

# East Iceland



The overeager Ring Rd charges through Egilsstaðir, completely bypassing the Eastfjords, and appearing in a terrible hurry simply to get out of the region. Many visitors follow its lead, foot to the accelerator, their eyes set on the prizes of Mývatn in the north or Skaftafell to the south. Thank them for their rabid urgency, since it leaves a largely tourist-free corner of the country for more exploratory bods to explore.

East Iceland may lack any obvious star attractions, but subtle charms unfold around the bends of its winding roads. In particular, the Eastfjords are a delight. On fine days there's nothing better than to climb a hillside, plonk yourself down in the heather, and watch as the deep water turns an unreal shade of cobalt blue, pods of dolphins break the waves, and fishing boats head home with their catch. The scenery is particularly dramatic around the northern fjord villages, backed by sheer-sided mountains covered in toppling streams and waterfalls. If the weather is fine, several days spent hiking or kayaking here may be some of your most memorable in Iceland.

Away from the coast, Iceland's longest lake, allegedly the home of a huge wormlike monster, stretches southwest from Egilsstaðir. On its eastern shore you'll find the country's largest forest – a source of great pride to tree-starved Icelanders! Head further inland still and you'll come to the forgotten farms, fells and heathlands of the empty east.

Some pretty dramatic changes are taking place in east Iceland, following the building of a controversial dam and hydroelectricity plant in the highlands, and an aluminium smelter on Reyðarfjörður. But, don't be deterred from coming to the east; it has plenty to offer.

## TOP FIVE

- Arrive in the country in style: sail up a lovely 17km-long fjord to the bohemian village **Seyðisfjörður** (p263) on the Norröna ferry
- Explore the fjords at water level on a guided **midnight kayaking trip** (p264 and p269)
- Take a boat trip out to the delightful island of **Papey** (p273), inhabited only by seals and sea birds
- Sparkly...shiny...be mesmerised by Petra Sveinsdóttir's **amazing mineral collection** (p270) in Stöðvarfjörður
- Escape into isolation at the far-off youth hostel at **Húsey** (p258), end-of-the-road **Neskaupstaður** (p268) or bird-watching haven **Skálanes** (p266)



## GETTING THERE & AROUND

### AIR

In summer **Flugfélag Íslands** (Air Iceland; ☎ 471 1210; www.airiceland.is) flies about five times daily from Egilsstaðir to Reykjavík (about Ikr9400, one hour), and once or twice per day from Egilsstaðir to Akureyri (about Ikr11,700, 40 minutes).

### BUS

Egilsstaðir is a major crossroads on the Ring Rd, so all buses pass through. The main bus stop is at the camp site.

From June to August there's a daily **TREX** (☎ 461 1106; www.trex.is) bus between Akureyri and Egilsstaðir, calling at Mývatn en route. It departs from Akureyri at 8am, and from

Egilsstaðir at 1pm. The journey takes four hours and costs Ikr5400 one way. Between September and May a service runs on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, departing at different times – see the latest schedule.

For Egilsstaðir–Höfn buses, see p296.

**Ferðajónusta Austurlands** (☎ 472 1515, 852 9250) runs a minibus–post van between Egilsstaðir and Seyðisfjörður (Ikr800, about 30 minutes). Between 1 June and 10 September it leaves Seyðisfjörður at 8.20am weekdays, with a second service at 1.30pm Wednesday and Thursday. Between 29 June and 4 August there's also a weekend service, leaving at 1.30pm Saturday and 2.15pm Sunday. The rest of the year a bus runs at 4.30pm weekdays and at 6.20pm Sunday.

Between 1 June and 10 September it leaves Egilsstaðir at 9.15am weekdays, with a second service at 2.20pm on Wednesday and Thursday. Between 29 June and 4 August there's also a weekend service, leaving at 2.20pm on Saturday and Sunday. The rest of the year a bus runs at 5pm Monday to Friday and at 7pm Sunday.

**Austfjarðaleið** (East Iceland Bus Company; ☎ 477 1713; www.austfjarðaleið.is) runs buses from Egilsstaðir to villages around the fjords. The Egilsstaðir–Norðfjörður (Ikr1600, 1½ hours) service via Reyðarfjörður (Ikr800, 30 minutes) and Eskifjörður (Ikr1100, 45 minutes) runs once or twice daily Monday to Saturday. There's also a bus that runs a 40-minute route around the Fjarðabyggð (Neskaupstaður/Eskifjörður/Reyðarfjörður) district on weekdays, at 7.40am and 5pm from Neskaupstaður, and back from Reyðarfjörður at 5.45pm. The Egilsstaðir–Breiðdalsvík (Ikr1800, 1½ hours) service via Fáskrúðsfjörður (Ikr1100, 45 minutes) and Stöðvarfjörður (Ikr1400, 1½ hours) runs weekdays only.

## INLAND

### EGILSSTAÐIR

pop 1910

However much you strain to discover some underlying charm, Egilsstaðir is really not a ravishing beauty. It's the main regional transport hub, and a centre for commerce and industry. Sorry, it's about as pretty as that sounds.

Thanks to the new hydroelectricity project (see the boxed text, p258) and its influx of workers, there has been feverish house building over the last few years. In time, no doubt, the town's entertainment facilities will catch up, but at present there's little to amuse visitors. Seyðisfjörður (p263) is a more pleasant place for ferry passengers to stay.

Egilsstaðir does have one saving grace – it's built on the banks of lovely **Lagarfljót** (Lögurinn), Iceland's third-largest lake. Since the time of the sagas tales have been told of a monster, the Lagarfljótsormurinn, who lives in its depths. If you want to go and do some beastie-hunting, or to explore the forest on the eastern bank of the lake, Egilsstaðir does make a very good base. Services include an excellent regional tourist office and some decent restaurants.

## Orientation & Information

North past the airport and over the lake, you'll find Egilsstaðir's twin-town. Fellabær has some pleasant accommodation options and a petrol station–bakery, but most services are in Egilsstaðir. The tourist office, petrol station, bus terminal, Landsbanki Íslands bank (with ATM), a supermarket and the camp site are all located in a single block just off the Ring Rd.

With some of the most helpful staff in Iceland, the central **tourist office** (Upplysingamiðstöð; ☎ 471 2320; www.east.is; ☎ 8am–10pm Jun–Aug, 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, noon–4pm Sat, 2–8pm Sun Sep–May; ☎ ), by the camp site and bus terminal, is a great first information stop for passengers just off the ferry. There are plenty of free brochures plus a great selection of walking maps for sale. Internet access costs Ikr200/400/500 per 15/30/60 minutes.

The post office is just up the hill on the corner of Selás and Fagradalsbraut.

The town **library** (☎ 471 1546; Laufskógar 1; ☎ 2–7pm Mon–Fri), upstairs in the same building as Minjasafn Austurlands, has internet access.

**Verzlunin Skógar** (☎ 471 1230; Dynskógar 4), near Fosshótel Valaskjálfi, is a sports store selling a range of tents, sleeping bags and other camping equipment.

### Sights & Activities

Egilsstaðir's cultural museum **Minjasafn Austurlands** (East Iceland Heritage Museum; ☎ 471 1412; Laufskógar 1; adult/child Ikr400/200; ☎ 11am–5pm Jun–Aug, 1–5pm Mon–Fri Sep–May) is quite a sweet little place. Its displays focus on the history of the region, and they include a reconstructed farmhouse and 10th-century grave goods. Much of the information is in Icelandic only.

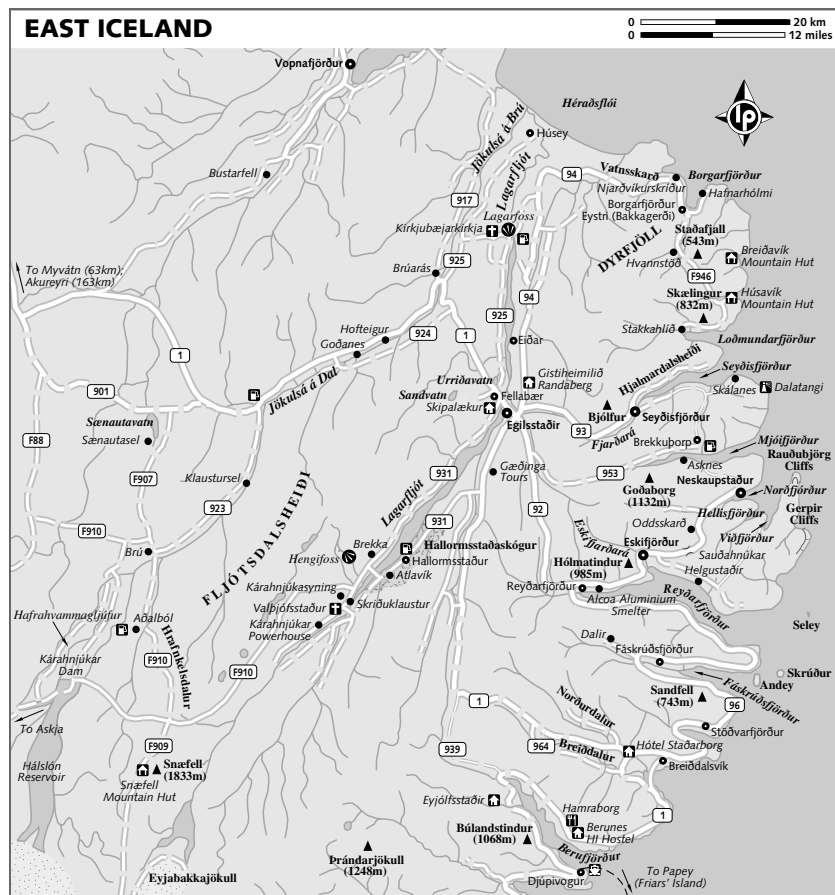
Egilsstaðir's impressive **swimming pool** (☎ 470 0777; Tjarnarbraut; adult/child Ikr300/150; ☎ 7am–9.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–7pm Sat & Sun), with indoor and outdoor pools, saunas, hot pots and a gym, is at the top end of Tjarnarbraut, north of town.

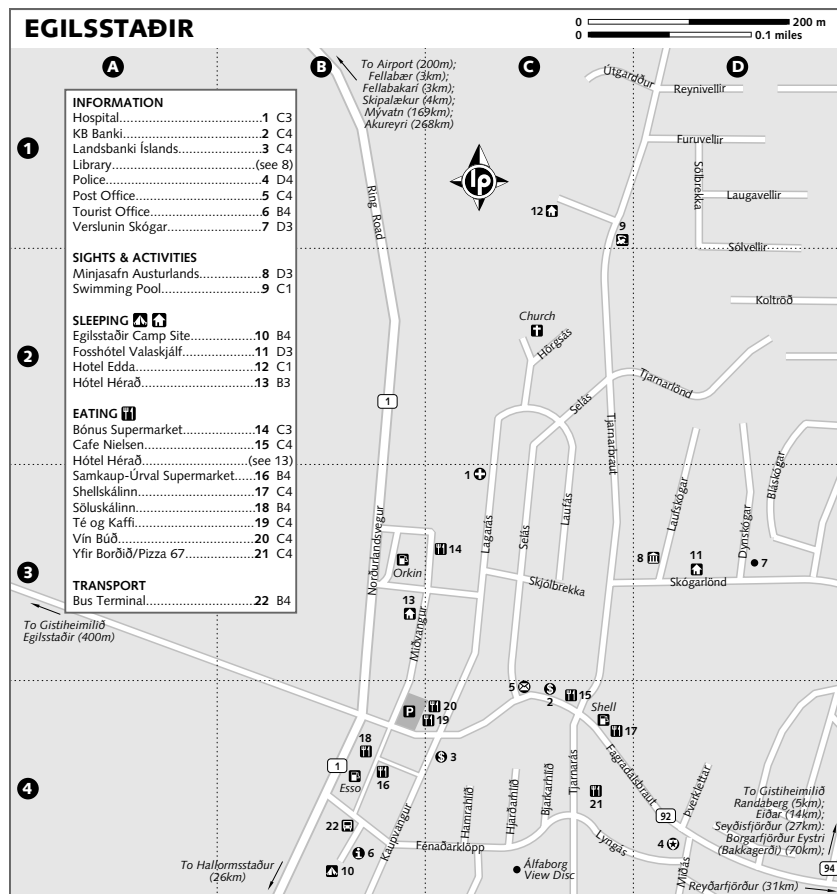
### Tours

For horse tours through the spectacular Eastfjords, **Gæðinga Tours** (☎ 471 1727; www.gaedingatours.is), 7km south of Egilsstaðir at Útmyringsstaðir, runs a variety of tours, including short rides and a seven-day tour of east Iceland.

### LAKE CRUISES

In summertime the boat **Lagarfljótsormurinn** pootles along the pretty lake Lagarfljót. Unfortunately, although there's a terminus at





the bridge in Fellabær, you can't actually get on there; passengers must set off from the Atlavík camp site, 30km southwest of town – see p256.

## Festivals & Events

If you are here in early November, stop by for the unusual 10-day **Dagar Myrkurs** (Days of Darkness), when the town perversely celebrates the failing light and the onset of winter with dark meals, dark dances, ghost stories, star walks, Northern Light spotting, and torch-lit processions! When life gives you lemons...

Around the third weekend in June, Egilsstaðir's annual jazz festival **Djasshátíð Egilsstaða** ([www.jea.is](http://www.jea.is)) takes place at various venues in the area.

The possible existence of the lake monster Lagarfjótormurinn is a good excuse for a week-long cultural festival, **Ormsteiti**, during late August.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET & MIDRANGE

**Egilsstaðir camp site** (☎ 471 2320; [info@east.is](mailto:info@east.is); Kaupvangur 10; sites per person 1kr750, sb 1kr2300, 5-person hut 1kr7000; 📶) Camping pitches are in utilitarian rows, but facilities are good – there's a kitchen, a washing machine (1kr500), a dryer (1kr600) and internet access in the tourist office. A dormitory building holds sleeping-bag accommodation.

**Our pick** **Gistiheimilið Randaberg** (☎ 471 1288; [randaberg@simnet.is](mailto:randaberg@simnet.is); sb d 1kr5000, made-up d 1kr6500) We

really loved this place, 5km from town on the Eiðar road. Its three dinky wooden cabins have porches, flower boxes, great lake views, and tea-making equipment. Although they're fairly sparse inside – just containing a double bunk bed and a small table – there's something homey about them, and owner Vilborg is kind.

**Hotel Edda** (☎ 444 4000; off Tjarnarbraut; sb/s/d 1kr2200/9000/11,300; 📶 Jun–mid-Aug) Based in the school opposite the swimming pool, this is a typical Edda hotel. Rooms have private bathrooms, and there's a bar and restaurant with panoramic views.

**Skjalpækur** (☎ 471 1324; fax 471 2413; sites per person 1kr650, May–Sep sb/made-up beds per person 1kr2100/4200, d with bathroom 1kr12,000, 4-/6-person chalet 1kr8000/11,000, discounts rest of year) In Fellabær, 4km from Egilsstaðir, this farmhouse has accommodation to suit all purses. There's a small camping area, two fairly noisy Portakabins with sleeping-bag accommodation, some rooms in a funny 1970s-decorated house, and comfortable, self-contained A-frame chalets (with bathroom, basic kitchen and lounge) overlooking the lake. All accommodation has access to showers, a kitchen, and a sitting room of some description. Short horse-riding trips (1kr2000 per hour) are available.

**Our pick** **Gistiheimilið Egilsstaðir** (☎ 471 1114; [www.egilsstadir.com](http://www.egilsstadir.com); s/d May–Sep 1kr10,500/13,900, Oct–Apr 1kr6900/9500; 📶) The town was named after this splendid heritage guesthouse and farm, on the banks of Lagarfjót, 300m west of crossroads. Its sensitively renovated en-suite rooms retain a real sense of character, and are decorated with antique furniture – ask for one with a lake view. Breakfast (included) is in the lake-side dining room, which also does a good Icelandic dinner buffet.

## TOP END

**Hótel Hérað** (☎ 471 1500; [herad@icehotels.is](mailto:herad@icehotels.is); Miðvangur 5-7; s/d Jun–Aug 1kr14,600/18,300, up to 40% discount rest of yr) This three-star Icelandic hotel is the plushiest in town. It's been hugely expanded since work began on the hydroelectricity project; a whole wing contains brand-new parquet-floored rooms, with satellite TV, bathroom and buffet breakfast included. There's a small cocktail bar and a flash restaurant.

**Fosshótel Valaskjálfi** (☎ 470 5050; [www.fosshotel.is](http://www.fosshotel.is); Skógarlond 3; s/d Jun–Aug 1kr14,700/19,000, Sep–May 1kr9300/10,700) Valaskjálfi is a slightly decrepit, overpriced hotel – an option only if everything else is full.

## Eating

**Yfir Borðið/Pizza 67** (☎ 471 2424; Lyngás 3; pizzas 1kr900-2000; 📶 5-10pm Sun–Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat) This ambient bar-restaurant has a massive pizza menu (please will someone out there try the raspberry jam, green apples, almonds and camembert combo?), as well as burgers and fish mains. It's quite easy to miss – it's upstairs in what looks like an office block, opposite the Shell petrol station.

**Café Nielsen** (☎ 471 2626; Tjarnarbraut 1; lunch 1kr1400, dinner mains 1kr2200-3900; 📶 11.30am-11.30pm Mon–Thu, to 2am Fri, 1pm-2am Sat, 1-11.30pm Sun) The top eating choice in town straddles the divide between smoky bar and genteel candlelit restaurant. There's plenty of variety, from veggie burgers to Icelandic favourites served with unusual flavourings – like scallops with mango and chilli. In summer there's a very pleasant leafy terrace and garden.

**Gistiheimilið Egilsstaðir** (☎ 471 1114; [www.egilsstadir.com](http://www.egilsstadir.com); mains 1kr2500-4200) This lovely lakeside restaurant just 300m west of crossroads has been given the world-cuisine treatment – salt cod with aubergines and sun-dried tomatoes, lamb with nutty Indonesian sauce. Local products include reindeer and beef from the farm, and there's always one veggie course.

**Hótel Hérað** (☎ 471 1500; Miðvangur 5; mains 1kr2900-3500) Hérað's stylish licensed restaurant is a good place for a splurge. It serves some interesting traditional dishes such as fresh char and lamb ribs, all livened up with modern European dressings and accompaniments. The house speciality is reindeer steak.

**Té og Kaffi** (☎ 471 2219; Miðvangur; 📶 til 6pm daily) Come here for great coffee, but avoid the food! It sounds really yum on paper, but in reality it's watery, claggy or tastes of onions.

**Söluskálinn** (☎ 470 1230), at the Esso petrol station near the tourist office, is an economical choice, with hearty daily specials of fish and meat dishes (around 1kr1800) and fast food. The **Shellskálinn** (Fagradalsbraut 13), at the Shell petrol station at the top of town, has an extremely popular set lunch.

Self-caterers have the well-stocked **Samkaup-Úrval supermarket** (📶 9am-7pm Mon–Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun) by the Esso garage, and the **Bónus supermarket** (☎ 471 2700; [www.bonus.is](http://www.bonus.is); 📶 noon-6.30pm Mon–Thu, 10am-7.30pm Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun) north of Fagradalsbraut.

The **Vín Búð** (☎ 471 2151; Miðvangi 2-4; 📶 12.30-6pm Mon–Thu, 11am-7pm Fri, 11am-2pm Sat) alcohol shop

is on the ground floor of the office building diagonally across from the Esso station.

There's a small bakery, **Fellabakari** (☎ 471 1800), open on weekdays, at the Ólis petrol station in Fellabær.

### Getting There & Away

Egilsstaðir is the transport hub of east Iceland. There's an airport (1km north of town), and all bus services pass through here (see p252).

The Ring Rd steams through Egilsstaðir, but if you want to explore the Eastfjords you need to leave it here. Rte 94 takes you north to Borgarfjörður Eystri, Rte 93 goes east to Seyðisfjörður, and Rte 92 goes south to Reyðarfjörður and the rest of the fjord towns.

### Getting Around

**Avís** (☎ 660 0623; www.avis.is), **Hertz** (☎ 471 1210; www.hertz.is) and **Bílaeigur Akureyrar** (☎ 461 6070; www.holdur.is) all have agents at the airport.

Bus connections with the Smyril Line ferry in Seyðisfjörður can be really inconvenient. If you get stuck, a **taxi** (☎ 892 9247) between Egilsstaðir and Seyðisfjörður costs around Ikr8000.

### SOUTH OF EGILSSTAÐIR Lagarfljót

The grey-brown waters of the river-lake Lagarfljót are reputed to harbour a fearsome monster, **Lagarfljótsormurinn** (Lagarfljót Serpent), which has allegedly been spotted since Viking times. The last 'sighting' was in 1987, when it was glimpsed coiled up in an inlet at Atlavík camp site. The poor old beast must be pretty chilly – Lagarfljót starts its journey in the Vatnajökull icecap and its glacial waters flow north to the Arctic Ocean, widening into a 38km-long, 50m-deep lake, often called Lögurinn, south of Egilsstaðir.

Whether you see monsters or not, it's quite a lovely stretch of water, which can be circumnavigated by car. Rte 931, a mixture of sealed surfaces and gravel, runs all the way around the edge from Egilsstaðir-Fellabær – a distance of 56km. There's no public transport, and traffic is light on the western shore if you're planning on hitching.

The eastern shore is thick with birch and fir trees: Hallormsstaðaskógur (see right) is Iceland's biggest forest and a site of reverential pilgrimage for Icelanders. In summer you can take a pleasure cruise from the popular camp site there.

### HALLORMSSTAÐASKÓGUR

The sequoia! The giant redwood! The mighty Scots pine! These are all trees that you won't see in the forest Hallormsstaðaskógur, on the eastern bank of the Lagarfljót. Although the country's coppices are comical to many foreigners ('Q. What do you do if you get lost in an Icelandic forest? A. Stand up.'). it's rude to snigger. Hallormsstaðaskógur is king of the woods and venerated by Icelanders.

There's a small petrol station near to the accommodation area in the forest, where you can pick up a free map (*gönguleiðakort*) of Hallormsstaðaskógur. It's in Icelandic-only, but shows the forest trails clearly.

### Sights & Activities

Although the forest is small by most countries' standards, it's also quite cute – and a leafy reprieve after the stark, bare mountain sides to the north and south of Egilsstaðir. Common species include native dwarf birch and mountain ash, as well as 50 tree species gathered from around the world. Iceland's oldest larch colony, **Guttormslundur**, 2.5km south of Fosshótel Hallormsstaður (see opposite), was planted in 1938; some of the trees are now 20m high!

Between mid-June and August, the 110-passenger cruise ship **Lagarfljótsormurinn** (☎ 471 2900; www.ormur.is; per person Ikr2000; ☎ 8.30pm daily) runs from Atlavík camp site to Egilsstaðir and back again.

You can arrange **horse-riding tours** (☎ 847 0063; vedisk@simnet.is; ☎ 11am-7pm Jun-Aug) at the hut by Hússtjórnarskólinn summer hotel. The same people also rent out pedal boats, rowing boats and canoes from Atlavík campsite.

### Sleeping

**Atlavík camp site** (☎ 849 1461; sites per person Ikr650) Down the hill, close to the lake shore, is this beautiful and extremely popular camp site, named after the first settler in this area, Graut-Atli. It's often the scene of raucous parties on summer weekends. The smaller, quieter Þurshöfðavík camp site is just north of the petrol station.

**Grái Hundurinn** (☎ 471 1763; www.graihundurinn.is; Hjalli; s/d Jun-Sep Ikr6500/8700, Oct-May Ikr5400/6900) Ironically, the surrounding trees mean that the Grey Dog guesthouse's rooms are rather dark. But they all have TVs and washbasins, and a light breakfast is included. One of the doubles has its own private bathroom (Ikr12,400). The same couple runs the summer hotel Hússtjórnar-

skólinn next door; rooms cost the same as those in the guesthouse.

**Fosshótel Hallormsstaður** (☎ 471 1705; bokun@fosshotel.is; s/d Ikr14,700/19,000; ☎ early Jun-late Aug) The en-suite, parquet-floored rooms here are small but bright and clean. Public spaces are decorated with children's drawings of the forest (this Fosshótel is a school out of season) and feel very welcoming. There's also a playground, and a swimming pool right next door. Breakfast is included.

### SKRIÐUKLAUSTUR

The site of a 15th-century monastery, and the home of an Icelandic author fêted by the Third Reich, **Skriðuklaustur** (☎ 471 2990; www.skriðuklaustur.is; adult/under 16yr Ikr500/free; ☎ 10am-6pm, to 10pm Wed in Jul) certainly has an interesting history. The unusual black-and-white turf-roofed building was built in 1939 by Gunnar Gunnarsson (1889–1975), and now holds a cultural centre dedicated to him. This prolific writer achieved phenomenal popularity in Denmark and Germany – at the height of his fame only Goethe outsold him! He was nominated for the Nobel Prize three times, but his books have dated quite badly; the most readable is *Svartfugl* (translated into English as *The Black Cliffs*), about an infamous Icelandic murder.

The house also contains an interesting exhibition about the earlier Augustinian monastery, demolished during the Reformation. Archaeological finds include bones indicating that Skriðuklaustur was used as a hospice. Its most famous artefact is a carved statue of the Virgin Mary, found hidden in an old barn wall.

Downstairs, **Klausturkaffi** serves a great lunch buffet (Ikr1750) made from local ingredients (wild mushrooms, reindeer meat, brambleberry puddings). For all who love gorging on sugary, creamy confections, there's an all-you-can-eat cake buffet (Ikr1250) between 2pm and 5pm at weekends.

### KÁRAHNJÚKASÝNING

Just up the road from Skriðuklaustur is the **visitor centre** (☎ 861 2195; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun mid-Apr–mid-Sep, 1-5pm mid-Sep–mid-Oct) for the Kárahnjúkar project (see p258).

### VALÞJÓFSSTAÐUR

If you're up at this end of the Lagarfljót lake, you might as well pop into the unassuming **church** at Valþjófsstaður. One of the most

amazing items in Reykjavík's National Museum, the wooden door depicting the story of the Knight of the Lion, was carved here around 1200. A replica has been fixed up at the current church.

### HENGIFOSS

Hengifoss is Iceland's third-highest **waterfall**. Once you've made the climb up and into the canyon you'll be blown away by the power of the water – it sounds plummet 120m into a colourful brown-and-red-stripped boulder-strewn gorge.

Getting to Hengifoss requires a return walk of about 1½ hours. From the parking area on Rte 933, about 200m south of the bridge across the lake, a well-defined path leads up the hillside – Hengifoss is soon visible in the distance. It's a steep climb in places but flattens out as you enter the gorge. Halfway up is a smaller waterfall, **Litlanesfoss**, which is surrounded by spectacular vertical basalt columns in a honey-comb formation.

### NORTH OF EGILSSTAÐIR

The region due north of Egilsstaðir is mostly water and grey sand! Few travellers visit, but if you've plenty of time, you might like to admire this landscape of dunes, basalt outcrops, marshes and river deltas (where the Lagarfljót and Jökulsá á Brú join the sea).

There's no regular public transport, but with your own vehicle you could do a loop drive along Rtes 94 and 925.

### Eiðar

Eiðar, 14km north of Egilsstaðir on Rte 94, was the farm of Helgi Ásbjarnarson, grandson of Hrafnkell Freygoði (see the boxed text, p260). The **church**, built in 1887, contains an interesting statue of Christ that washed up on the shore at Héraðssandur, north of Eiðar. Its location beside a popular trout lake, Eiðavatn, makes it especially appealing for anglers.

**Hotel Edda** (☎ 444 4000; www.hoteledda.is; sb Ikr1700-2200, s/d Ikr5800/7200; ☎ mid-Jun–Aug), in the local school just off the Egilsstaðir-Borgarfjörður road, is a summer hotel with lots of sleeping-bag space, rooms with washbasins, a swimming pool and a licensed restaurant.

### Kirkjubæjarkirkja

One of Iceland's oldest wooden churches, Kirkjubæjarkirkja (1851) is set in a peaceful deep-grassed graveyard, 3km west of Lagarfoss.

It's a quaint little place, with a dusty harmonium, a sky-blue ceiling, creaking stairs up to a tiny gallery and the oldest pulpit in the country – a great 16th-century piece, carved with medieval-looking saints.

### Húsey

The only reason to venture out to the isolated farm at Húsey, 60km north of Egilsstaðir near the shores of Héraðsflói, is to stay at the friendly **Húsey HI Hostel** (☎ 471 3010; husey@simnet.is; sb 1kr2400, made-up bed 1kr3100). Apart from the sheer isolation and the stark but beautiful surroundings, this is a great spot for bird-watching – more than 30 species breed here. There are also lots of seals (the farmers hunt, tan and eat them). If you don't have a vehicle the wardens might pick up prebooked guests (for a fee) from Egilsstaðir. There are cooking

facilities at the hostel but there's nowhere to buy food, so bring supplies. Breakfast (1kr1000) can be ordered.

### THE HIGHLANDS Jökulsá á Dal

At the time of writing, this large, turbulent river was still flowing strong, from the Vatnajökull icecap all the way to Héraðsflói bay, 150km away. By the time you read this, it will be an ex-river as the completed Kárahnjúkar dam will block off the water after it has travelled a mere 20km from the glacier, and the river will back up to become the Hálsón reservoir.

A small stream, formed by rivulets from the hillsides, will still puddle through the old riverbed. The part alongside the Ring Rd is said to be haunted by mischievous leprechauns and bloodthirsty Norse deities.

### KÁRAHNJÚKAR – OPENING THE FLOODGATES *Stuart Cooper*

The Kárahnjúkar Hydroelectric Project: monstrous in scale, costly compared to the alternatives, controversial at home and attracting a storm of international protests. Just why has the state power company, Landsvirkjun, built the largest infrastructure project in Iceland's history?

The simple answer is that Alcoa, the American multinational, will use power generated by damming two rivers to smelt aluminium, and that it will be cheaper for them to do so this way than to use conventional methods. (Although it's not cheaper than recycling existing aluminium products.) There is brave talk of 1000 additional jobs and a new Golden Circle, as tourists flood in to use the new roads created by the project. The Eastfjords, traditionally one of Iceland's poorest regions, has seen an increase in visitors wanting to study the site of the project, and a steady supply of work.

However, the project's critics are numerous: the Iceland Conservation Association (INCA), the Icelandic Society for the Protection of Birds, Greenpeace and the WWF, not to mention Björk's mum, and one of the most well-known newsreaders in the country! The Hálsón reservoir, to be created by the massive Kárahnjúkar dam, will alone submerge 57 sq km of wilderness, and there are concerns for the habitats of reindeer and pink-footed geese, as well as the harbour seals at Reyðarfjörður, site of the smelting works.

Icelanders themselves are deeply divided – the National Planning Authority initially refused plans for the project on environmental grounds, but was overruled by the environment minister. Protestors set up camp near the site, but lost support when they occupied the offices of a local architect; some local people question the right of outsiders to tell them what to do, and welcome the development whatever the cost, believing it will deliver them from years of isolation and relative poverty.

The dam and smelter are a dramatic illustration of the dilemma Iceland now faces: with staple industries such as fishing in decline and threatened by overexploitation, how will Icelanders earn their living in the future? Through tourism, and thriving cultural industries such as design and music-making; or by opening up vast tracts of their wilderness to industrial megaprojects?

Reykjavík is thriving – it has joined the global network of hip city destinations – and many of its inhabitants are appalled by the scale of and the devastation caused by the Kárahnjúkar project. Iceland is resonant with history, it's one of the last European wildernesses and it's a country like no other. Whether it remains so – a pristine land of lava and lichen – is now open to serious question for the first time in its history. The waters in the reservoir are rising, and power will start flowing to the smelter in 2009.

The outcrop called **Goðanes**, about 3km west of the farm Hofteigur, was the site of an ancient pagan temple where some ruins are still visible. The iron-stained spring **Blóðkelda** (Blood Spring) carries an apocryphal legend that the blood of both human and animal sacrifices once flowed into it.

Consider breaking up a long car journey with kids at **Klaustursel** (☎ 471 1085; allis@centrum.is), 6km off the Ring Rd along rough Rte 923 (the alarming little bridge you cross was once part of the American railway!). The farm has swans and geese, and you can pat the soft noses of the oh-so-pretty reindeer.

Continuing along Rte 923 leads you to the valley of **Hrafnkeldalur** (about 100km from Egilsstaðir), full of Saga Age sites relating to *Hrafnkell's Saga* (see the boxed text, p260). The farm **Aðalból** (☎ 471 2788; www.simnet.is/samur; sites per person 1kr500, sb 1kr2200, made-up bed 1kr3300; ☞ Jun–mid-Sep) was the home of the saga's hero, Hrafnkell Freygoði, and his burial mound is there. At the time of writing the current occupier, Sigurður, was marking a 10km-long saga trail, threading together places mentioned in the story; even if you're not a raving saga addict it's an interesting walking area, off the tourist trail.

There's simple accommodation available at Aðalból farm, and a petrol pump, but unless you preorder meals Egilsstaðir is the nearest place to buy food. The road becomes the F910 before you reach Aðalból, but it's easily driveable (if a bit skiddy) in a normal car. It's definitely 4WD only once you continue past Aðalból – an alternative route to Snæfell, or to the **Kárahnjúkar dam** (see the boxed text, opposite).

The reconstructed turf farmhouse **Sænautasel** (☎ 471 1086; ☞ daily Jul & Aug), dating from 1843, really brings the past to life...plus it sells pancakes and coffee! This is one of several old farms on Jökuldalsheiði that were originally abandoned when Askja erupted in 1875. The building is beside the lake Sænautavatn, 32km west of Hofteigur and 4km south of the Ring Rd via Rte 907. This area was a source of inspiration for Halldór Laxness' master work, *Independent People*; you may notice that many of the farm names here match those of the fictional farms in the book.

### Snæfell

No-one seems to know whether 1833m-high Snæfell is an extinct volcano, or it's just hav-

'Why's the dam being built? Greed and local politics. It makes no sense. We need to remember: what we do today will affect little Vikings in 100 years' time. People need to wake up.'

*Jónas, Original Haunted Walk of Reykjavík*

ing a rest! Iceland's highest peak outside the Vatnajökull massif is relatively accessible, making it popular with hikers and mountaineers. Snæfell looms over the southern end of Fljótsdalsheiði, an expanse of spongy tussocks of wet tundra, boulder fields, perennial snow patches and alpine lakes, stretching westwards from Lagarfljót into the interior.

Work on the dam has improved the roads around Snæfell, with Rte F910 from Fljótsdalur being the best way up. (It's still pretty vertical, though!) Along the way, watch for wild reindeer. At the base of the peak, at 800m elevation, is Ferðafélag Íslands' **Snæfell mountain hut** (N 64°48.250', W 15°38.600'; per person 1kr2000), accommodating up to 62 people, with a kitchen, a camping area and showers.

Although climbing the mountain itself is not difficult for experienced, well-prepared hikers, the weather can be a concern and technical equipment is required. Discussing your route first with the hut warden is a good idea.

### SNÆFELL-LÓNSÓRÆFI TREK

One of Iceland's most challenging and rewarding treks takes you from Snæfell to the Lónsóræfi district (see p296) in southeast Iceland. The five-day route begins at the Snæfell hut and heads across the glacier Eyjabakkajökull (an arm of Vatnajökull) to Geldingafell, Egilssel and Múlaskáli huts before dropping down to the coast at Stafafell.

This route should not be approached lightly – it's for experienced trekkers only. You'll need good route-finding skills and, for the glacier crossing, you must be able to use a compass and have a rope, crampons and an ice axe. If you're unsure of your skills, you'd be much wiser doing the trip commercially with Ferðafélag Íslands.

Advance hut bookings are advised for July and August – contact **Ferðafélag Íslands** (☎ 568 2533; www.fi.is; Mörkin 6, 15-108 Reykjavík).

You'll need the following topo sheets for walking in this region: *Hornafjörður* 1:100,000 (1986), *Hamarsfjörður* 1:100,000 (1987) and *Snæfell* 1:100,000 (1988).

### HRAFNKELL'S SAGA

The saga of Hrafnkell is one of the most widely read Icelandic sagas, thanks to its short, succinct plot and memorable characters. The tale is particularly interesting because its premises seem to derail any modern notions of right, wrong and justice served. The only conclusions one can really draw are 'it's better to be alive than dead'; and 'it's better to have the support of powerful chieftains than rely on any kind of god'.

The main character, Hrafnkell, is a religious fanatic who builds a temple to Freyr on the farm Aðalból in Hrafnkelsdalur (see p258). Hrafnkell's prized stallion, Freyfaxi, is dedicated to the god, and Hrafnkell swears an oath to kill anyone who dares ride him without permission. As might be expected, someone does. The stallion himself tempts a young shepherd to leap onto his back and gallop off to find a herd of lost sheep. Discovering the outrage, Hrafnkell takes his axe to the errant youth.

When the boy's father, Þorbjörn, demands compensation for his son's death, Hrafnkell refuses to pay up, offering instead to look after Þorbjörn in his old age. Proudly, the man refuses, and the characters are launched into a court battle that ultimately leads to Hrafnkell being declared an outlaw. He chooses to ignore the sentence and returns home.

Before long, Þorbjörn's nephew Sámur Bjarnason arrives to uphold the family honour, stringing Hrafnkell up by the Achilles tendons until he agrees to hand over his farm and possessions. Sámur then offers him a choice: to live a life of subordination and dishonour, or to die on the spot; you might think a saga hero would go for death, but Hrafnkell chooses life.

Sámur moves into Aðalból, and makes a few home improvements. The pagan temple is destroyed, and the horse Freyfaxi weighted with stones, thrown over a cliff and drowned in the water below. Hrafnkell, by now convinced that his favourite god doesn't give two hoots about him, renounces his religious beliefs and sets up on a new farm, Hrafnkelsstaðir. He vows to change his vengeful nature and becomes a kind and simple farmer, becoming so well-liked in his new neighbourhood that he gains even more wealth and power than before.

One day, Sámur and his brother Eyvindur pass by en route to Aðalból. Hrafnkell's maid sees them and goads her employer into taking revenge for his earlier humiliation. Hrafnkell abandons the Mr Nice Guy routine, sets out in pursuit of the troublesome brothers, kills Eyvindur, and offers Sámur the same choice that he was offered before – give up Aðalból and live in shame, or be put to death. Sámur also decides not to die. Hrafnkell thus regains his former estates and lives happily ever after at Aðalból.

## THE EASTFJORDS

Unlike the histrionic, wildly folding Westfjords, the Eastfjords wiggle more modestly around the coast. It's like the difference between an overtheatrical actor chewing up the scenery, and an underemoting character in some Scandinavian arthouse film.

Despite good surfaced roads and all the smelter-related activity, the Eastfjords still feel pretty remote – a feeling enhanced by immense, dramatic mountain sides and the tiny working fishing villages that nestle under them.

The fjords are a definite highlight of eastern Iceland. There are some lovely walks, you can kayak to far-off headlands, thousands of sea birds nest along the cliffs, and it's amazing how many dolphin pods you can spot if you choose a good vantage point and wait.

In a Finest Fjord competition it would be hard to pick a winner – Borgarfjörður is great for its off-the-tourist-track air, Seyðisfjörður has a cheery bohemian atmosphere, atmospheric Mjóifjörður is full of ruined buildings, and Norðfjörður feels like the Lost Valley. You'll just have to visit and choose your own favourite.

The following section is organised from north to south.

### BORGARFJÖRÐUR EYSTRÍ (BAKKAGERÐI)

pop 100

This village, the most northerly in the Eastfjords, is in a stunning location. It's framed by a backdrop of rugged rhyolite peaks on one side and the spectacular Dyrfjöll mountains on the other. There's very little in the village itself, although weird driftwood sculptures, crying

sea birds and pounding waves exude a strange charm. The main reason to come here is to hike in the surrounding hills. (If anyone happened to watch the reality TV programme *Rockstar Supernova*, this is where Magni is from!).

The Álfasteinn rock shop and Fjarðarborg community centre (see right) are the two places to go for information. Fjarðarborg sells a good booklet of walks (Ikr400) in the area but only has a small supply – it may be better to buy the booklet from the Egilsstaðir tourist office.

### Sights & Activities

The touristy rock shop **Álfasteinn** (Elf Stone; ☎ 897 2765, 470 2000; www.alfasteinn.is; ☹ noon-8pm Jun-Aug, 10am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) does a booming business collecting semiprecious stones, polishing them up, then turning them into kitsch candle holders, cheese slicers and the like. Out the front is a 2250kg piece of raw jasper, the biggest found in Iceland.

Jóhannes Sveinsson Kjarval (1885–1972), Iceland's best-known artist, was brought up on the nearby farm Geitavík and took much of his inspiration from Borgarfjörður Eystri. **Kjarvalsstofa** (☎ 472 9950; adult/child Ikr500/free; ☹ 10am-6pm mid-Jun–Aug), inside the Fjarðarborg community centre, is the village's tribute to him; we hate to say it, but it's underwhelming – a single room containing copies of his famous sketches of local people.

Better to see the touching and unusual altarpiece in the small church **Bakkagerðiskirkja**, painted by Kjarval in 1914. It depicts the Sermon on the Mount and is directly aimed at his village of fishermen and farmers – Jesus is preaching from Álfaborg, with the mountain Dyrfjöll in the background.

From the town's monument to the painter it's a signposted half-hour walk to **Smalakofi Kjarvals**, the ruins of a stone shepherd's hut that Kjarval built as a child.

You can't miss the village's hairiest house! Bright red **Lindarbakki** (1899) is completely cocooned by whiskery green grass, with only a few windows and a giant pair of antlers sticking out. It's a private home and not open to the public, but an interesting information board outside tells you more about its history. We particularly liked the estate agent's comments from 1979...

**Álfaborg** (Elf Rock), the small mound and nature reserve near the camp site, is the 'borg' that gave Borgarfjörður Eystri its name. From

the view disc on top there's a fabulous vista of the surrounding fields, which turn white in summer with blooming arctic cotton. Some locals believe that the queen of Icelandic elves lives here. Borgarfjörður Eystri's main festival, **Elf Dance**, held on the weekend nearest 6 January, involves a bonfire and candle-lit procession led by the elf king and queen.

There's a large **puffin colony** of 10,000 pairs on the islet **Hafnarhólmi** (connected to the mainland by a causeway), about 5km north-east of Borgarfjörður Eystri at the end of the road. The viewing platform is open from 10am to 10pm daily in June and July (free) and at all times in August.

Back in the village there's a small hide for **bird-watching** behind the general store.

### Tours

Skúli Sveinsson at **Borg Travel Services** (☎ 472 9870, 854 4470; gisting-borg@visir.is) runs 4WD tours and transports hikers and luggage to trail heads for around Ikr2500 per person, depending on where you go.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Camp site** (☎ 472 9999; magnus@eldhorn.is; sites per person Ikr750, 3rd night free) Beside the church, this quiet green site has a kitchen and free showers.

**Borgarfjörður Eystri HI Hostel** (☎ 472 9962; borgarfjordur@hostel.is; sb Ikr2000; ☹ May–mid-Sep) This small hostel offers sleeping-bag accommodation for up to 17 people. There's a guest kitchen and a washing machine.

**Gistiheimilið Borg** (☎ 472 9870, 894 4470; gisting-borg@visir.is; sb/s/d Ikr2100/3500/6000) Borg is a good bet for a bed, since the owner has three houses in the village. Rooms are OK if old fashioned, with cooking and lounge facilities. Breakfast (Ikr900) is available in summer.

**Réttarholt** (☎ 472 9913; helgima@mi.is; sb Ikr2200, s/d Ikr4500/6800) This year-round guesthouse has just three simple, brightly quilted rooms and is the nicest place to stay in the village. There's a homey guest kitchen and the house is set in the most lovely garden, full of odd sculptures and pieces of lichen-covered wood. The owner, Helgi, leads guided walks during the summer and is a good person to ask about hiking in the area.

**Fjarðarborg community centre** (☎ 472 9920; berg runj@mi.is; sb Ikr2000; ☹ 11am-8pm mid-Jun–Aug) In summer, there's basic sleeping-bag accommodation here, and a bit of food – mainly burgers, pancakes and ice cream.

**Álfasteinn** (☎ 897 2765, 470 2000; www.alfasteinn.is; ☎ noon-8pm Jun-Aug, 10am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) The rock shop has a pleasant summer-only café serving the best coffee in town, plus traditional light nibbles such as fish soup, flatbread with lamb sausage or smoked trout, and Icelandic doughnuts.

The tiny **KHB general store** (☎ 472 9940; ☎ 12.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) by the pier sells groceries.

### Getting There & Away

The only public transport to Borgarfjörður Eystri is the **postal van** (☎ 472 9805, 894 8305) from Egilsstaðir at noon on weekdays (1kr1500/750 per adult/child under 12). It returns at 8am, departing from Álfasteinn and stopping at the Fjarðarborg community centre too.

The village is 70km from Egilsstaðir along Rte 94, about half of which is sealed. It winds steeply up over the Vatnsskarð mountains before dropping down to the coast. There's a card-operated petrol pump by the KHB general store.

### AROUND BORGARFJÖRÐUR EYSTRÍ

There are loads of trails crisscrossing the northeast – everything from easy two-hour strolls to serious mountain hiking for people with a head for heights! Watch your footing in nonvegetated areas – loose material makes for an experience akin to walking on thousands of tiny ball bearings.

The colourful rhyolite peak **Staðarfjall** (543m) rises 8km southeast of Borgarfjörður Eystri and makes a nice day walk. The best access is up the ridge from Desjamýri farm, across the estuary from Borgarfjörður Eystri.

### Dyrfjöll

One of Iceland's most dramatic ranges, the Dyrfjöll mountains rise precipitously to an altitude of 1136m between the Lagarfjót valley and Borgarfjörður Eystri. The name Dyrfjöll means 'Door Mountain' and is due to the large and conspicuous notch in the highest peak – an Icelandic counterpart to Sweden's famous Lappporten. There are two walking tracks crossing the range, which allow for day hikes or longer routes from Borgarfjörður Eystri.

**Stóruð**, on the western flank of Dyrfjöll, is an extraordinary place scattered with huge rocks and small glacial ponds. It can be reached in 2½ hours from just west of the pass on the road to Egilsstaðir (Rte 94).

### Njarðvíkurskriður

A habitual site of accidents in ancient times, Njarðvíkurskriður is a dangerous scree slope on Rte 94 near Njarðvík. All the tragedies were blamed on a nuisance creature (half man, half beast), Naddi, who dwelt in a sea-level cave beneath the slope.

In the early 1300s Naddi was exorcised by the proper religious authorities, and in 1306 a cross was erected on the site bearing the inscription *Effigiem Christi qui transis pronus honora, Anno MCCCVI* – 'You who are hurrying past, honour the image of Christ – AD 1306'. The idea was that travellers would repeat a prayer when passing the danger zone and therefore be protected from malevolent powers. The cross has been replaced several times since, but the current one still bears the original inscription.

### LOÐMUNDARFJARÐARLEIÐ

In high summer, the relatively little-known mountain route between Borgarfjörður Eystri and Loðmundarfjörður is an obscure but very attractive hike. It follows a 4WD track up over the pass and opens up lots of opportunities to explore the pristine surroundings. The required topo sheet is *Dyrfjöll* 1:100,000 (1986). For 4WD transport to the trail heads or huts, contact Skúli Sveinsson at Borg Travel Services (see p261).

The route begins at the farm Hvanntöð, 7km south of Borgarfjörður Eystri, and continues for 20km over Húsavíkurheiði (477m). You can either descend along the side track to the small bay of Húsavík or continue south to the deserted fjord Loðmundarfjörður. From there the route follows the historic 20km bridle path up Hjálmarðalur and across Hjálmarðalsheiði to Seyðisfjörður.

A more direct route leads due south from Hvanntöð, across the mountains to Loðmundarfjörður, via the strange **Álfakirkjan**, a huge, house-shaped rock.

The shallow bay **Breiðavík** has a deep valley and a basic Ferðafélag Íslands **hut** (N 65°27.830', W 13°40.286'; per person 1kr2000) reached by 4WD track from the head of Borgarfjörður or a hiking trail from Húsavíkurheiði. The valley isn't on the direct Loðmundarfjarðarleið route, but it makes a fine side trip.

At the **Nesháls pass**, between Víkurá and Loðmundarfjörður, the track reaches an altitude of 435m. Just west is the peak **Skælingur** (832m), sometimes called the 'Chinese temple'.

### Loðmundarfjörður

This short but beautiful fjord was once well settled, and at least six farms occupied the upper basin. However, after the coastal supply boats stopped running, construction of all-season roads into such sparsely populated outposts became uneconomical and the region was finally abandoned in 1973. Unfortunately, there is no longer any accommodation in the area. Walkers will have to wild camp and postpone the hot shower till another day!

From Loðmundarfjarðarleið it's a six- to eight-hour walk south to Seyðisfjörður, where there are plenty of facilities and buses back to Egilsstaðir.

### SEYÐISFJÖRÐUR

#### pop 740

If you visit only one town in the Eastfjords, this picturesque place should be it. Made up of multicoloured wooden houses, and surrounded by snow-capped mountains and cascading waterfalls, Seyðisfjörður (www.sfk.is) is the most historically and architecturally interesting town in east Iceland. It's also a friendly place with a gregarious and

bohemian community of artists, musicians and craftspeople.

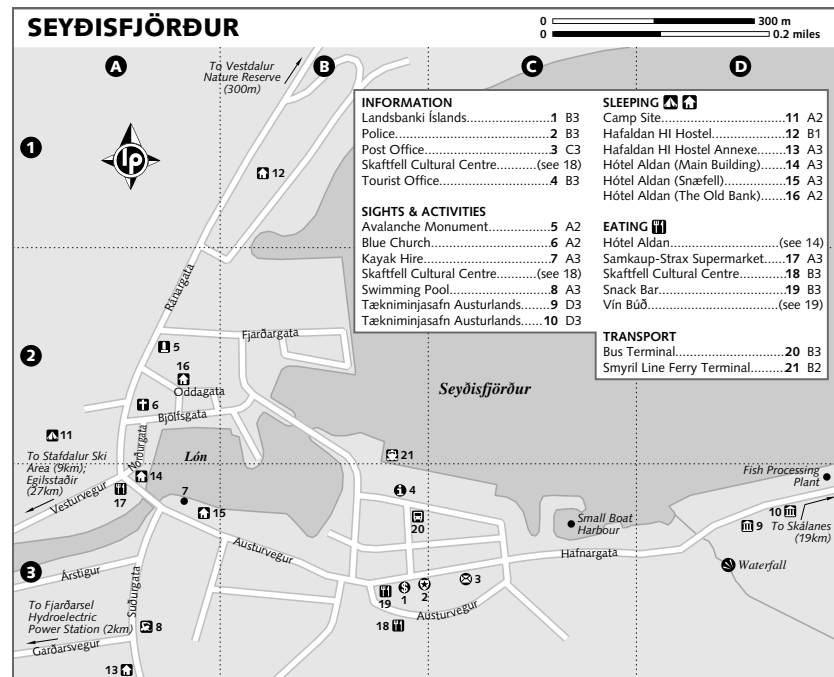
Summer is the liveliest time to visit, particularly when the Smyril Line's ferry *Norróna* sails majestically up the 17km-long fjord to the town – a perfect way to arrive in Iceland.

The substance and soul of the village has traditionally been focused on the fishing industry. For a glimpse of what life here was like 40 years ago, we recommend the moving film *Kaldaljós* (*Cold Light*; 2004), partly filmed in Seyðisfjörður.

If the weather's good, the scenic road from Egilsstaðir is a delight, climbing to a high pass then following the waterfall-filled river Fjarðará down. If it's bad weather you probably won't see much more than the tail-lights of the car in front!

### History

Seyðisfjörður started as a trading centre in 1848, but its later wealth came from the 'silver of the sea' – herring. Its long, sheltering fjord gave it an advantage over other fishing villages, and it grew into the largest and most prosperous town in east Iceland. Most of the beautiful



and unique wooden buildings here were built by Norwegian merchants, attracted by the rich pickings of the herring industry.

During WWII Seyðisfjörður was a base for British and American forces. The only attack was on an oil tanker that was bombed by three German warplanes. The bombs missed their target, but one exploded so near that the ship sank to the bottom, where it remains today.

Seyðisfjörður's steep-sided valley has made it prone to avalanches. In 1885 an avalanche from Bjölfur killed 24 people and pushed several houses straight into the fjord. A more recent avalanche in 1996 flattened a local factory, but no lives were lost. The avalanche monument near the church is made from twisted girders from the factory, painted white and erected as they were found.

## Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 472 1551; 🕒 10am-noon & 1-5pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri winter, 10am-noon & 1-8pm Wed summer, 1-5pm Wed & Thu rest of yr), in the modern ferry terminal building, sells bus passes and books onward accommodation.

There's a **Landsbanki Íslands bank** (☎ 470 3040; Hafnargata 2), which can get crowded when the ferry arrives. In summer you can access the internet at the **Skaftfell Cultural Centre** (☎ 472 1632; skaffell@skaffell.is; Austurvegur 42; 📺) for Ikr200 per 30 minutes.

## Sights

Seyðisfjörður is stuffed with 19th-century **timber buildings**, brought in kit form from Norway; read all about them in the brochure *Historic Seyðisfjörður*, available at the tourist office.

For insight into the town's fishing and telecommunications history, there's a worthwhile museum, **Tæknimínjasafn Austurlands** (☎ 472 1596; Hafnargata 44; adult/under 18yr Ikr500/free; 🕒 11am-5pm daily Jun-mid-Sep, 1-4pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep-May). It's housed in two buildings on Hafnargata: the impressive 1894 home of ship owner Otto Wathne, and a workshop from 1907. Seyðisfjörður was at the cutting edge of Icelandic technology in the 19th century – the first submarine telephone cable linking Iceland with Europe was brought ashore here in 1906. The museum charts this history with displays of old machinery, photographs, and a re-creation of the original telegraph station, foundry and machine shop. An old fishing boat in the harbour opposite the museum is being restored as a floating addition to the collection.

The **Skaftfell Cultural Centre** (☎ 472 1632; Austurvegur 42) is the place to hang out in Seyðisfjörður. It's a meeting place for local artists and musicians with a very bohemian vibe. Upstairs is a spacious gallery of changing exhibitions, and occasional concerts and poetry readings are held here.

The first high-voltage electricity in Iceland came from the **Fjarðarsel hydroelectric power station** (☎ 472 1122; www.fjardarsel.is), which opened in 1913. The power station, a 15-minute walk upriver from town, is still in operation; its small electricity museum opens on request.

## Activities

For an unearthly experience, try a guided night **kayaking trip** (☎ 865 3741; www.iceland-tour.com; 🕒 Jun-Aug) around the tranquil lagoon (one hour, Ikr1500) with Hlynur Oddssen. More experienced paddlers can go on a six-hour paddle (Ikr6000) to Austdalur or a two-day trip (Ikr17,000) to Skálanes – a fabulous way of getting close to the bird life and maybe seals.

Hlynur also does **mountain-bike tours** (Ikr2000 for a two-hour trip), or you can hire bikes and take off on your own (Ikr1500/2000 per half/full day).

Seyðisfjörður's indoor **swimming pool** (☎ 472 1414; Suðurgata 5; adult/child Ikr300/150; 🕒 7-9am & 5-9pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun) has a sauna and hot pots.

In winter there's downhill and also cross-country **skiing** at the Stafdalur ski area, 9km from Seyðisfjörður on the road to Egilsstaðir – contact the tourist office for details.

## Festivals & Events

Seyðisfjörður is a highly regarded artistic centre in east Iceland. The town's cultural festival **Á Seyði** runs from mid-June to mid-August, with plenty of exhibitions, workshops and music. An important part of the festival is the programme of classical-, jazz and folk-music concerts, held on Wednesday evenings in the pretty **Blue Church** (Ránargata; admission Ikr1000) at 8.30pm from late June to mid-August. If you're leaving on the Thursday ferry, this is a great way to spend your final night in Iceland.

## Sleeping

**Camp site** (☎ 861 3097; ferdamenning@sfk.is; Ránargata; sites Ikr600) This is a pleasant, sheltered grassy site with big hedges and picnic benches. Note that camping isn't permitted in Vestdalur or anywhere along the roads.



**Hafaldan HI Hostel** (☎ 472 1410; thorag@simnet.is; Ránargata 9; sb dm Ikr1650, sb d Ikr4800, d Ikr6000; 📺) Seyðisfjörður's cheerful arty hostel is split over two sites (facilities are shared). The original building has harbour views, a sunny lounge, a newly fitted kitchen, a laundry, internet access...and even a snug Mongolian yurt (available July and August) in the garden. The central new building used to be the old hospital, but you'd never guess – Indian hangings and funky old furniture make it homey.

**our pick** **Hótel Aldan** (☎ 472 1277; www.hotelaldan.com; Norðurgata 2) The hotel is shared across three old wooden buildings. Reception and the bar-restaurant (where breakfast is served) are at this location. The Snæfell location (at Austurvegur 3) is a creaky, characterful three-storey place with cheaper rooms (Ikr10,800/14,800/16,800 for singles/doubles/triples in summer, and Ikr6500/8800/10,800 for singles/doubles/

triples in winter), fresh white paintwork, draped muslin curtains and Indian bedspreads to add a splash of colour. The Old Bank location (at Oddagata 6) houses a truly gorgeous boutique guesthouse with all mod-cons. Its luxury rooms (Ikr12,800/16,800/19,800 for singles/doubles/triples in summer, and Ikr7800/11,800/14,800 for singles/doubles/triples in winter) are bright, spacious and furnished with antiques, and beds are snuggled under hand-embroidered bedspreads. The triple rooms have wicked little alcoves.

## Eating & Drinking

**Skaftfell Cultural Centre** (☎ 472 1632; Austurvegur 42; snacks Ikr450-1100, mains Ikr2000-3500; 🕒 11am-10pm summer, cultural events only winter; 📺) This welcoming, arty bistro-bar and internet café is a great place to linger over coffee and a good book. Snacks include omelettes, waffles and toast with caviar, and the freshly caught seafood is fab.

**Hótel Aldan** (☎ 472 1277; Norðurgata 2; mains Ikr2600-3500; 🕒 7am-9.30pm mid-May-mid-Sep) Coffee and light meals are served all day. In the evening, damask tablecloths, crystal wine glasses and flickering candles prettify the tables, and the menu features traditional Icelandic ingredients (lamb, lobster, reindeer, fish) served with contemporary salads and sauces. The bar fairly buzzes when the boat comes in.

**Snack bar** (☎ 472 1700; Hafnargata 2; 🕒 noon-9pm) This place at the Shell petrol station does hot dogs and sandwiches, as well as cooked lunch/dinner mains – usually something filling and Icelandic, such as fish soup or meatballs.

The **Samkaup-Strax supermarket** (☎ 472 1201; Vesturvegur 1; 🕒 closed Sun) is opposite the petrol station, and there's also a **Vín Búð** (☎ 472 1191; Hafnargata 2a; 🕒 5-6pm Mon-Thu, 4-6pm Fri) alcohol shop.

## SEYÐISFJÖRÐUR-VESTDALUR HIKE

A wonderful introduction to hiking in Iceland will take you up through the Vestdalur Nature Reserve and around Bjölfur down to the Seyðisfjörður-Egilsstaðir road.

Start by walking up the road past the HI hostel to where a rough 4WD track takes off up the glacial valley to your left. The track peters out after a few hundred metres, but keep walking uphill, along the left side of the Vestdalsá river. After a couple of hours and several tiers of glorious waterfalls, you'll arrive at a small lake, Vestdalsvatn, which remains frozen most of the year. Here you'll see Bjölfur to your left.

From the lake, bear left and make your way southwards over the tundra, through the snowfields and past a small ski hut to the highway. From there, you'll have to hitch to either Seyðisfjörður or Egilsstaðir, or arrange a pick-up. The trip can also be done in the opposite direction – and more easily because most of it is downhill.



## Getting There & Away

### BUS

In summer there's at least one bus to/from Egilsstaðir daily – see p252 for details.

### BOAT

The **Smyril Line car ferry** ([www.smyril-line.com](http://www.smyril-line.com)) *Norðna* sails year-round to Seyðisfjörður from Hanztholm (Denmark), Tórshavn (the Faeroes) and Bergen (Norway). From mid-May to the end of September the ferry also brings passengers from Scotland (currently from Lerwick in the Shetlands, but it's possible that the ferry will eventually depart direct from Aberdeen). From mid-May to August it sails into town at 9am on Thursday, departing for Scandinavia/Scotland at 1pm the same afternoon; check-in is at least one hour before departure. The (complicated) timetable changes at other times of the year – for more information, see p328, or check the website.

## AROUND SEYÐISFJÖRÐUR

### Skálanes

The remote farm **Skálanes** (☎ 690 6966; [www.skalanes.com](http://www.skalanes.com); sites per tent/sb 1kr600/2000; ☞ May-Aug), about 19km east of Seyðisfjörður, has recently been dubbed a **nature and heritage field centre**. Its isolation, plus stunning sea cliffs full of diverse and abundant bird life, will do wonders for your inner hermit/naturalist. You can stay in very simple accommodation (sleeping-bag bunks, kitchen, running water), or the centre does a neat package – 1kr7500 per day will get you a night's sleeping-bag accommodation, three light meals and an hour-long guided walk.

Getting there is an adventure in itself. You could walk the 19km; you could get there on a mountain bike or in a canoe hired from Hlynur Oddssen (see p264); in a normal car you can drive 13km along the 4WD track until you get to the river, then walk; in a Jeep you can drive the whole way there; or it may be possible for the centre to pick you up from Seyðisfjörður in a boat – contact them to ask.

## MJÓIFJÖRÐUR

pop 35

The next fjord south of Seyðisfjörður is Mjóifjörður, flanked by spectacular **cliffs**, and well off the worn tourist circuit. The several abandoned **turf farmsteads** (hard to find), the site of the early-20th-century **Norwegian whaling station** at Asknes and the 19th-century **wooden church** at Brekkuborpi are worth visit-

ing, but the best-known attraction is the ruin of the **Dalatangi light**, Iceland's first lighthouse. The new lighthouse and the nearby vegetable and flower gardens are also of interest.

At Brekkuborpi, **Sólbrekka** (☎ 476 0020; mjoif@simnet.is; sb 1kr1000, cottages per person 1kr2500 to a maximum of 1kr8000; ☞ closed Dec & Jan) is the one and only place to stay around here and it's a welcome sight for hikers. There are two four-person cottages, sleeping-bag accommodation on mattresses in a classroom, and a camp site out the back. There's also a little café open from July to mid-August.

## REYÐARFJÖRÐUR

pop 2120

Reyðarfjörður is currently a place of notoriety: it's the site for the controversial Alcoa aluminium smelter. This enormous industrial building is 2km long from end to end and completely dominates the end of the east coast's largest fjord. At the time of writing it wasn't operational – but it will be by 2007. It's already had an unbalancing effect on the town, whose population shot up from 700 people in early 2005 to over 2000 people at the end of 2006.

Reyðarfjörður was never the prettiest of the fjord towns – it's a relatively new settlement, which only came into existence (as a trading port) in the 20th century. The main reason to stop is for its interesting museum. Get here on sealed Rte 92 from Egilsstaðir (34km).

## Sights & Activities

During WWII around 3000 Allied soldiers – about 10 times the local population – were based in Reyðarfjörður. At the end of Heiðarvegur you'll find the **Iceland Wartime Museum** (☎ 470 9063; [www.fjardabyggd.is](http://www.fjardabyggd.is); Spítalaskampur; adult/under 15yr 1kr400/free; ☞ 1-6pm Jun-Aug), which records this strange occupation. The building is surrounded by mines, Jeeps and aeroplane propellers, and holds other war relics. Photographs and tableaux provide a good background to Iceland's wartime involvement. The museum is tucked behind a rusting set of army barracks, built as part of a hospital camp in 1943 but never used for that purpose.

Above the fjord, 2km east of Reyðarfjörður, there is a **view disc** that is accompanied by a commanding vista. Those travellers who are very energetic can make the 985m climb up **Hólmatindur**, which rises east of the village and separates it from Eskifjörður.

## Sleeping & Eating

Campers can head to the free camp site on the main road into town. The adjoining pond is popular with salmon anglers; permits cost 1kr500 per fish and are available from the Veidflugan sports shop in the Molinn shopping centre.

The only hotel in Reyðarfjörður, **Hótel Reyðarfjörður** (☎ 474 1600; fax 474 1601; Búðareyri 6; s/d 1kr12,100/15,900; ☎) is open year-round. It's a comfortable enough place with spacious rooms (some with facilities for the disabled) and a restaurant.

There are burgers, pizzas and snacks at the Shell or Olís petrol stations, and there's a **Krónan supermarket** (☞ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) inside the Molinn shopping centre.

## Getting There & Away

For bus information, see p253.

## ESKIFJÖRÐUR

pop 1010

This friendly little town is stretched out along a dimple in the main fjord Reyðarfjörður. Its setting is superb: it looks directly onto the mighty mountain Hólmatindur (985m), rising sheer from the shining blue water.

The surrounding hills are beautiful places for walking, particularly in autumn when their green sides are splattered with bright fungi and huge bog bilberries. Eskifjörður is one of the least expensive places to fish for salmon in Iceland – it's free on the river Eskifjarðará (although most fish are trout).

Eskifjörður followed the same herring-town/trading-centre route to prosperity as Seyðisfjörður. Fishing is still important, though the nearby aluminium smelter will soon be providing a new source of wealth.

## Information

For tourist information, visit the souvenir shop **Verkstaði Kötú** (☎ 894 9306; Strandgata 29; ☞ 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat), just off the main street. Buy walking maps before you come here from the tourist office at Egilsstaðir (p253). The **Landsbanki Íslands bank** (☎ 410 4166; Strandgata 47) has an ATM.

## Sights & Activities

The **East Iceland Maritime Museum** (Sjómínjasafn Austurlands; ☎ 476 1179, 476 1605; [www.fjardabyggd.is](http://www.fjardabyggd.is); Strandgata 39b; adult/under 16yr 1kr400/free; ☞ 1-5pm Jun-Aug), in the black timber warehouse named

'Gamla Buð', which dates from 1816, illustrates two centuries of the east coast's historic herring and shark fisheries and whaling industry. The museum contains a jumble of fishing boats, nets, tools and other paraphernalia central to Iceland's maritime history. There is also a model of Eskifjörður as it was in the 1920s and a re-creation of a general store.

Take a look inside the freezing plant (almost opposite the museum), whose walls are graced with **murals** by the Spanish-Icelandic artist Baltasar.

The remains of the world's largest Iceland spar quarry, **Helgustaðanáma**, can be found east of Eskifjörður. Iceland spar (*silfurberg* in Icelandic) is a type of calcite crystal that is totally transparent and can split light into two parallel beams. It was a vital component in early microscopes, and quantities of the stuff were exported to some of Europe's top scientists starting from the 17th century through until 1924, which is when the quarry closed. The largest specimen taken from Helgustaðir weighed 230kg and is displayed in the British Museum. Science aside, you can still see calcite sparkling in rocks around the quarry – very pretty. The area is a national preserve, though, so you can't poke out pieces of crystal or take them away. Follow the rough dirt road 9km along the coastline until you get to an information panel; the quarry is then a 500m walk uphill.

## HIKING

The southern shore of the **Hólmanes peninsula**, below the peak Hólmatindur, is a nature reserve. Hiking in the area offers superb maritime views – look out for pods of dolphins – and the chance to observe the protected vegetation and bird life.

There are also plenty of longer hiking routes: Oddskarð, Helgustaðarsveit, Hellsfjörður, Vindháls and the mountain areas around the end of the peninsula, where you may even see reindeer. The main routes are marked on the map *Gönguleiðir á Austurlandi II* (1kr750; available from Egilsstaðir tourist office).

Although it's a beautiful mountain, Hólmatindur, looming over the southwest of the fjord, also cuts out all sunlight to the village from September to April. Four rivers topple down its steep slopes, posing landslide threats.

**SKIING**

From January through until May, skiing is possible on slopes near Oddsskarð, which is the pass leading over to Neskaupstaður (5pm to 9pm weekdays, 10am to 5pm weekends). The longest run is 327m and is floodlit. There's also a basic ski hut, **Skíðaskáli** (☎ 476 1465; skidam@itn.is), where you can buy ski passes (1kr1000/500 per day for adults/children under 16) and hire equipment (1kr1000/800 adult/child per day).

**Sleeping & Eating**

The free camp site is at the western end of town.

**Ferðabjónustan Mjóeyri** (☎ 477 1247; www.mjoeiri.is; Strandgata 120; sb/s/d 1kr2400/4000/7000) Right at the eastern edge of town, this cosy 111-year-old wooden house has unparalleled fjord views. Sleeping-bag space is in a spick-and-span nine-person dorm with its own kitchen; the five bright guesthouse rooms all have patchwork bedspreads, TV and CD radio; or there are brand-new cabins, sleeping up to six people. Breakfast (1kr900) and dinner (1kr1500) can be requested; or you can hire a boat, catch your own fish, and then barbecue it in the sheltered back yard!

That's all the accommodation in town; eating options are limited, too. On Strandgata, there's a pizza place, **Valhöll** (☎ 540 0400), near the bank; a Shell petrol station with a grill and snack bar; and a **Samkaup-Strax supermarket** (☎ 476 1580).

**Getting There & Away**

For bus information, see p252.

**NESKAUPSTAÐUR (NORÐFJÖRÐUR)**

pop 1410

Just getting to Neskaupstaður feels like a real odyssey. You travel via the highest highway pass (632m) in Iceland, through an alarming single-lane 630m-long tunnel, then drop from the skies like a falcon into town; attempt to drive further east, and you simply run out of road. Although it's one of the largest of the fjord towns, this dramatic end-of-the-line location makes it feel very small and far away from the rest of the world.

Splendid isolation and beautiful scenery are the main reasons to visit. There are also a few museums, a small nature reserve and a fascinating working harbour that teems with life when the boats come in.

As with most towns in the Eastfjords, Neskaupstaður began life as a 19th-century trading centre and prospered during the herring boom in the early 20th century. Its future was assured by the building of the biggest fish-processing and freezing plant in Iceland, Sildarvinnslan (SNV), at the head of the fjord. Backed by ridiculously steep slopes, Neskaupstaður is prone to avalanches: in 1974 a large one tumbled down and killed 12 residents.

**Information**

There's a stand of tourist brochures at Verslun Nesbær (see opposite). There's internet access at the **library** (☎ 477 1521; Skólavegur 9), based inside the distinctive blocky blue school. Opening hours are variable, but it usually only opens on weekdays in the afternoons.

**Sights & Activities**  
**MUSEUMS**

Neskaupstaður has three small **museums** (per museum adult/under 16yr 1kr400/free; ☎ 1-5pm Jun-Aug), all clustered in a warehouse by the harbour at Egilsbraut 2. Perhaps most interesting is the art gallery **Tryggvasafn** (☎ 470 9063), showcasing a collection of paintings by prominent modern artist Tryggvi Ólafsson (1940–), who was born in Neskaupstaður. His colourful abstracts, some of which hang in national galleries in Reykjavík, Sweden and Denmark, depict Icelandic scenes and are visually quite striking.

The **natural history museum** (Náttúrugripasafnið í Neskaupstaði; ☎ 477 1454) has a big collection of local stones (including zeolites, spar from the Helgustaðir mine and crystal quartz), plus an array of stuffed animals, birds, fish and pinned insects; and the **Jósafat Hinriksson museum** (☎ 470 9063), one man's collection of artefacts relating to the sea.

**WALKING & HIKING**

At the eastern end of town where the road runs out is the **nature reserve** Folksvangur Neskaupstaðar – perfect for short strolls. Various paths

**FJARÐABYGGÐ**

If you're trying find the town of Fjarðabyggð on your map, it could take a while. This is the joint name given to the three fjord towns Reyðarfjörður, Eskifjörður and Neskaupstaður, all part of the same administrative district.

run through long grass, over tiny wooden bridges, and past boulders, peat pits, cliffs and the rushing sea. There are plenty of puffins to watch, as well as gulls and ravens.

For serious hikers, a rewarding route will take you up **Goðaborg** (1132m) from the farm Kirkjuból, 8km west of town. From the summit you can also descend into Mjóifjörður, the next fjord to the north; allow two days and, due to late snows at higher altitudes, attempt it only at the height of summer.

A more difficult walk is from **Oddsskarð** along the ridges eastward to the deserted fjords Hellisfjörður and Viðfjörður. The dramatic Gerpír cliffs, Iceland's easternmost point, can be reached with difficulty, but the only way to visit this beautiful place is on foot. For route finding, use the Landmælingar Íslands *Gerpír* 1:100,000 (1986) topo sheet or the map *Gönguleiðir á Austurlandi II*.

**BOAT TRIPS**

Between mid-June and mid-August the company **Fjarðaferðir** (☎ 477 1710; aust@austfjardaleid.is) runs a two-hour **boat trip** (per person 1kr3900; ☎ 11am) from the harbour opposite Egilsbúð. It sails into Hellisfjörður, hugging the coastline to give passengers the best views of caves and nesting sea birds.

**KAYAKING**

There's no better way to explore the fjords than in a kayak. **Kayakklúbburinn Kaj** (☎ 863 9939; www.123.is/kaj) offers guided two-hour trips (1kr3500 per person) around Norðfjörður, exploring sea caves and resident bird life. Trips are on request; in midsummer, midnight kayaking is possible.

**Sleeping**

**Camp site** (☎ 470 9000) This excellent free site, with laundry and hot showers, is at the end of the main road on the eastern edge of town, 2km from the harbour.

**Guesthouse** (☎ 477 1580; www.tonspil.is; sb 1kr1800, made-up bed 1kr3800) Like an extra in the film *High Fidelity*, you need to ask the dude in the music shop Tónlistaverslun Austurlands about the rooms above! Which are very, very simple (cork floor, white ply wardrobe, bed); but there's a TV room-kitchen area with microwave and hotplates, and it's pretty peaceful.

**Hotel Edda Nes** (☎ 444 4000; Nesgata 40; s/d 1kr9000/11,300; ☎ 9 Jun-19 Aug) On the waterfront at the eastern end of town, the Nes summer hotel

has a nice restaurant, but there's no sleeping-bag accommodation and the overpriced rooms (all with bathroom) are predictably staid.

**Hótel Capitanó** (☎ 477 1800; island@islandia.is; Hafnarbraut 50; sb/s/d summer 1kr3000/7900/11,900, winter 1kr2500/6600/8900) This is a real bargain. The bright-blue corrugated iron building doesn't look like much, but all rooms have attached bathrooms and some of the doubles are spacious and well appointed. Modern art by celebrated local artist Tryggvi Ólafsson adorns the walls.

**Eating**

**Bakarí Neskaupstaður** (☎ 477 1306; Hafnarbraut 2; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri) For breakfast, cakes or pastries, the local bakery is the place. There are a few tables and chairs inside.

**Verslun Nesbær** (☎ 477 1115; Egilsbraut; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat) This café-bakery-knack-knack shop is a great spot for fancier lattes, cake, sandwiches and soup.

**Hótel Capitanó** (☎ 477 1800; Hafnarbraut 50; mains 1kr1700-2900; ☎ noon-2pm & 5-9pm Thu-Sun) Four days per week the hotel serves genuine Thai food in its pleasant, informal restaurant. It makes a change from ubiquitous pizza places, and there's also an inviting small bar and lounge.

**Egilsbúð/Pizza 67** (☎ 477 1321; www.egilsbud.is; Hafnarbraut; mains 1kr1800-2300; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat) This place doubles as the town bar, with two pool tables downstairs and a large-screen TV on the balcony. There's a spacious restaurant area upstairs. It has a slight community-centre feel, but there's a light menu of meat and fish dishes, pizzas, pitta sandwiches and burgers, and live music at weekends.

For fast-food grills and hot dogs, there's the **Ólis petrol station** (☎ 477 1476; Hafnarbraut). The **Samkaup-Úrvall supermarket** (☎ 477 1301; Hafnarbraut 13; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sat & Sun) opens daily.

**Getting There & Away**

For bus information, see p252.

**FÁSKRÚÐSFJÖRÐUR**

pop 620

The village of Fáskrúðsfjörður, sometimes known as Búðir, was originally settled by French seamen who came to fish the Icelandic coast between the late 1800s and 1914. In a gesture to the French heritage, street signs are in both Icelandic and French.

The population was steadily declining, but the village is near enough for people to commute to the aluminium smelter through the huge new road tunnel nearby. Although more people are moving here, it's still something of an unappealing ghost town with little on offer for visitors.

### Sights & Activities

The full story about the French seamen in Fáskrúðsfjörður can be found at **Fransmenn á Íslandi** (☎ 475 1525; www.fransmenn.net; Búdavegur 8; admission Ikr400; ☎ 10am-5pm Jun-Aug), in the blue building on the main road near the harbour. The museum features pictures and historical displays.

Down on the shore on the western approach to the village is a small **cemetery** and **monument** commemorating the French seamen who died here.

At the mouth of the fjord, the island **Skrúður** contains lots of bird life, as well as the world's biggest 'puffin cave', formerly believed to have been a giant's cave. Another little islet, **Andey** (Duck Island), has a large colony of eider ducks.

If Fáskrúðsfjörður leaves you less than overwhelmed, **Hótel Bjarg** (see below) may be able to offer an injection of excitement with **Jet Ski hire** and **quad-bike trips**.

For **hiking**, head up to Dalir, above the head of the fjord, where you can walk the old route up over Stuðlaheiði to Reyðarfjörður.

Geologists may get a buzz from the laccolithic mountain **Sandfell** (743m), above the southern shore of Fáskrúðsfjörður, formed by molten rhyolite bursting through older lava layers. It's one of the world's finest examples of this sort of igneous intrusion (although Rio's Sugar Loaf Mountain is perhaps a mite more impressive). It's a two- to three-hour walk to the top.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Camp site** (☎ 475 0550) This free site is on the slope just west of the village.

**Hótel Bjarg** (☎ 475 1466; hotelbjarg@simnet.is; Skólavegur 49; sb Ikr5000, d Ikr9000-12,000; ☎ check with hotel) New owners with big plans have bought this place, in the upper part of the village overlooking the fjord. It will be completely renovated in 2007 to become a 'health hotel', with natural stone floors, cool cream décor, adjustable orthopaedic beds, and a spa. Unusually, a stream runs through the basement of the

building (just look out of the window in the reception area), the vibrations of which are said to promote a great night's sleep! There are plans to run boat/fishing trips and quad-bike excursions into the highlands, and possibly hire out Jet Skis. The restaurant here is your best chance of a decent sit-down meal, with a menu focused on fresh, local Icelandic meat and fish dishes, with plenty of healthy vegetarian options, too.

**Café Sumarlína** (☎ 475 1575; www.123.is/sumarlina; ☎ 11am-11pm Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat) This brand-new café-bar down by the fjord is a great little place, in a creaking old wooden house decorated with odd ornaments. It mainly serves coffee, cakes and crêpes, with extra dishes on festive occasion.

For hamburgers and hot dogs, there's a grill at the Esso petrol station.

### Getting There & Away

For bus information, see p253.

### STÖÐVARFJÖRÐUR

pop 240

This tiny fishing village (sometimes called Kirkjuból) is a pretty somnolent little place. However, Petra's eye-popping rock collection makes it an unmissable stop!

### Sights & Activities

Even if geology usually makes you pass out from boredom, don't miss **Steinasafn Petru** (☎ 475 8834; Fjarðarbraut 21; adult/under 14yr Ikr400/free; ☎ 9am-6pm May-Sep, phone first rest of year). This exceptional collection is octogenarian Petra Sveinsdóttir's lifelong labour of love. Inside the house, stones and minerals are piled from floor to ceiling – 70% of them are from the local area. They include unbelievably beautiful cubes of jasper, polished agate, purple amethyst, glowing-cream 'ghost stone', glittering quartz crystals... it's like a treasure chest. The garden is a wonderfully peaceful place, awash with more rocks, garden gnomes, and beach-combed flotsam and jetsam. Some of the rocks are for sale, either in raw form, polished up or mounted onto ornaments – it's hard to resist buying a memento! Petra is now in a nursing home, but she sometimes comes back to visit, and her children and grandchildren are keeping her collection going.

The owners of Kirkjubær (see opposite) organise **boat/fishing trips** from the harbour in an old six-tonne fishing boat or a Zodiac.

Hiring the boat costs Ikr5000 for two hours, and you can go at any time of year, although the fishing is best in summer.

### Sleeping & Eating

The free camp site is just east of the village.

**Kirkjubær** (☎ 892 3319, 846 0032; sb Ikr2000) One of the most unusual places to stay in the Eastfjords is this tiny old church on the hill above Fjarðarbraut. The church dates from 1925 but is now in private hands and has been renovated into a cute one-room hostel. The pulpit and altar are still there, and some of the pews are now part of the furniture. There's a full kitchen and bathroom, and the beds (mostly just mattresses) are on the upper mezzanine level. It supposedly sleeps 10, but that would be pretty cosy! The owners live in the yellow house just below the church at Skólubraut 1.

**Brekkan** (☎ 475 8939; cnr Fjarðarbraut & Bankastræti; snacks Ikr400-800; ☎ 11am-7pm Sun-Thu, 10am-10pm Fri & Sat) This bare-bones room, full of fishermen warming themselves up with hot coffee, is the only sit-down place to eat in town. It sells burgers and sandwiches, or there's a grocery area in the back.

### Getting There & Away

For bus information, see p253.

### BREIÐDALSVÍK

pop 160

The fishing village of Breiðdalsvík is beautifully situated at the end of Iceland's broadest valley, Breiðdalur (see right). It's a very quiet place – more a base for walking in the nearby hills and fishing the rivers and lakes than an attraction in itself. The biggest excitement of the year is the **Austfjarðatröllid** strong-man competition in mid-August.

### Sleeping & Eating

The free camp site is behind Hótel Bláfell.

**Café Margret** (☎ 475 6625; s/d Jun-mid-Sep Ikr5900/8900, mid-Sep-May Ikr4900/7500) This beautiful boutique guesthouse is built from Finnish pine. Its four spacious rooms are full of antique German furniture and Persian rugs; breakfast costs Ikr1100 extra. The attached café (open 8am to 11pm June to mid-September, 10am to 8pm mid-September to May) provides a welcome respite from hot dogs and hamburgers. The menu (mains Ikr1400 to Ikr2900) includes German specialities such as pork schnitzel (Ikr1600) and a cold-cut platter (Ikr1950), as

well as open sandwiches and Icelandic meat and fish dishes. The only downside is that the family who runs the place is quite rude. Café Margret is outside Breiðdalsvík, on Rte 96 heading towards Stöðvarfjörður.

**Hótel Bláfell** (☎ 475 6770; blafell@centrum.is; Sólvelli 14; s/d Ikr7900/10,800 Jun-mid-Sep, discounts mid-Sep-May) This cosy timber hotel by the harbour is popular with visiting anglers – there are three excellent salmon rivers in Breiðdalur. The pleasant, woody-smelling rooms contain patchwork-covered beds, TVs, telephones and private bathrooms. The lounge, with open fire and leather couches, is a great place to unwind, and there's a sauna, a solarium and a year-round restaurant. Breakfast costs Ikr950.

### Getting There & Away

The Egilsstaðir-Breiðdalsvík bus runs Monday to Friday only. It leaves Egilsstaðir at 9.20am, stopping at Fáskrúðsfjörður (45 minutes), Stöðvarfjörður (1¼ hours), and Breiðdalsvík (1½ hours). Returning from Breiðdalsvík, it departs at 7.30am (7.20am in winter).

If you're driving, Breiðdalsvík is just off where the Ring Rd joins Rte 96.

### AROUND BREIÐDALSVÍK Breiðdalur & Norðurdalur

As the Ring Rd returns to the coast it passes through the lovely Breiðdalur valley, nestled beneath colourful rhyolite peaks. Near the head of the valley you may see reindeer. At the abandoned farm Jórvík a forestry reserve harbours native birch and aspen.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Hótel Staðarborg** (☎ 475 6760; www.stadarborg.is; sb/s/d/tr Jun-Aug Ikr1700/7500/10,400/13,400) Once a school, this hotel (contact it for winter opening details and prices) has neat, modern rooms with proper shutters to keep out that midnight sun! Breakfast is included with made-up beds, and dinner is available on request. You can hire horses here to explore Breiðdalur, or fish in the neighbouring lake. Staðarborg is 6km west of Breiðdalsvík on the Ring Rd, near the turn-off to Rte 964.

### Berunes & Berufjörður

South of Breiðdalur along the Ring Rd is Berufjörður, a longish, steep-sided fjord flanked by rhyolite peaks. The southwestern shore is dominated by the obtrusive, pyramid-shaped mountain **Búlandstindur**, which rises

1068m above the water. The westernmost ridge is known as Goðaborg or 'God's rock'. When Iceland officially converted to Christianity in 1000, locals supposedly carried their pagan images to the top of this mountain and threw them over the cliff.

Around Berufjörður are several historical walking routes through the steeply rugged terrain. The best-known of these climbs is from Berufjörður, the farm at the head of the fjord, and crosses the 700m Berufjarðarskarð into Breiðdalur.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Eyjófsstaðir** (☎ 478 8137; sites per tent 1kr500, sb 1kr1750) About halfway between Breiðdalsvík and Djúpvogur, this farm is tucked 2km off the Ring Rd in the beautifully secluded Fossá valley. The accommodation building has kitchen facilities, a bathroom, a lounge and basic rooms, and is brightened throughout by the kind of crazy 1970s nail-and-thread pictures and tapestries you sadly don't see any more!

**our pick Berunes HI Hostel** (☎ 478 8988; www.simnet.is/berunes; sites per person 1kr700, sb 1kr1900, s/d 1kr4500/6900, cottages 1kr8000-9500; ☹ May-Oct; 📺) Located on an old farm (built in 1907) with 'a good spirit', this hostel/guesthouse is one of our all-time favourites. There is space for campers; there are delightful little rooms, a kitchen and a lounge with books in the old farmhouse; plus Berunes boasts two self-contained family apartments and a separate cottage. There's also a bright dining room where you can join the owners for breakfast (1kr950), which includes delicious homemade pancakes, and dinner if prebooked (1kr1700 to 1kr1950). Musicians are welcome to play the organ in the neighbouring 19th-century church. The hostel is 25km along the Ring Rd south of Breiðdalsvík.

**Hamrborg** (☎ 476 1348; mains 1kr900-2500; ☹ 10am-10pm Jun-Aug) About 1km past Berunes, this is a unique café-restaurant specialising in local game and small 'gourmet' courses. Special dishes include locally caught fish, puffin, reindeer and wild goose. Many of the dishes are served cold and entrée sized, such as gravad reindeer with blueberry sauce, where the reindeer is marinated in herbs rather than cooked. If your tastes aren't quite so exotic, there are salads, home-baked bread, omelettes, coffee and cakes, and a well-stocked bar. Worth a stop.

## DJÚPVOGUR

pop 360

This friendly little fishing village, at the mouth of Berufjörður, gives summer visitors a flowery welcome. Its neat historic buildings, museum, and small, colourful harbour are worth a look, and it has a couple of nice eating places; but the main reason to visit is to catch the boat to Papey island (opposite).

Djúpvogur is actually the oldest port in the Eastfjords – it's been around since the 16th century, when German merchants brought goods to trade. The last major excitement was in 1627, when pirates from North Africa rowed ashore, plundering the village and nearby farms and carrying away dozens of slaves.

### Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 478 8220; langabud@langabud.is; ☹ 10am-6pm Jun-early Sep) is in the historic rust-coloured building, Langabúð, alongside the harbour. The village also has a bank (there's an ATM in Við Voginn café), a post office and a swimming pool.

### Sights & Activities

Some of the town's lovely wooden **buildings** date from the late 19th century. The oldest building, **Langabúð**, is a harbourside log warehouse dating from 1790, which now houses the tourist office, a coffee shop and an unusual local **museum** (☹ 10am-6pm Jun-early Sep; adult/child 1kr400/200). Downstairs is a collection of works by renowned woodcarver Rikarður Jónsson (1888-1977). They range from lifelike busts of worthy Icelanders to mermaid-decorated mirrors and reliefs depicting saga characters. Rikarður also championed the Icelandic woodcarving typeface, whose letters are possibly descended from runes – look out for this strangely illegible alphabet in his work. Upstairs, in the dusty, tarry-smelling attic, is a collection of local-history artefacts.

Another old harbourside building houses a small **collection** of stones, minerals and stuffed birds. Admission is 1kr300, or you can buy a joint ticket for both museums for 1kr500 (from Langabúð).

The Djúpvogur peninsula is compact and ideal for short hikes from town. A particularly nice walk is to **Álfkirkja** on the rock formation Rakkaberg, north of town. The indoor **swimming pool** (☎ 478 8999; Varða 4; adult/child 1kr300/150; ☹ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat), up behind Hótel Framtíð, is a good place to unwind after hiking.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Camp site** (☎ 478 8887; sites per person 1kr700) Just behind the Við Voginn shop, with showers and cooking facilities, the site is run by Hótel Framtíð, so cough up your pennies at the reception there.

**Hótel Framtíð** (☎ 478 8887; framtid@simnet.is; Vogaland 4; s/d sb 1kr2850/5250, with bathroom 1kr10,500/13,125, without bathroom 1kr6500/8200) This friendly hotel by the harbour is impressive for a village of this size. Although it's been around for a while (the building was brought in pieces from Copenhagen in 1905), a new wing of modern rooms gives it a nice mix of history and freshness.

**Langabúð coffee shop** (☹ 10am-6pm Jun-early Sep) A good option for lunch, this café has a suitably old-world atmosphere, and serves cakes, soup and homemade bread with a view over the harbour. It can get very crowded with coach parties, so order while you have a chance!

**Við Voginn** (☎ 478 8860; Vogaland 2; mains 1kr700-1900; ☹ 9am-11pm) This is a lively meeting place for locals and serves a big range of fast food, such as hamburgers and pizzas, along with fish dishes.

**our pick Hótel Framtíð restaurant** (mains 1kr1700-3500) This wonderfully romantic à la carte restaurant specialises in local fish and has harbour views. Its small but select menu includes a good-value dish of the day (1kr1890, including soup), delicious lobster tails and a veggie option.

On the main road into town is a **Samkaup-Strax supermarket** (Búland 2; ☹ 11am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) with a Vin Búð alcohol shop attached.

## AROUND DJÚPVOGUR

### Papey

The name of the lovely offshore island of Papey (Friars' Island) suggests it was once a hermitage for the Irish monks who may have briefly inhabited Iceland before the arrival of the Norse. It's thought that they fled in the face of Nordic settlement. This small and tranquil island was once a farm, but it's presently inhabited only by seals and nesting sea birds. In early summer the dramatic, 45m-high cliffs are crowded with nests. Other highlights include the **Hellisbjarg lighthouse**, which dates from 1922; Iceland's oldest and smallest **wooden church**, built in 1805; and the remains of an **apartment house** from the early 20th century. There's no formal accommodation on Papey, but camping is allowed by prior arrangement.

Getting to Papey is easy enough in summer. From June to August **Papeyjarferðir** (☎ 478 8119; adult/8-13yr 1kr3500/1750; ☹ Jun-Aug) runs four-hour tours to the island. Weather and numbers permitting, they leave from Djúpvogur harbour at 1pm daily. In fine weather this is a truly magical tour. Make sure you bring good footwear, as a visit will involve some hiking.

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