country and radios multiplied rapidly. To begin with, there were only four to six hours of broadcast time per twenty-four-hour cycle. The Broadcasting Service is operated by the Icelandic government and, as such, entails compulsory subscription. In an era of private enterprise, this way of operating has met with some criticism. On the other hand, defenders of the National Broadcaster believe that it performs an important service for Icelanders. It is the radio for all the people; broadcasts by various other radio stations only reach a limited part of the country. Amongst other things, this is important in providing information, such as warnings of natural disasters. The advocates for the National Broadcaster also believe that its cultural value is very important.

Evening Entertainment and Work

One may say that in many ways the National Broadcaster has taken over the role of providing evening entertainment. For centuries, people in rural societies passed time by reading, composing poetry, and telling stories out loud when the time came for evening entertainment. As a matter of fact, the evening entertainment, *kvöldvakan*, was a time of activity, and furthermore a time for the people of the household to be together. Books were read out for the household, ballad songs were recited from collections or memory, and people talked about different matters which came up. At the end

of *kvöldvakan* was *húslestur*, a sacred reading followed by a pray and a hymn.

The National Broadcaster is still formed in a way which reflects this structure. As well as news and various programs, story series are read out, poems are recited, morning prayers are read, Hallgrímur Pétursson's Passíusálmar are read during the fast and so on, much in the way of the old evening entertainments. In the first years of radio, people even gathered around the radio and sat by it, listening to the announcer just as they would during the evening entertainment of old days.

Television and Icelandic Culture

Television broadcasts did not begin until 1966. The broadcast was limited to evenings and one night per week, Thursday night, was television free. With the arrival of television, a considerable decline in people's old habit of calling in on one another began. In its place, the family passes time in front of the television or the computer in the evenings and entertains itself with the content which comes from all over the world. Many feel that Icelandic language and culture are threatened by the wave of foreign material and fashions flooding people in the era of globalization. Television and computers makes a considerable contribution to this. Others point out that, in spite of this, the Icelandic language has never been stronger than it is now. More people talk Icelandic today than ever before and many foreigners are now undertaking studies in Icelandic both in Iceland and at universities abroad.

Other Media

In 1986, the first privately run television station commenced operations, and since then there has been a growth in media outlets, including some privately run stations like N4. Also, almost everyone has an access to the internet in Iceland.

There a two large daily newspapers published in Reykjavík (given the size of the population, they are considered large papers). Morgunblaðið, is a morning paper about 70 pages in size and Fréttablaðið, has a print run of ca. 90.000, it is free of charge and delivered to every home in the Capital Area. DV, is an semiweekly afternoon paper and Fréttatíminn is delivered free of charge, three times a week, and has a print run of ca. 80.000 copies.

But people can also read the news and look for information of all kinds by accessing a news provider on the internet, the most popular news websites are: www.ruv.is, www.mbl.is and www.visir.is.

14. Movies

- An Outline of the History of Cinema
- Cinema Today

An Outline of the History of Cinema

Icelandic cinema is a young area of art. Iceland's first movie theatre was opened in Reykjavík in 1906. Yet a very long time passed before Icelanders themselves produced films. The first steps in movie production in the country were taken by foreigners, who for the most part came in order to film the landscape. Likewise, it was a team of foreigners from the Nordisk

Film Kompagni in Copenhagen who came to the country in 1919 to make the first Icelandic feature film, Saga Borgarættarinnar, based on the novel by the Icelandic author Gunnar Gunnarsson.

The Danes continued to make movies in Iceland, sometimes in collaboration with Icelanders, but the first Icelandic sound and colour movie was made by Loftur Guðmundsson in 1948. It was called Milli fjalls og fjöru (Between Mountain and Shore). The movie is a love story about Ingólfur, a poor farmer's son, and the daughter of a rich merchant.

Out of the older generation of movie figures, the director to have had the most influence on the young is probably Óskar Gíslason. His best known movie is the children's story, Síðasti bærinn í dalnum (1950). Other pioneers of Icelandic cinema were Asgeir Long and Ósvaldur Knudsen. Ósvaldur was an early leader in documentary film making, concentrating mainly on movies about volcanoes.

At the beginning of the decade, a number of films based on novels were made, for example one by Indriði G. Þorsteinsson: the Dane Erik Balling directed 79 af stöðinni (1962, Girl Gogo), but it was not until after 1980 that Icelandic cinema really began to grow.

At the close of the 1970s, many young artists who had finished studies abroad returned home and injected new life into the arts. This came at the same time as the Icelandic film fund was established (1979), which sees to the allocation of funding to film makers.

Cinema Today

In the last thirty years, there has been strong growth in Icelandic film making. An increase in international cooperation in cinema and investment of foreign capital have enabled Icelanders to take on film production.

The world community was first alerted to Icelandic cinema when the films Land og synir (Land and Sons), directed by Ágúst Guðmundsson, and Óðal feðranna (Father's Estate), directed by Hrafn Gunnlaugsson, were screened at foreign film festivals in the early 1990s. Land og synir broke all attendance records in Iceland, with 110,000 tickets sold even though the ticket price was higher than to other films (understandable given that it was not every day that an Icelandic film was shown in the nation's cinemas). Land og synir and Óðal feðranna both depict the conflict between town and country during a period of rapid increase in urban dwelling. With them, a new era in Icelandic cinema began and the last two decades have made up a very productive period.

There has been a definite trend amongst directors to look for material in the past or to deal, in a bittersweet way with their childhood experiences. As such, Atómstöðin (1984, The Atom Station), based on the novel of the same title by the Nobel Laureate Halldór Kiljan Laxness, was something of a novelty in Icelandic cinema. It concerned a political controversy which has generated enormous debate, namely the American military presence in Iceland. The film's director was Þorsteinn Jónsson.

The most famous Icelandic directors are Hrafn Gunnlaugsson, Friðrik Þór Friðriksson and Baltasar Kormákur.

Hrafn became known for his Viking movies, the films Hrafninn flýgur (1984, When the Raven Flies) and Í skugga hrafnsins (1988, In the Shadow of the Raven).

Amongst the best known of Friðrik Þór's films are Börn náttúrunnar (1991, Children of Nature (an Oscar nominee for best foreign film in 1992), Englar alheimsins (2000, Angels of the Universe), the documentary Sólskinsdrengurinn (2008, The Sunshine Boy, A mother's

Courage) and his newest film Mamma Gógó (2010).
Baltasar Kormákur has directed and produced many movies such as 101 Reykjavik 2001, A little trip to heaven, 2006, which is a thriller starring Julia Stiles and Forest Whitaker, Grafarþögn (2010, Silence of the grave), based on Arnaldur Indriðason's novel with the same title, Contraband (2012) a thriller starring Mark Wahlberg and Kate Beckinsale based on the film Reykjavík-Rotterdam written by Óskar Jónasson and Arnaldur Indriðason and Everest (2015).

Looking Ahead
In the new age of Icelandic cinema, one can see many promising buds. With financial help from the Icelandic Film Fund and a greater number of subsidies, more collaborations with overseas parties, plans by foreign film companies for projects in Iceland, and the many young, up and coming, film directors are indications of a bright future for Icelandic cinema.

Peter Cowie has written about Icelandic films: Icelandic Films (1995) and Icelandic Films 1980-2000 (2001).

15. A Briefly History About Icelandic Music

- Music in the Past
- On the Path to the Present
- Musical Life Now

Music in the Past

The history of Icelandic instrumental music is, by European standards, very young. Throughout the centuries, music consistent mostly of singing and it was not until around 1930 that the foundations were laid for the abundant musical life which now thrives in the country.

Few Sources
There a few extant sources regarding people's musical pursuits during the first centuries of the Icelandic settlement. Through to the nineteenth-century, sources are limited. Yet the ancient Norse people were widely travelled and one can argue that they would have had some knowledge of the music of the countries they visited. Many slaves accompanied the Icelandic settlers, mainly of Celtic origin, and one might argue that these people did, in some respect, bring their musical culture with them. Icelanders also travelled widely during the first centuries of Icelandic settlement and came into contact with foreign musicianship. Furthermore, music was part of the education of learned people.

Although the sources say little about the ownership of musical instruments or instrumental music, music has a long tradition in Iceland. Roman Catholic songs of worship, named after Gregory the Great (540-604), were brought to the country with Christianity and performed in churches and monasteries. It was the central subject of the mass and service, and one spoke of "singing the mass." Various old manuscripts indicate that, in the Catholic church in Iceland, there were many clerical scholars who were familiar with musical notation. The largest manuscript of this kind is Þorlákstíðir. Þorlákur Þórhallsson, after whom the manuscript is named, was bishop at Skálholt. He died in 1193. "Þorlák's Service" (on the 23rd December) is also named after him, and Þorlákur was declared a saint at the

National Assembly in 1198.

After the reformation the Icelanders sang Lutheran hymns that were printed with musical notation in hymnbooks. Many hymns have also been preserved in manuscripts. Pictures of Icelandic musical manuscripts can be found in an on-line database, Ísmús, a website about the Icelandic music and cultural heritage.

Ballad Songs or "Rímnalög"

The general public enjoyed themselves by singing ballads or rhymes (the Icelandic is "rímur"), which were the greatest source of amusement for Icelandic people over the centuries. Their origin can be traced back to the middle of the fourteenth-century. Although the "rímur" form a branch of poetry, it is not unnatural to classify them as music as well, for they were recited or delivered with a certain kind of musical intonation or chant. The poetic tune of the "rímur" is called "stemma" (tune), "rímnalag" (ballad song), or "bragur" (melody). "Rímur" are narrative poems. They are mainly based on the ancient legendary sagas and chivalric romances (called "fornaldarsögur" and "riddarasögur" respectively), foreign works, and a few are based on events in the family sagas (or "Íslendingasögur").

The ballad songs can, perhaps, be called Icelanders' chamber music, at a time when other kinds of chamber music were not available. Not everyone agrees about the aesthetic quality of the Icelandic ballad songs.

On the Path to the Present

A Musical Revival in Iceland

Around the middle of the nineteenth-century, musical life begins to change. At that time, a great musical stirring began in Iceland: it came on the initiative of one man, Jónas Helgason (1839-1903). He had benefited from musical instruction and had the opportunity of taking a short course of musical study in Copenhagen. He quickly developed a strong interest in polyphonic music, leading him to establish the first choir in Iceland in 1862. About one decade later, his brother Helgi Helgason set up the first brass band in Iceland, called Lúðurþeytarafélag Reykjavíkur. Jónas was an energetic music teacher and, in addition, established more choirs. As a result, choral music became increasingly popular and to this day it is probably one of the most common musical pursuits. Little by little, more people took to musicianship and the conditions for a living musical culture in the nation were created.

"Ó, Guð vors lands!" ("Oh God of our Land")

The first professional Icelandic composer was Sveinbjörn Sveinbjörnsson (1847-1927). Amongst other things, he was an excellent pianist and composed larger pieces and compositions than any Icelander had done before. Amongst the general public, he is perhaps best known for having brought his nation a new national anthem, using Matthías Jochumsson's psalm "Ó, Guð vors lands!"

Icelandic National Songs

Shortly after 1880, Bjarni Þorsteinsson (1861-1938) took on the important task of recording Icelandic national songs and printed his research in the book Íslenzk þjóðlög. Until that time,

little attention had been paid to the musical heritage of the common people.

1930, A Crucial Year in Musical History

1930 marks a watershed in Icelandic musical history. At that point, about one hundred years of quiet development, driven in large part by the enthusiasm and initiative of few men, came to an end and a new chapter began. This occurred because of the establishment of the first institutions which, one might say, are necessary in order for musical life to prosper. They were the College of Music in Reykjavík and the National Radio Broadcaster. The first symphony orchestra, The Icelandic Symphony Orchestra, was established two decades later, in 1950.

Musical Life Now

Musical life in contemporary Iceland is characterized by a varied classical music culture and all kinds of popular music. The symphony orchestra has operated since 1950, and a small opera house has been going for almost 40 years. There has been more and more interest in musical training in past years, and the general population has enjoyed a musical harvest resulting from seeds sown in the past years and decades. If one looks in the newspapers, one can see the large number of events advertised or in the pipeline, so everyone should be able to find something which suits them.

Pop music in Iceland is developing greatly. Songs by The Beatles resounded on the waves of the ether during the 1970s and, as in other places, enchanted the younger generation in Iceland. Within a while the first Icelandic Beatle-style group was formed. This was the band Hljómar, from Keflavík. They released the first Icelandic "Beatle record" in 1965.

Many very good bands have shot into Icelandic pop stardom and even managed to cast some rays of light abroad. The group Mezzoforte, and The Sugar Cubes (in Icelandic, "Sykurmolarnir") with Björk Guðmundsdóttir, are probably the Icelandic bands to have received the most exposure abroad along with Sigur Rós, but Björk is the first Icelandic pop singer to have really broken onto the international scene. Without any doubt, she is a crucial factor in the current strong growth in Icelandic pop music. Her success is an encouragement to artists. Certainly, throughout the country drums are being hit, horns blown, and strings thrashed in the hope of fame and success abroad.

Popular Bands and Singers

Amongst the most popular bands today is the group Sigur Rós (lit. Victory Rose), which attracted interest in the summer of 1999 with their LP Ágætis byrjun (lit. "A Good Start"). The band was responsible for the music for the film Englar alheimsins (Angels of the Universe), based on the novel of the same name by Einar Már Guðmundsson and made by one of the most important Icelandic directors, Friðrik Þór Friðriksson. There the originality which characterizes this unusual band is used to full effect. Emilíana Torrini has also been successful at home and abroad as a singer and a songwriter. Popular dance bands are many and some live only for one summer. Few groups have lived on and been popular for a long time like Stuðmenn, Sálin hans Jóns míns and GusGus. The singers Bubbi Morthens, Ragnhildur Gísladóttir and Páll Óskar Hjálmtýsson have been popular for a long time and have a strong fan bases as well as Dikta, Ólafur Arnalds and Of Monsters and Men.