

Reykjavík



The world's most northerly capital combines colourful buildings, quirky people, a wild night-life and a capricious soul to devastating effect. Most visitors fall helplessly in love, returning home already saving to come back.

The city's charm lies in its many peculiar contrasts, which, like tectonic plates clashing against one another, create an earthquake of energy. Reykjavík offers a bewitching combination of village innocence and big-city zeal. It's populated by darkly cynical citizens who are nevertheless filled with unstoppable creativity and enthusiasm. In summer the streets are washed by 22 hours of daylight; in winter they're scoured by blizzards and doused in never-ending night. Reykjavík is a city that treasures its Viking past but wants the future – the very best of it – NOW!

You'll find all the cultural trappings of a large 21st-century European city here: cosy cafés, world-class restaurants, fine museums and galleries, and state-of-the-art geothermal pools. Reykjavík has also become infamous for its kicking music scene and its excessive Friday-night *runtur*, a wild pub crawl round the small, superstylish clubs and bars.

Add to this a backdrop of snow-topped mountains, an ocean that wets the very toes of the town, air as cold and clean as frozen diamonds, and incredible volcanic surroundings, and you'll agree that there's no better city in the world.

TOP FIVE

- Swig coffee in a quirky **café** (p89), or treat yourself to some top-quality **Icelandic seafood** (p88), in Reykjavík
- Join the **runtur** (p93), a wild pub crawl through Reykjavík's tiny but oh-so-cool bars and clubs
- Enjoy the geothermal pools at **Laugardalslaug** (p71), **Nauthólsvík Beach** (p71) and of course the **Blue Lagoon** (p111)
- Hear spooky stories on a **ghost walk** (p80) round the city's haunted places
- Immerse yourself in Icelandic culture at the **National Museum** (p75), the brand-new exhibition **Reykjavík 871 +\-2** (p75) or the family-friendly **Saga Museum** (p75)



■ POPULATION: 180,000

HISTORY

Ingólfur Arnarson, a Norwegian fugitive, became the first official Icelander in AD 871. Myth has it that he tossed his *öndvegissúlur* (high-seat pillars) overboard, settling where the gods washed them ashore. This was at Reykjavík (Smoky Bay), which he named after steam rising from geothermal vents. According to 12th-century sources, Ingólfur built his farm on Aðalstræti, and excavations have unearthed a Viking longhouse there – see p75.

Reykjavík remained just a simple collection of farm buildings for centuries to follow. In 1225 an important Augustinian monastery was founded on the offshore island of Viðey (p100), although this was destroyed during the 16th century Reformation.

In the early 17th century the Danish king imposed a crippling trade monopoly on Iceland, leaving the country starving and destitute. In a bid to bypass the embargo, local sheriff Skúli Magnússon, the 'Father of Reykjavík', created weaving, tanning and wool-dyeing factories – the foundations of the city – in the 1750s.

Reykjavík really boomed during WWII, when it serviced British and US troops stationed at Keflavík. Since the 1950s Reykjavík has become unstoppable, throwing itself passionately into the 21st century. In a neat bit of historical irony, the Vikings' 'Smoky Bay' is now known as the 'smokeless city' due to its complete adoption of geothermal energy.

ORIENTATION

The city is spread out along a small peninsula, with Reykjavík Domestic Airport and the long-distance bus terminal BSÍ in the southern half, and the picturesque city centre and harbour occupying the northern half. The international airport is 48km away at Keflavík (a special airport bus provides connections to the centre of Reykjavík). The camp site and hostel are around 2km east of the centre, in the Laugadalur valley.

The city centre is very compact, and contains most of Reykjavík's attractions. The main street is Laugavegur. At its very furthest eastern end is Hlemmur bus terminal, one of the two main city bus stations. Moving westwards, this narrow, one-way lane blossoms with Reykjavík's flashiest clothes shops, bars and eateries. It changes its name to Bankastræti, then Austurstræti as it runs across the centre. Running uphill off Banka-

stræti at a jaunty diagonal, the artists' street Skólavörðustígur ends at the spectacular modernist church Hallgrímskirkja.

Two-laned Lækjargata cuts straight across Bankastræti/Austurstræti. To its west are the old town squares Austurvöllur and Ingólfstorg. At the northern end is Lækjartorg bus terminal, the other important city bus stand. To the northwest lies Reykjavík's working harbour. Tjörninn lake is to the south.

Maps

The tourist information centres are on the ball, and will provide you with a free city plan with your route marked on it probably while you're still pondering where you want to go. Most plans contain city bus maps, but you can also pick up the excellent Strætó bus-route map from Lækjartorg and Hlemmur bus stations.

The largest selection of road maps and trekking maps is in the bookshops listed in the following section.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Reykjavík's two big bookshops have a superb choice of English-language books, newspapers, magazines and maps.

Eymundsson (Map p72; ☎ 511 1130; Austurstræti 18; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat, 1-10pm Sun)

Mál og Menning (Map p72; ☎ 515 2500; shopping@edda.is; Laugavegur 18; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun)

Also try:

Bókin ehf (Map p72; ☎ 552 1710; Klapparstígur 25-27; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat) Great second-hand bookshop run by exactly the right kind of eccentric!

Bóksala Stúdent (Map pp68-9; ☎ 570 0777; www.boksala.is; Hringbraut) University bookshop.

Iða (Map p72; ☎ 511 5001; Lækjargata 2a; ☎ 9am-10pm) Tourist shop and bookshop combined.

Cultural Centres

A-Hús Intercultural Centre (Alþjóðahús; Map p72; ☎ 530 9300; www.ahus.is; Hverfisgata 18) Advice bureau for immigrants, with occasional events held downstairs in Café Cultura (see p90).

Alliance Française (Map pp68-9; ☎ 552 3870; www.af.is; 2nd fl, Tryggvagata 8) Book and video library, and regular programme of films, lectures etc.

Norræna Húsið (Nordic House; Map pp68-9; ☎ 551 7030; www.nordice.is; Sturlugata 5; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun) Scandinavian cultural centre.

GAY REYKJAVÍK

Reykjavík is a very tolerant place; its bar and club scene is so integrated that segregated gay bars disappear almost before they've opened.

The gay and lesbian organisation **Samtökin '78** (Map p72; ☎ 552 7878; office@samtokin78.is; 4th fl, Laugavegur 3; ☎ office 1-5pm Mon-Fri) provides information during office hours and doubles as an informal gay community centre with a drop-in **café** (☎ 8pm-11pm Mon & Thu year-round, sometimes also Sat late Jul-Aug). Created especially for gay, lesbian and bisexual visitors to Iceland, www.gayice.is is an English-language website with great information and upcoming events.

The only gay café-bar in Reykjavík is **Café Cozy** (Map p72; ☎ 511 1033; Austurstræti 3; snacks from 1kr300; ☎ 10am-1am Mon-Fri, 8am-5.30am Sat & Sun), near Ingólfstorg. The only specifically gay club in Reykjavík is a men-only leather bar, **MSC Iceland** (Map p72; ☎ 562 1280; Bankastræti 11; ☎ from 11pm Sat).

There are several good gay-friendly guesthouses close to the centre – see Tower Guesthouse (p84) and Room with a View (p84). Reykjavík has a lively Gay Pride celebration – see p81 for more information.

Discount Cards

The **Reykjavík Tourist Card** (24/48/72hr 1kr1200/1700/2200) is available at various outlets including the tourist offices. The card gives you free admission to Reykjavík's swimming pools, galleries and museums (Árbæjarsafn, ASÍ Art Museum, Ásmundarsafn, Culture House, Hafnarhús, Kjarvalsaðaír, National Gallery of Iceland, National Museum, Reykjavík 871 +/-2, Reykjavík Zoo, Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum, and museums in Hafnarfjörður). It's worth it if you make use of the buses and swimming pools but might not be good value if you're just visiting museums and galleries, since many of them are free one day per week anyway.

Emergency

For an ambulance, the fire brigade or the police, dial ☎ 112.

Landspítali University Hospital (Map pp68-9; ☎ 543 2000; Fossvogur) It has a 24-hour casualty department.

Internet Access

The cheapest internet places are Reykjavík's libraries (see right). Many hotels and guesthouses have free internet access; the youth hostel and several private tourist offices have rather overpriced services. If you've brought your laptop with you, many cafés have free wi-fi access where you can tap away for the price of a coffee.

Ground Zero (Map p72; ☎ 562 7776; per 15/35/60min 1kr200/300/500; Vallarstræti 4; 11am-1am Mon-Fri, noon-1am Sat & Sun) Reykjavík's only dedicated internet café, full of game-playing teenagers.

Internet Resources

Some good websites for information on Reykjavík:

Culture in Iceland (www.culture.is) Cultural events in Reykjavík.

Grapevine (www.grapevine.is) English-language newspaper's website, with lively news and reviews.

Reykjavik.com (www.reykjavik.com) Straight-down-the-line English-language magazine website containing current events and reviews.

Visit Reykjavik (www.visitreykjavik.is) Official tourist-office website.

Laundry

Most people rely on their hostel, hotel or guesthouse for laundry.

Úðafoss (Map p72; ☎ 551 2301; Vitastígur 13; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Thu, to 6.30pm Fri) This central dry-cleaner also does laundry (1kr1375/1925 for 1kg/5kg).

Left Luggage

Most hotels have left-luggage facilities, as do the camp site and youth hostel.

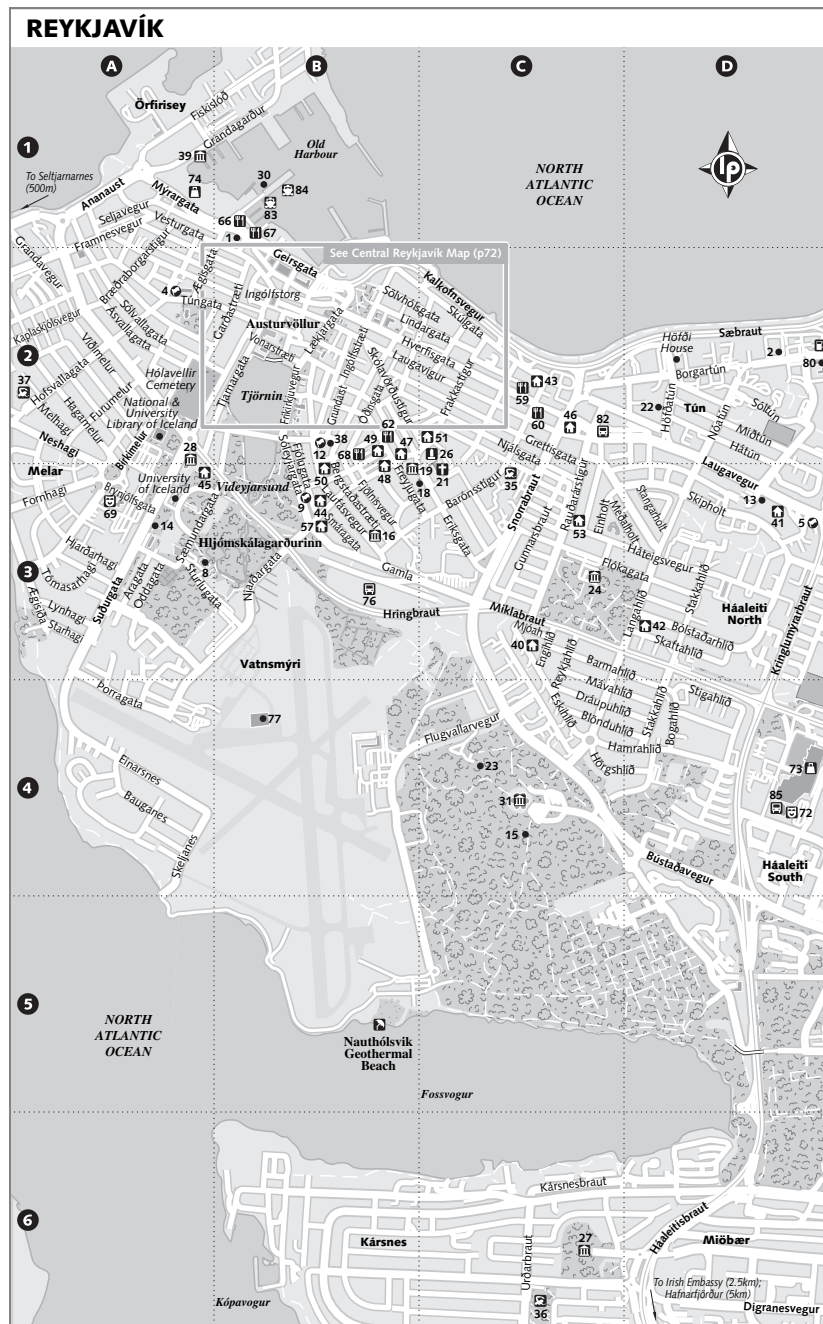
BSÍ bus terminal (Map pp68-9; ☎ 591 1000; Vatnsmýrarvegur 10; ☎ 7.30am-10pm) Luggage storage 1kr150/700 per day/week.

Libraries

The following offer books, novels and periodicals in English, French and other languages, and internet access for 1kr200 per hour.

Aðalbókasafn (Map p72; ☎ 563 1717; www.borgarbokasafn.is; Tryggvagata 15; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon, to 7pm Tue-Thu, 11am-7pm Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun) Excellent main library, in the heart of Reykjavík.

Kringlusafn (Map pp68-9; ☎ 580 6200; www.borgarbokasafn.is; cnr Borgarleikhús & Listabraut;



☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Wed, to 9pm Thu, 11am-7pm Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun) Branch by the Kringlan shopping centre.

Medical Services

For a dentist, call ☎ 575 0505.

Health Centre (Map p72; ☎ 585 2600; Vesturgata 7) A doctor's appointment costs 1kr700 (under 16s pay 25%).

Læknavaktin (☎ 1770) Nonemergency telephone medical advice between 5pm and 11.30pm.

Lyfja (Map p72; ☎ 552 4045; Laugavegur 16; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat) Central pharmacy.

Lyfja Apótek (Map pp68-9; ☎ 533 2300; Lágmúli 5; ☎ 8am-midnight) Late-night pharmacy, near Hótel Nordica. Buses S2, 15, 17 and 19.

Money

Beware of changing currency at hotels or private exchange offices in the city; commissions can reach 8.75% and exchange rates may be poor. There are central branches, with ATMS, of all three major Icelandic banks.

Landsbanki Íslands (Map p72; ☎ 410 4000; www.landsbanki.is; Austurstræti 11)

Giltirnir (Map p72; ☎ 440 4000; www.giltirnir.is; Lækjargata 12)

KB Banki (Map p72; ☎ 525 6000; www.kaupthing.net; Austurstræti 5)

Post

Some Nóatún supermarkets have post-office desks that remain open until 9pm.

Main post office (Map p72; ☎ 580 1000; Pósthússtræti 5; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, plus 11am-2pm Sat Jun-Aug)

With an efficient parcel service, philatelic desk (www.stamps.is), and poste restante service.

Post office branch (Map pp68-9; Grensásvegur 9; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Opens til late.

Telephone

Public phones are becoming elusive in mobile-crazy Reykjavik. Try the tourist office, the post office, by the southwestern corner of Austurvöllur, on Lækjargata, or at Kringlan shopping centre.

At the city hostel you can make cheap international calls using an Atlas telephone card.

Tourist Information

Reykjavik has a very good main tourist office and several smaller private centres. Besides providing information, they can make accommodation, bus-tour and entertainment bookings.

Pick up the free booklets *Reykjavik This Month* and *What's On in Reykjavik* for events

INFORMATION	Leifur Eiríksson Statue.....26 C2	Askur Brasserie.....61 E3
Alliance Francaise.....1 B1	Menningarmiðstöð Köpavogs...27 C6	Bónus Supermarket.....(see 73)
BSÍ Bus Terminal Tourist Desk...(see 76)	National Museum.....28 A2	Café Konditori Copenhagen...(see 61)
Bóksala Stúdenta.....(see 45)	Norræna Húsið (Nordic House).....(see 8)	Eldsmíðjor.....62 B2
Dutch Embassy.....(see 2)	Old Wash House.....29 F3	Fljót og Gott.....(see 76)
Exit: Studentaferðir.....2 D2	Old Whaling Ships.....30 B1	Food Court.....(see 73)
Ferðafélag Íslands.....3 F4	Perlan & Saga Museum.....31 C4	Kornið.....63 E2
Finnish Embassy.....4 A2	Puffin Express Boat Trips.....(see 8)	Lauga-Ás.....64 F2
German Embassy.....(see 12)	Reykjavík Excursions.....(see 76)	Múlakaffi.....65 E3
Iceland Total.....(see 7)	Reykjavík Botanic Gardens.....32 F3	Ning's.....(see 61)
Japanese Embassy.....5 D3	Reykjavík Skating Hall.....33 F3	Perlan.....(see 31)
Kringlusafn.....(see 72)	Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum.....34 E1	Sægreifinn.....66 B1
Landspítali University Hospital.....6 E5	Sundhöllin Swimming Pool.....35 C3	Tveir Fiskar.....67 B1
Lyfja Apótek.....7 E3	Sundlaug Köpavogs.....36 C6	Vox.....(see 52)
Norræna Húsið (Nordic House).....8 A3	Vesturbæjarlaug Swimming Pool.....37 A2	Vin Búð.....(see 73)
Norwegian Embassy.....9 B3	Volcano Show.....38 B2	Þrír Frakkar.....68 B2
Post Office.....10 F4	Vikin Maritime Museum.....39 A1	
Swedish Embassy.....11 E3		ENTERTAINMENT
UK Embassy.....12 B2		Háskólabíó Cinema.....69 A3
Úrval Útsýn.....(see 7)		Iceland Symphony Orchestra...(see 69)
Útivist.....13 D3		Laugarásbíó Cinema.....70 F2
Youth Hostel Travel Service...(see 56)		National Football Stadium.....71 E3
		Reykjavík City Theatre.....72 D4
		Sambíóin Cinema.....(see 73)
	SLEEPING	
	4th Floor Hotel.....(see 46)	SHOPPING
	Alba Guesthouse.....40 C3	Kringlan Shopping Centre.....73 D4
	Bolholt Guesthouse.....41 D3	Liborius.....74 A1
	Central Guesthouse.....42 D3	Skáfan.....(see 73)
	Fosshótel Barón.....43 C2	Útílf.....(see 73)
	Galtafell Guesthouse.....44 B3	Útílf.....75 F4
	Garður Inn.....45 A3	
	Gistiheimilið 101.....46 C2	TRANSPORT
	Gistiheimilið Sunna.....47 B2	BSÍ Bus Terminal.....76 B3
	Guesthouse Andrea.....48 B2	Domestic Airport.....77 B4
	Guesthouse Aurora.....49 B2	Ferðþjónusta Bænda (Icelandic Farm Holidays).....78 E3
	Guesthouse Baldursbrá.....50 B3	Grensás Bus Stand.....79 F4
	Hótel Leifur Eiríksson.....51 C2	Guðmundur Jónasson Travel.....80 D2
	Hótel Nordica.....52 E3	Highlanders.....81 E3
	Hótel Reykjavík.....53 C3	Hlemmur Bus Terminal.....82 C2
	Park Inn Island.....54 E3	Jetty for Puffin Express.....83 B1
	Reykjavík Camp Site.....55 F2	Jetty for Whale Watching.....84 B1
	Reykjavík City Hostel.....56 F2	10-11 Supermarket.....85 D4
	Travel-Inn Guesthouse.....57 B3	Viðey Ferry Dock.....86 F1
	EATING	
	10-11 Supermarket.....58 E2	
	10-11 Supermarket.....59 C2	
	Argentina.....60 C2	

in the capital. The excellent English-language newspaper *Grapevine*, widely distributed, has the lowdown on what's new in town.

Main Tourist Office (Upplýsingamiðstöð Ferðamanna; Map p72; ☎ 590 1550; www.visitreykjavik.is; Aðalstræti 2; ☎ 8.30am-7pm daily Jun-Aug, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun Sep-May) Staff are friendly, and there are mountains of free brochures and leaflets, plus some maps for sale. Internet access costs 1kr350/500 per 30/60 minutes.

BSÍ bus terminal desk (Map pp68-9; Vatnsmyrarvegur 10) Information leaflets.

Raðhús Tourist Information Desk (Map p72; ☎ 411 1000; Tjarnargata 11; ☎ 8.20am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun mid-May-mid-Sep, closed Sun mid-Sep-mid-May) Small tourist desk inside the city hall.

Iceland Visitor (Map p72; ☎ 511 2442; www.icelandvisitor.com; Lækjargata 2; ☎ 9am-10pm Jun-Aug, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-May) Private office.

Kleif Travel Market (Map p72; ☎ 510 5700; www.kleif.is; Bankastræti 2; ☎ 8am-10pm May-Aug, 9am-6pm Sep-Apr) Private office.

Travel Agencies

Numerous travel agents and tour companies in Reykjavík specialise in trips around Iceland by bus or plane. A few agents can also arrange international travel. Also see p333.

Exit: Stúdentaféðir (Map pp68-9; ☎ 562 2362; www.exit.is; Borgartún 29) Student travel agency specialising in international travel.

Ferðþjónusta Bænda (Icelandic Farm Holidays; Map pp68-9; ☎ 570 2700; www.farmholidays.is) Arranges farm holidays and self-drive tours around Iceland.

IcelandTotal (Map pp68-9; ☎ 585 4300; www.icelandtotal.com; Lágmúli 4) Can organise coach tours, car hire and complete holiday packages.

Norræna Ferðaskrifstofan (☎ 570 8600; info@smryll-line.is; Stangarhlý 1) The local agent for Smryll Line, which runs ferries to the Faeroes, Norway and Denmark, and Scotland (the latter in summer only).

Úrval Útsýn (Map pp68-9; ☎ 585 4000; www.urvalut.syn.is; Lágmúli 4) Mainstream travel agency specialising in international travel.

Útivist (Map pp68-9; ☎ 562 1000; www.utivist.is; Laugavegur 178) Owns several mountain huts, including some at Þórsörk and Landmannalaugar, and runs guided treks.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

If you find a safer city, let us know! Accidental injury at the hands of drunken revellers is a possibility, although considering how many beers are sunk at the weekend, it's surprising there isn't more trouble.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Hallgrímskirkja

Reykjavík's most attention-seeking building is the immense concrete church **Hallgrímskirkja** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 510 1000; www.hallgrímskirkja.is; Skólavörðuholt; ☎ 9am-5pm), star of a thousand postcards and visible from 20km away. For an unmissable view of the city, make sure you take an elevator trip up the 75m-high **tower** (adult/child 1kr350/50).

In contrast to the high drama outside, the church's interior is puritanically plain. The most startling feature is the vast 5275-pipe **organ**, which has a strangely weapon-like appearance. Between mid-June and mid-August you can hear this mighty beast in action three times per week at lunchtime/evening **concerts** (admission 1kr1000/1500).

The church's radical design caused huge controversy, and its architect, Guðjón Samúelsson, never lived to see its completion – it took a painstaking 34 years (1940-74) to build. Those sweeping columns on either side of the tower represent volcanic basalt – a favourite motif of Icelandic nationalists. Hallgrímskirkja was named after the poet Reverend Hallgrímur Pétursson, who wrote Iceland's most popular hymn book.

Gazing proudly into the distance outside is a **statue** of the Viking Leifur Eiríksson, the first European to stumble across America. It was a present from the USA on the 1000th anniversary of the Alþing (p78).

Geothermal Pools & Spas

Reykjavík's heavenly pools (and beach) are the heart of the city's social life: children play,

teenagers flirt, business deals are made, and everyone catches up on the latest gossip. Volcanic water keeps the temperature at a mellow 29°C, and most of the baths have *heittir pottar* (hot pots), Jacuzzi-like pools kept at a toasting 37°C to 42°C. Admission usually costs 1kr280/120 for adults/children aged 6 to 15, and towels and swimming costumes can be rented for 1kr300 each. For further information, see www.spacity.is.

Reykjavíkurs get very upset by dirty tourists in their nice, clean pools (for good reason – the city's pools are free of chemicals). To avoid causing huge offence, visitors *must* wash thoroughly without a swimsuit before hopping in.

The dinky **Nauthólsvík Geothermal Beach** (Ylströndin; Map pp68-9; ☎ 511 6630; ☎ 10am-8pm mid-May-mid-Sep) on the edge of the Atlantic should be visited only by seals and seagulls. However, it's packed with happy bathers in summer, thanks to golden sand imported all the way from Morocco and an artificial hot spring that keeps the water at a pleasant 18°C to 20°C. There are sociable hot pots on shore and in the sea, a snack bar, changing rooms (1kr200), and canoes and rowing boats for hire on Thursday. Get there on bus 16.

Laugardalslaug (Map pp68-9; ☎ 553 4039; Sundlaugavegur 30a; ☎ 6.30am-10.30pm Mon-Fri year-round, plus 8am-10pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) is the largest pool in Iceland, with the best facilities: an Olympic-size indoor pool, an outdoor pool, four hot pots and a whirlpool, a steam bath, and a curling 86m water slide. Take bus 14.

The new five-star **Laugar spa** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 553 0000; www.laugarspa.is; spa admission 1kr3600; ☎ spa 6.30am-10.30pm Mon-Fri year-round, plus 8am-10pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar, beauty salon 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat, massage salon 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat) is attached to Laugardalslaug (see above), and offers delicious ways to pamper yourself. There are six themed saunas and steam rooms, a vast and well-equipped gym, and beauty and massage clinics with soothing treatments (detox wraps, facials and hot-stone therapies).

It's a step out of town, but the slickly designed **Árbæjarlaug** (☎ 567 3933; Fyllkisvegur, Elliðaárdalur; ☎ 6.30am-10pm Mon-Fri year-round, plus 8am-10pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar; ☎) is well known as the best family pool: it's half inside and half outside, and there are lots of watery amusements (slides, waterfalls and massage jets) to keep the kids entertained. Take bus 19.



INFORMATION

A-Hús Intercultural Centre.....(see 63)
 Aðalbóksafn.....1 B1
 Bókin ehf Bookshop.....2 E3
 Canadian Embassy.....3 A2
 Danish Embassy.....4 E3
 Eymundsson Bookshop.....5 C2
 French Embassy.....6 A2
 Giltir.....7 B3
 Ground Zero.....8 B2
 Health Centre.....9 A1
 Iceland Visitor.....10 C2
 Icelandic Tourist Board.....(see 10)
 Iða Bookshop.....(see 10)
 KB Banki.....(see 116)
 Kleif Travel Market.....11 C2
 Landsbanki Íslands.....12 B2
 Lyfja.....13 D3
 Main Post Office.....14 C2
 Mal og Menning Bookshop.....15 D3
 Ráðhús Tourist Information Desk.....(see 29)
 Samtökin '78.....16 D3
 Tourist Office (Upplýsingamiðstöð Ferðamanna).....17 B1
 US Embassy.....18 C4
 Úðafoss Laundrette.....19 F4

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A-Hús.....(see 63)
 Alþingi (Parliament).....20 B2
 Culture House (Þjóðmenningarhúsið).....21 D2
 Domkirkja.....22 B3
 Frikirkjan í Reykjavík.....23 B4
 Fálkahús.....(see 66)
 Hafnarhúsið (Reykjavík Art Museum).....24 B1
 ið.....25 E3
 Kling & Bang.....26 E3
 National Gallery of Iceland (Listasafn Íslands).....27 B4
 Nýlistasafnið.....28 E3
 Original Haunted Walk of Reykjavík.....(see 17)
 Raðhús (City Hall).....29 B3
 Reykjavík 871 +/-.....30 B2
 Reykjavík Museum of Photography.....(see 1)
 SAFN Gallery.....31 E3
 Stjómarráðið.....32 C2
 Sun-Craft.....33 F2

SLEEPING

101 Hotel.....34 D2
 Álfrhöf Guesthouse.....35 A1
 CenterHotel Klöpp.....36 E3
 CenterHótel Skjaldbreið.....37 D3
 Domus Guesthouse.....38 E3
 Forsæla Guesthouse.....39 F4
 Gistiheimilið Ísafold.....40 A1
 Gistiúsið Hvíti Svanrinn.....41 E3
 Guesthouse Butterfly.....(see 35)

Guesthouse Oðinn.....42 D4
 Hótel Borg.....43 B2
 Hótel Frón.....44 E3
 Hótel Plaza.....45 B2
 Hótel Reykjavík Centrum.....46 B2
 Hótel Öðinsvé.....47 D4
 Litli Ljóti Andarunginn.....48 C3
 Metropolitan Hotel.....49 A1
 Radisson SAS 1919 Hotel.....50 C2
 Room With a View.....(see 15)
 Salvation Army Guesthouse.....51 B2
 Three Sisters.....52 A1
 Tower Guesthouse.....53 E4

EATING

10-11 Supermarket.....54 C2
 Á Næstu Grösum (First Vegetarian).....55 E3
 Apótek.....56 C2
 Austur India Félagið.....57 E3
 b5.....58 C2
 Babalú.....59 D4
 Bakari Sandholt.....60 E4
 Bæjarins Beztu.....61 B1
 Café Cosy.....62 B2
 Café Cultura.....63 D2
 Café Garðurinn.....64 D4
 Café Paris.....65 B2
 Café Victor.....66 B1
 Café Ópera.....(see 10)
 Einar Ben.....67 B2
 Emmessis og Pylsur.....68 B2
 Enrico's.....69 D3
 Grái Kötturinn.....70 D2
 Grænn Kostur.....71 D3
 Hereford Steakhouse.....72 F4
 Hlöllá Bátar.....73 B2
 Hornið.....74 C2
 Humarhúsið.....75 C2
 Indian Mango.....76 E4
 Kaffi Hjómalið.....77 E3
 Kaffi Mokka.....78 D3
 Kaffi Sólón.....79 D2
 Kaffitár.....80 D3
 Kebabhúsið.....81 C2
 Kofi Tómasar Frænda.....82 D3
 Kornid.....83 C2
 Krua Thai.....84 A1
 La Primavera.....(see 116)
 Litli Ljóti Andarunginn.....(see 48)
 Lækjarbrekka.....85 C2
 Maru.....86 B2
 Nonnabiti.....87 B2
 Nuðluhúsið.....88 F4
 Ömmu Kaffi.....89 C2
 Ristorante Italia.....90 D3
 Siggihall.....(see 47)
 Sjávarjarkallarinn.....(see 17)
 Skólábrú.....91 B3
 Svarta Kaffið.....92 F4
 Tapas Barinn.....93 B1
 Té og Kaffi.....94 E3
 Vegamót.....95 D3

Við Tjörna.....96 B3
 Vin Büð.....97 B2
 Vin og Skel.....(see 72)

DRINKING

101 Hotel Bar.....(see 34)
 Bar 11.....98 D3
 Barinn.....99 E3
 Café Oliver.....100 D3
 Celtic Cross.....101 D3
 Dillon.....102 E3
 Dubliner.....103 B2
 Glaubar.....104 B1
 Grand Rökk.....105 D3
 Hressingarskálinn.....(see 113)
 Hverfisbarinn.....106 D3
 Kaffi Brennslan.....107 B2
 Kaffi Reykjavík.....108 B1
 Kaffi Sólón.....(see 79)
 Kaffibarinn.....109 D3
 NASA.....110 B2
 Nelly's.....111 C2
 Ólstofan.....112 D3
 Pravda.....113 C2
 Prikið.....114 D3
 Q Bar.....115 D3
 Rex.....116 B2
 Salt Lounge Bar.....(see 50)
 Sirkus.....117 E3
 Thorvaldsen Bar.....118 B2
 Vegamót.....(see 95)

ENTERTAINMENT

Café Amsterdam.....119 B2
 Íslenska Óperan.....120 D2
 Iðnó Theatre.....121 B3
 MSC Iceland.....122 D3
 NASA.....(see 110)
 National Theatre.....123 D2
 Regnboginn Cinema.....124 E3

SHOPPING

125 Tónar.....125 D4
 66° North.....126 C2
 Aurum.....127 C2
 ELM.....128 D3
 Friða Frænka.....(see 93)
 Guðbrandur Jósef Jezorski.....129 E3
 Handknitting Association of Iceland.....130 F4
 Handknitting Association of Iceland.....131 D4
 Kirsuberjatréd.....132 B1
 Kolaportið Flea Market.....133 B1
 Naked Ape.....134 D3
 Nornabuðin.....135 A1
 Rammagerðin.....(see 87)
 Smekkleysa Plötubúð.....(see 2)

TRANSPORT

Borgarhjól SF.....136 E3
 Lækjartorg Bus Terminal.....137 C2
 Taxi Rank.....138 C2

Other central pools include the following two:

Sundhöllin (Map pp68-9; ☎ 551 4059; Barónsstígur 16; ☎ 6.30am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm Sat & Sun)

Reykjavík's oldest swimming pool (with a definite 'municipal baths' feel to it) is close to the Hlemmur

bus station and is the only indoor pool within the city.

Vesturbæjarlaug (Map pp68-9; ☎ 551 5004; Hofsvallagata; ☎ 6.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun)

Also within walking distance of the centre (or take bus 15), Vesturbæjarlaug has a basic 25m pool and three hot pots.

REYKJAVÍK IN...TWO DAYS

Day One

Early risers should visit the bustling **working harbour** to watch the fishing boats come in. It's backed by stunning views of the peak **Esja**, across the fjord in southwest Iceland. Afterwards, head for breakfast at **Grái Kötturinn** (p91), a tiny eccentric café serving bacon, eggs and hunks of fresh bread.

Next meander up arty **Skólavörðustígur**, poking your nose into its crafty little galleries. At the top of the hill is the immense concrete church **Hallgrímskirkja** (p71), Reykjavík's most dramatic building. For a perfect view of the city, take an elevator trip up the tower.

Once you've plumped back down to earth, pop across the road to the **Einar Jónsson Museum** (p76). You'll get a free glimpse of this gloomy sculptor's weird works in the garden round the back; if you like what you see, there are plenty more fantastical sculptures inside.

For further research into the Icelandic mind, head to the **National Gallery of Iceland** (p77). Here, paintings by the country's most treasured artists include hallucinogenic landscapes and eerie depictions of folk-tale monsters.

Pop into cosy **Café Paris** (p90) for a light lunch – it's a prime people-watching spot. Then, if you're here at the weekend, make **Kolaportið** (p79) your next stop – rummaging through foreign flea markets is always enlightening! You can also buy cubes of infamous *hákarl* (rotten shark meat) from the fish market – it might look innocuous, but find a quiet bin to stand by...

Next, catch bus 18 from Lækjartorg bus station to **Perlan** (opposite). There are two excitements here: first is the superb **Saga Museum**, which brings Iceland's early history to life with fantastically realistic models and a soundtrack of horrible screams – we think the Vikings would approve. Second is the hexagonal **viewing deck and café**, where you'll get tremendous views.

If you're cunning, last week you'll have booked a table at **Sjávarkjallarinn** (p89), a town-centre restaurant currently far ahead of the game. Once the bill's been settled, head back to your hotel for a kip and a brush-up: you're going to need some energy to get you through the **runtur** (p93), Reykjavík's notorious Bacchanalian pub crawl, which starts around midnight and carries on till 5am. Rather than cosying down in one venue, it's the done thing to cruise from bar to bar. To get you started, our top tips are: **Sirkus** (p92), **Kaffibarinn** (p92), **Kaffi Sólon** (p91) and **Thorvaldsen** (p92).

Day Two

After the night you've just had, start the recovery slowly with brunch at **Café Oliver** (p92).

At 12.30pm we recommend taking the 'express' version of the **Golden Circle tour**. OK, so it's a bit of a rush – maybe next time you'll book more than two days in lovely Iceland! At least you get to see some of the Icelandic countryside and marvel over two of its natural wonders – the tumbling waterfall **Gullfoss** (p120) and the spouting hot springs at **Geysir** (p120).

Tired but happy, you'll get back to Reykjavík in the early evening just in time for tea. For a dash of spice, why not try an Indian meal made with Icelandic ingredients? Go for succulent tandoori salmon at **Austur India Félagið** (p87), or try the unique guillemot dish at **Indian Mango** (p87). Round off the evening at the **Volcano Show** (opposite), an explosive introduction to Iceland's violent geography.

'What about the **Blue Lagoon** (p111)?' we hear you ask. Well, here's the clever part – you can visit Iceland's number one attraction on your way back to the airport tomorrow. Wallowing in its warm, sapphire-blue waters is certainly a fantastic last memory to take home.

Whale Watching

Iceland is a fantastic place for whale watching – its waters hold over 20 species of cetacean. In Faxaflói bay you'll most commonly come across white-beaked dolphins, harbour porpoises and minke; humpbacks were also spotted from time to time in 2006.

Between April and October two companies run three-hour trips from Reykjavík's old harbour, at 9am and 1pm (1pm only in October; also at 5pm June to August): **Elding** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 555 3565; www.elding.is; adult/6-15yr lkr3900/1600; ☎) and **Hvalstöðin Whale-Watching Centre** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 533 2660; www.whalewatching.is; adult/7-15yr lkr3800/1500; ☎). Hvalstöðin also has a floating nature centre, with whale models and films. In breeding season (mid-May to mid-August), both companies visit around Akurey island, offshore from Reykjavík, to look at the **puffins**.

The rusting **old whaling ships** (Map pp68-9) *Hvalur* 6, 7, 8 and 9 are roared directly opposite the whale-watching companies. Ladders and gangplanks enable visitors to climb aboard for a closer look.

Puffin Watching

Around 50,000 of these wonderful little birds (see the boxed text, p47) nest on Lundey and Akurey, two islands just offshore from Reykjavík. Between mid-May and mid-August you can visit them on the one-hour **Puffin Express boat trips** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 581 1010; www.ferja.is; adult/under 12yr lkr2500/1000), which sail from Reykjavík harbour at 10.30am and 4.30pm daily.

Also see Whale Watching, above.

Volcano Show

Eccentric eruption-chaser Villi Knudsen is the photographer, owner and presenter of the fascinating **Volcano Show** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 845 9548; vknudsen2000@yahoo.com; Red Rock Cinema, Hellusund 6a; adult/child/student 1hr show lkr900/250/750, 2hr show lkr1150/300/950; in English 11am, 3pm & 8pm daily, in German 6pm daily, in French 1pm Sat Jul & Aug, in English 3pm & 8pm daily Sep & Apr-Jun, 8pm Oct-Mar), a film show that captures 50 years of Icelandic volcanoes. Although some of the footage is a bit old and wobbly, you're still left reeling by images of the town Heimacy being crushed by molten lava, or the island Surtsey boiling its way out of the sea.

Perlan & the Saga Museum

Looking like half of Barbarella's bra, **Perlan** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 562 0200; www.perlan.is; ☎ 10am-10pm) is a complex based around the huge hot-water

tanks on Öskjuhlíð hill. It's about 2km from the city centre (take bus 18 from Hlemmur).

The main attraction is the endearing blood-thirsty **Saga Museum** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 511 1517; www.sagamuseum.is; adult/child/concession lkr900/450/700; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, noon-5pm Oct-Mar), where Icelandic history is brought to life by eerie silicon models and a soundtrack of thudding axes and hair-raising screams. Don't be surprised if you see some of the characters wandering around town, as moulds were taken from Reykjavík residents (the museum's owner is Ingólfur Arnarson, and his daughters are the Irish princess and the little slave gnawing a fish!).

The hexagonal **viewing deck** offers a tremendous 360-degree panorama of Reykjavík and the mountains: multilingual recordings explain the scenery. There's a busy **café** (☎ 10am-9pm) on the same level, so if it's brass-monkey weather, you can admire the same beautiful views over coffee and crepes. The mirrored dome on top of the tanks contains one of the city's finer restaurants, **Perlan** (see p87).

Two **artificial geysers** will keep small children absolutely enthralled: the one inside blasts off every few minutes, while the outside geyser comes on in the afternoon. There are numerous **walking and cycling trails** on the hillside, including a path to Nauthólsvík hot beach (see p71).

Museums

Displays at the **National Museum** (Þjóðminjasafn; Map pp68-9; ☎ 530 2200; www.natmus.is; Suðurgata 41; adult/under 18yr/concession lkr600/free/300, free Wed; ☎ 10am-5pm daily May-mid-Sep, 11am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep-Apr) are well thought out and give an excellent overview of Iceland's history and culture. The strongest section delves into the Settlement Era, with swords, silver hoards and a great little bronze **model of Thor** on display. However, the most treasured artefact in the museum is a beautiful 13th-century **church door**, carved with the touching story of a knight and his faithful lion! Upstairs, you really get a sense of the country's poverty over the following 600 years. Simple, homy artefacts utilise every scrap: check out the **gaming pieces** made from cod ear bones, and the **wooden doll** that doubled as a kitchen utensil.

The city's newest exhibition **Reykjavík 871 +/-2** (Settlement Exhibition; Map p72; ☎ 411 6370; www.reykjavik871.is; Aðalstræti 16; adult/12-18yr lkr600/300; ☎ 10am-5pm; ☎) is based around a single 10th-century Viking house but shows what miracles can be achieved when technology, archaeology

REYKJAVÍK IN WINTER

It's bitterly cold and the sun barely rises, but there are *some* advantages to wintery Iceland. The major joy, of course, is watching the unearthly glory of the **Northern Lights** (see p46).

The **Reykjavik Skating Hall** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 588 9705; www.skautahöll.is; Múlavegur 1, Laugardalur; adult/child 1kr500/400, skate hire 1kr300; ☎ noon-3pm Mon & Tue, noon-3pm & 5-7.30pm Wed & Thu, 1-8pm Fri, 1-6pm Sat & Sun Sep-Apr) throws open its doors in winter. Some people also skate on **Tjörninn** (p78) when it freezes.

The **skiing** season runs from November to April, depending on snowfall. The three ski areas close to Reykjavik (Bláfjöll, Hengill and Skálafell) are managed by the organisation **Skíðasvæði** (☎ 510 6600; www.skidasvaedi.is; Frikirkjuvegur 11, IS-101 Reykjavik). Iceland's premier ski slopes are at 84-sq-km **Bláfjöll** (☎ 561 8400; ☎ 2-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun), which has downhill, cross-country and snowboarding facilities – and gets swamped by eager city dwellers when the snow begins to fall. Passes cost 1kr1700/500 per adult/child 6 to 16, and you can hire skis, poles, boots and other gear at reasonable rates. The resort is located about 25km southeast of Reykjavik on Rte 417, just off Rte 1. Buses leave from the Mjódd bus stand southeast of town.

More **bus tours** (p80) operate in winter than you might imagine, offering a startling vision of familiar places: a white and frozen Gullfoss, caves full of icicles, and snow-covered mountains.

and imagination meet. Through 21st-century wizardry, a fire leaps from the hearth, while around the walls ghostly settlers materialise to tend crops, hunt, launch a boat, and bury their dead. Go and marvel while it's all pristine!

Creeping into the darkened rooms of the **Culture House** (Þjóðmenningarhúsið; Map p72; ☎ 545 1400; www.thjodmenning.is; Hverfisgata 15; adult/under 16yr/concession 1kr300/free/200, free Wed; ☎ 11am-5pm; ♿) is a true thrill for saga lovers. A permanent exhibition covers saga history: from a Who's Who of Norse gods to a fascinating account of Árni Magnússon, who devoted his life to saving Icelandic manuscripts, and died of a broken heart when his Copenhagen library went up in flames. Two hushed display rooms contain the original vellums; if you're interested in seeing more, contact the **Árni Magnússon Institute** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 525 4010; www.am.hi.is; Suðurgata).

Quaint old buildings have been uprooted from their original sites and rebuilt at the open-air **Árbæjarsafn** (☎ 411 6300; www.arbaejarsafn.is; Kistuhyllur 4; adult/under 18yr 1kr600/free; ☎ 10am-5pm daily Jun-Aug, by tour only 1pm Mon, Wed & Fri Sep-May), a kind of zoo for houses, 4km from the city centre. Alongside the 19th-century homes are a turf-roofed church, and various stables, smithies, barns and boat-houses – all very picturesque. There are summer arts-and-crafts demonstrations, and it's a great place for kids to let off steam. Take bus 12.

Despite its grand name, the **Reykjavik Museum of Photography** (Ljósmyndasafn Reykjavíkur; Map p72; ☎ 563 1790; www.photomuseum.is; 6th fl, Grófarhús, Tryggvagata 15; admission free; ☎ 1-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun) is really just an exhibi-

tion room above Reykjavik City Library. It's definitely worth dropping in, though – its quintessentially Scandinavian exhibitions are free and usually thought-provoking. If you take the lift up, walk down the stairs, which are lined with funny old black-and-white photos.

Based appropriately in a former freezing plant for fish, the small new **Vikin Maritime Museum** (Vikin Sjóminjasafnið; Map p72; ☎ 517 9400; www.sjominjasafn.is; Grandagarður 8; adult/under 18yr/concession 1kr500/free/300; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, Sat & Sun Oct-May) celebrates the country's seafaring heritage, focusing on the trawlers that transformed Iceland's economy. Much of the information is in Icelandic only, but silent film footage of trawler crews in action is worth a look.

Reykjavik has several specialist museums dealing with natural history, medicine, banknotes and coins, and hydroelectricity; contact the tourist office for details.

Galleries

Einar Jónsson (1874–1954) is Iceland's foremost sculptor, famous for his intense symbolist works. Chiselled allegories of Hope, Earth, Spring and Death burst from basalt cliffs, weep over naked women, sprout wings and slay dragons. For a taster, the **sculpture garden** (admission free) behind the museum contains 26 bronze casts; they're particularly effective at dusk. If these appeal to your inner Goth, you'll find gleaming white-marble sculptures on similar themes inside the fascinating **Einar Jónsson Museum** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 551 3797; www.skulptur.is; Njardargata; adult/under 16yr/concession 1kr400/free/200; ☎ 2-5pm

Tue-Sun Jun–mid-Sep, 2-5pm Sat & Sun mid-Sep–Nov & Feb-May). The building itself was designed by the artist and contains his austere penthouse flat, with unusual views over the city.

The **Reykjavik Art Museum** (Listasafn Reykjavíkur; www listasafnreykjavikur.is; adult/under 18yr 1kr500/free, free Mon) is split over three sites – one ticket admits you to all if you visit on the same day.

There's something immensely tactile about Ásmundur Sveinsson's monumental concrete creations – see for yourself in the **garden** (admission free) outside the rounded, white **Ásmundarsafn** (Ásmundur Sveinsson Museum; Map pp68-9; ☎ 553 2155; Sigtún; ☎ 10am-4pm May-Sep, 1-4pm Oct-Apr). Duck inside the museum for smaller, spikier works in wood, clay and metals, exploring themes as diverse as folklore and physics. Ásmundur (1893–1982) designed the building himself; getting into the spirit of things, the council later added an igloo-shaped bus stop in front. Buses 14, 15, 17, 19 and S2 pass close by.

Hafnarhúsið (Map p72; ☎ 590 1200; Tryggvagata 17; ☎ 10am-5pm; ♿) is a former warehouse now converted into a severe steel-and-concrete exhibition space. Pride of place is usually given to the distinctive, disturbing comic-book paintings of Erró (Guðmundur Guðmundsson; 1932–), a political artist who has donated several thousand works to the gallery. The rest of the industrial interior holds temporary installations: fluorescent paintings of moss, a kaleidoscopic coffin and children's toys made from fish bones were recent offerings. The café has great harbour views.

Jóhannes Kjarval (1885–1972) was a fisherman until his crew paid for him to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. He's one of Iceland's most popular artists, and his unearthly landscapes can be seen inside the angular glass-and-wood **Kjarvalsstaðir** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 552 6131; Flókagata; ☎ 10am-5pm; ♿), alongside changing installations.

Surreal mud-purple landscapes are intermingled with visions of trolls, giants and dead men walking at the **National Gallery of Iceland** (Listasafn Íslands; Map p72; ☎ 515 9600; www listasafn.is; Frikirkjuvegur 7; admission free; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun; ♿). Iceland's main art gallery, overlooking Tjörninn, certainly gives an interesting glimpse into the nation's psyche. As well as a huge collection of 19th- and 20th-century paintings by Iceland's favourite sons and daughters (including Ásgrímur Jónsson, Jóhannes Kjarval and Nína Sæmundsson), there are works by Picasso and Munch. If you want to see more of Jónsson's

work, the National Gallery also owns the **Ásgrímur Jónsson Museum** (Map pp68-9; Bergstaðastræti 74), open by appointment only.

The **Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 553 2906; www.iso.is; Laugarnestangi 70; adult/under 18yr 1kr300/free; ☎ 2-5pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 2-5pm Sat & Sun Sep-Nov & Feb-May) is a peaceful little place showcasing the varied works – portrait busts, driftwood totem poles and abstract football players – of sculptor Sigurjón Ólafsson (1908–82). A salty ocean breeze blows through the wooden rooms, which also contain Reykjavik's only shoreside café. On Tuesday from mid-July to August there are classical concerts at 8.30pm. Buses 12 and 16 pass close by.

Close to Reykjavik University, **Norraena Húsið** (Nordic House; Map pp68-9; ☎ 551 7030; www.nordice.is; Sturlugata 5; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun) is a Scandinavian cultural centre with a **gallery** (adult/under 15yr/concession 1kr300/free/150; ☎ noon-5pm Tue-Sun), a library of Scandinavian literature, a pleasant café, and regular Nordic-themed concerts, lectures and films.

Reykjavik has many small contemporary art galleries. **SAFN Gallery** (Map p72; ☎ 561 8777; www.safn.is; Laugavegur 37; admission free; ☎ 2-6pm Wed-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun) is one of the best: this tall wooden building contains three floors of conceptual art – beer cans in perspex and floating teacups – created by home-grown and international artists.

ASÍ Art Museum (Map pp68-9; ☎ 511 5353; Freyjugata 41; admission free; ☎ 2-6pm Tue-Sun) often has interesting installations; and there are similar exhibitions at **Kling & Bang** (Map p72; ☎ 696 2209; http://this.is/klingogbang; Laugavegur 23; ☎ 2-6pm Thu-Sun), **i8** (Map p72; ☎ 551 3666; www.i8.is; Klappartígur 33; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Fri, 1-5pm Sat) and **Nýlistasafnið** (Map p72; ☎ 551 4350; www.nylo.is; Laugavegur 26; ☎ 1-5pm Wed-Sun).

Parks & Gardens

Reykjavik Botanic Gardens (Map pp68-9; ☎ 553 8870; botgard@rvk.is; Skúlatún 2; admission free; ☎ greenhouse 10am-10pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar) contains over 5000 varieties of subarctic plant species, colourful seasonal flowers, a summer café serving coffee and waffles, and lots of bird life (particularly grey geese and their fluffy little goslings).

Laugardalur (Map pp68-9) was once the main source of Reykjavik's hot water supply – the name translates as 'Hot-Springs Valley'. Just north of the botanic garden you'll find the **old wash house** (Map pp68-9) – sadly, rather graffitied – where washerwomen once scrubbed the city's dirty laundry in sulphurous pools. A small

open-air exhibition of old photos brings the past to life.

Reykjavík's Family Fun Park & Zoo (see opposite) is also based in the valley, along with most of the city's sport and recreational facilities. Buses 14, 15, 17, 19 and S2 pass within a few hundred metres of Laugardalur.

At the heart of the city, grassy **Austurvöllur** (Map p72) was once part of first settler Ingólfur Arnarson's hay fields. Today it's a favourite spot for lunchtime picnics and summer sun-bathing, and is sometimes used for open-air concerts and political demonstrations. The statue in the centre is of Jón Sigurðsson, who led the campaign for Icelandic independence.

The parks around the lake Tjörninn (see below) are great for strolling.

Buildings & Monuments

Tjörninn (Pond; Map p72) is the placid lake at the centre of the city. It echoes with the honks, squawks and screeches of over 40 species of visiting birds, including swans, geese and arctic terns; feeding the ducks is a popular pastime for the under fives. Pretty sculpture-dotted parks line the southern shores, and their lacing paths are much used by cyclists and joggers. In winter, hardy souls strap on ice skates and turn the lake into an outdoor rink. For a self-guided art tour round Tjörninn, buy the brochure *'The City Statues'* (1kr200) from the tourist office.

Reykjavík's waterside **Ráðhús** (City Hall; Map p72; ☎ 563 2005; Vonarstræti; admission free; ☎ 8am-

7pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sat & Sun) is a postmodern construction that divides all who see it into 'hate-its' or 'love-its'. Concrete stilts, tinted windows and mossy walls make it look like a half-bird, half-building rising from Tjörninn. Inside there's a fabulous 3D map of Iceland – all mountains and volcanoes, with flecks of nothing-towns disappearing between the peaks. There's also a pleasant café, with free internet access for customers and an intimate view of the ducks.

Compared to the sky-scraping hulk of Hallgrímskirkja (p71), Iceland's main cathedral, **Dómkirkja** (Map p72; ☎ 520 9700; www.domkirkjan.is; Lækjargata 14a; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) is a modest affair, but it played a vital role in the country's conversion to Lutheranism. The current building (from 1848) is small but perfectly proportioned, its plain wooden interior animated by glints of gold.

Iceland's first parliament, the **Alþingi**, was created at Þingvellir in AD 930. After losing its independence in the 13th century, the country gradually won back its autonomy, and the modern **Alþingi** (Map p72; ☎ 563 0500; www.althingi.is; Túngata) moved into the current basalt building in 1881; a stylish glass-and-stone annexe was completed in 2002. You're welcome to attend **sessions** (☎ 3pm Mon, 1.30pm Tue & Wed, 10.30am Thu Oct-May) when parliament is sitting.

Popular with skateboarders, the stone square **Ingólfstorg** is notable for its billowing **steam vent**, where pent-up geothermal energy finds a release.

REYKJAVÍK'S ARCHITECTURE

The old town's mid-18th-century houses demonstrate the Icelandic talent for adaptation. In a country devoid of many building materials, most are made from driftwood (which floated from Siberia and South America) and covered in sheets of corrugated tin to protect them from the elements. Even churches, such as the **Fríkirkjan í Reykjavík** (1899; Map p72), were made the same way. By happy chance, this light construction method also makes the buildings pretty earthquake-proof.

Building houses from scraps didn't mean that artistic impulses were squashed – check out **A-Hús** (Map p72), from 1906, one of the city's finest examples of wood-and-tin architecture. Its tall turrets are topped by swirling arabesques, and the wooden struts supporting the balconies are carved with whales.

As the country rallied from almost 700 years of deprivation, a new pride worked its way into Iceland's public architecture. Basalt became a nationalist symbol – the country's parliament building, the **Alþingi** (above), is built from blocks of the stuff, and **Hallgrímskirkja** (p71) flaunts its basalt columns with unquenchable pride.

Today, the city is snowballing. Much of the current growth is an ugly suburban sprawl, but there are some genuinely startling constructions going up, such as the new avant-garde harbourside concert hall, due for completion in 2010.

Some of the city's oldest houses line the square. **Fálkahús** (Map p72; Hafnarstræti 1) has a particularly interesting history – it's where Icelandic falcons were kept before being shipped off to Europe's noblemen.

Reykjavík is littered with fascinating statues and abstract monuments, but it's Jón Gunnar Árnason's shiplike **Sun-Craft** (Map p72) sculpture that seems to catch visitors' imaginations. Its situation – facing the sea and snow-capped Esja – may have something to do with it.

Horse Riding

Trotting through lava fields under the midnight sun is an unforgettable experience. Horse farms around Reykjavík offer tours for all ages and experiences, and can collect you from your hotel. Most operate at least some of their trips year-round.

Two long-established companies offer everything from 1½- to two-hour outings (1kr3000 to 1kr5000), to nine-day tours into the wilderness, including riding and rafting/whale-watching/Blue Lagoon combinations (1kr7500 to 1kr10,000):

Eldhestar (☎ 480 4800; www.eldhestar.is; Vellir) Near Hveragerði.

Íshestar (☎ 555 7000; www.ishestar.is; Sörlaskeiði 26, Hafnarfjörður)

There are also two farms, based near the eastern suburb of Mosfellsbær, that offer rides in the area round Halldór Laxness' former home:

Ferðahestar (☎ 517 7000; www.travelhorse.is;

Víðigrund, Mosfellsbær)

Laxnes (☎ 566 6179; www.laxnes.is; Mosfellsbær)

Cycling

See p97 for information.

REYKJAVÍK FOR CHILDREN

Icelanders love their kids, but they're treated as small adults rather than as a separate species; consequently, there are only a handful of entertainments aimed specifically at children. However, kids get discount rates at the theatre and cinema, and can travel free or at discount rates on many excursions.

The **Family Fun Park & Zoo** (Fjölskyldu-og húsdýragarðsins; Map pp68-9; ☎ 575 7800; www.mu.is; Laugardalur; adult/5-12yr 1kr550/450, 1-/10-/20-ride tickets 1kr170/1500/2800; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-May-mid-Aug, to 5pm mid-Aug-mid-May; 🐾) is the city's only attraction especially for (youngish) children. Don't expect lions and tigers; think seals, foxes

and farm animals with slightly dismal enclosures. The family park section is jolly, with a mini-racetrack, child-size bulldozers, a giant trampoline, boats and kids' fairground rides. Future plans include an Imax cinema and an aquarium, but at the time of writing building work hadn't started.

Water babies will go mad for Reykjavík's wonderful geothermal **swimming pools** (p71), particularly Laugardalslaug and Árbæjarlaug. **Icelandic horse-riding** (left) is a great confidence-booster for novice riders – the horses have calm temperaments... and aren't too high off the ground. The 18-lane bowling-hall **Keiluhöllin** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 511 5300; www.keiluhollin.is; Óskjuhlöð; disco bowling 1/2/3 games 1kr720/1270/1820, other evening & weekend times 1/2/3 games 1kr600/1150/1490, cheaper weekdays; ☎ 11am-midnight Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) has arcade games and pool tables; its weekend **disco-bowling sessions** (☎ 11am-3pm Sat & Sun) may appeal to teenyboppers. In winter, **skating** (p76) is a popular family activity.

The best museums for children are the open-air **Árbæjarsafn** (p76), where they can zoom around in a safe green space; and the **Saga Museum** (p75), which will appeal to Viking fans. The **National Museum** (p75) has dressing-up clothes, and puzzles and games relating to the museum's collections.

Over in Hafnarfjörður, take younger children hunting for elves on a **Hidden Worlds tour** (p103).

QUIRKY REYKJAVÍK

Held in a huge industrial building by the harbour, the weekend **Kolaportíð Flea Market** (Map p72; Geirsgata; ☎ 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) is a Reykjavík institution and definitely worth a visit. Browse through piles of second-hand clothes, music, antiques and children's toys, or pick up Icelandic fish delicacies including cubes of *hákarl*.

For an Icelandic joke, at the beginning of Bankastræti look north towards the detached building **Stórnarráðið** (Map p72), which contains the prime minister's offices. The statues outside are of Hannes Hafstein, leader of the first home-rule government, and King Christian IX presenting Iceland with its constitution. If you get the right perspective, you can recreate a shot from the cult movie *101 Reykjavík* – the king stuffing the constitution up Hafstein's rear.

Voodoo is generally associated with the steamy Mississippi delta, but **Nornabúðin** (The Witch Shop; Map p72; ☎ 552 3540; Vesturgata 12; ☎ 2-6pm

Mon-Sat) sells Icelandic voodoo dolls – perfect for wreaking havoc on your enemies, although you may need a dictionary to work out what damage you're doing.

On the same street is **Kirsuberjatréð** (Cherry Tree; Map p72; ☎ 562 8990; www.kiris.is; Vesturgata 4; 🕒 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, 11am–3pm Sat), a collective of women artists selling weird and wonderful designs – fish-skin handbags, woven music boxes and (our favourite) beautiful coloured bowls made from radish slices!

TOURS

Walking Tours

Reykjavík is perfect for exploring under your own steam, but if you'd like a little guidance, the tourist office sells themed brochures (lkr200). They're easy to follow; the 'City Centre Walk' is probably the most interesting, followed by 'The City Parks' and 'The City Statues'.

The 1½- to two-hour **Original Haunted Walk of Reykjavík** (Map p72; ☎ 696 7474; www.hauntediceland.is; adult/under-12yr lkr1500/free; 🕒 8pm Jun–mid-Sep), which leaves from outside the main tourist office, is a new and extremely successful attraction. The walks are quite long, but the enthusiasm of Jónas the guide makes them very enjoyable. He manages to combine the ghost stories – gruesome, sad or just plain strange – with Viking history, environmentalism and visits to homes of the hidden people. The tour finishes, as all ghost walks should, in a twilight graveyard...

REYKJAVÍK WALKS

'Our ghost tours have been so successful that next year we'll be adding another walk, 'Welcome to Reykjavík', at 6pm. They'll be led by locals – one day you might get a tour from a 40-year-old father of two, the next day a 19-year-old student. We'll visit places we've been to and enjoyed ourselves – you'll get an honest opinion.'

Thanks to Jónas, Original Haunted Walk of Reykjavík

Menningarfylgd Birnu (☎ 862 8031; www.birna.is; per person lkr4000, minimum 2 people; 🕒 by arrangement) aims to show visitors around Reykjavík 'the cat's way'! But rather than go yowling on a dustbin, Birna leads people on 1½-hour cultural tours, dropping in on artists' studios, local characters and places of culinary interest, as well as the mainstream sights.

Bus Tours

Some associate coach tours with over-60s trips to the seaside, but a day-long bus tour from Reykjavík is one of the best ways to see some of the country's spectacular natural wonders. They're also good if you want to combine sightseeing with snowmobiling, horse riding, kayaking, rafting and other exhilarating activities.

SUGGESTED TOURS FROM REYKJAVÍK

Destination/Activity	Price	Season
Diving/snorkelling at Þingvallavatn	lkr24,500/12,500	year-round
Geysir & Gullfoss, plus horse riding	lkr9400–9800	year-round
Golden Circle (Þingvellir, Geysir, Gullfoss)	lkr6200–7000	year-round
Hekla volcano	lkr22,700	Jul–Sep
Landmannalaugar geothermal area	lkr9500–11,000	Jul & Aug
Exploring a lava tunnel	lkr6200–13,300	year-round
Northern Lights spotting	lkr3500–6000	Oct–Mar
Rafting on the Hvítá river	lkr13,300	May–mid-Sep
Reykjanes peninsula & Blue Lagoon	lkr5800–6200	year-round
Snæfellsnes coast	lkr11,900	mid-May–mid-Sep
Snæfellsnes coast & boat ride or whale watching	lkr13,500–13,900	Jun–Aug
Snowmobiling	lkr15,500–16,500	year-round
South coast	lkr9500–9900	year-round
Þórsmörk nature reserve	lkr9500	Jun–mid-Sep
Quad biking	lkr15,000	year-round

Tours need to be booked in advance (either at the tourist office, at your hotel or hostel, or directly with the company) and they may be cancelled if there are insufficient numbers or if the weather turns rancid. Young children generally can travel free or at discounted rates.

Three of the biggest and best tour operators: **Iceland Excursions** (Allrahanda; Map pp68–9; ☎ 540 1313; www.icelandexcursions.is; Höfðatún 12) The cheapest bus-tour operator, with comprehensive day trips plus horse riding, whale watching, underground explorations, diving, and self-drive holidays.

IcelandTotal (Map pp68–9; ☎ 585 4300; www.icelandtotal.com; Lágmúli 4) IcelandTotal is part of the Icelandair group, and can organise a huge range of winter and summer bus trips, activities and special-interest tours, such as sagas, bird-watching, fishing and cycling.

Reykjavík Excursions (Kynnisferðir; Map pp68–9; ☎ 562 1011; www.re.is; BSÍ bus terminal, Vatnsmyrarvegur 10) The most popular bus-tour operator has summer and winter programmes. Extras include horse riding, snowmobiling, and themed tours tying in with festivals.

The boxed text opposite shows examples of places to visit and things to try, with approximate prices and seasonal availability. We recommend bringing a bag of cash and giving them all a whirl! See p51 for a rundown on major activities available in Iceland.

Super-Jeep & Supertruck Tours

If you fancy bigger wheels and a little more exclusivity, you can go sightseeing by super-jeep or supertruck instead of by bus. Most of the places and activities listed in the previous section are on offer (prices are at least double).

Activity Group (☎ 580 9900; www.activity.is) Super-jeep and supertruck activity and sightseeing tours.

Atours (☎ 517 4455; www.amazingtours.is) Super-jeep trips to the Golden Circle, Landmannalaugar, Þórsmörk and the south coast, plus the option of adding on outdoor activities.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Also see the list of national festivals (p318), most of which are celebrated with gleeful enthusiasm in Reykjavík. For forthcoming live music, see www.musik.is.

February

Winter Lights In mid- or late February Reykjavík celebrates the end of winter with cultural events, a mini food festival, and lots of illuminated buildings.

May

Listahátíð í Reykjavík (Reykjavík Arts Festival; www.artfest.is) Held from mid-May every year, this popular three-week event features films, dance, theatre, concerts and art exhibitions from Iceland and around the world.

Rite of Spring (www.riteofspring.is) A new world-music festival featuring everything from jazz to folk and blues.

August

Gay Pride (www.gaypride.is) This is Iceland's second-biggest festival – thousands of people parade carnival-style through the streets of Reykjavík on the third weekend of the month, with open-air concerts in the city centre.

Reykjavík Marathon (www.marathon.is) Held on a Saturday in mid-August, with shorter distances and fun runs for those who like to grit their teeth less.

Menningarnott (Culture Night; www.menningarnott.is) Iceland's biggest festival is this evening of cultural events that follows the marathon – over a third of Iceland attends. It includes musicians on every street corner, citywide cultural and artistic performances, much drunkenness, and a massive fireworks display.

Tango on ICEland (www.tango.is) Tango has really gripped the Icelandic soul. This three-day annual event at the end of August is composed of dance workshops and performances.

September

Jazzhátíð Reykjavíkur (www.jazz.is) The five-day Reykjavík Jazz Festival at the end of September attracts a range of local and international talent.

Reykjavík International Film Festival (www.filmfest.is) Also at the end of the month, this is a 10-day celebration of art-house films, with screenings across the city and talks by Icelandic and international directors – for example, this year's guests include Atom Egoyan, Yoko Ono and Aleksandr Sokurov, director of *Russian Ark*.

October

Iceland Airwaves (www.icelandairwaves.com) This four-day event in mid-October is one of the world's coolest music festivals. Homegrown talent and international DJs and bands play their souls out in various intimate venues around the city; past acts have included Sigur Rós, Fat Boy Slim, the Flaming Lips and Hot Chip.

SLEEPING

Reykjavík has loads of accommodation choices, with midrange guesthouses and business-class hotels predominating. In July and August accommodation fills up quickly; reservations are strongly advised. Most places open year-round apart from Christmas (we've noted where accommodation is summer only), and offer 20% to 45% discounts from October to April.

Budget

Reykjavík camp site (Map pp68-9; ☎ 568 6944; www.reykjavikcampsite.is; Sundlaugavegur 34; sites per person 1kr800; ☂ mid-May–mid-Sep) The only camping option in the city (right next door to the city hostel) gets very busy in summer, but with space for 650 people in its three fields, you're likely to find a place. Facilities include free showers, bike hire, a kitchen and barbecue area, and a reception desk selling gas bottles and postcards; you can share the hostel's internet access and laundry room, but emphatically *not* its kitchens. From June to August a direct bus runs to the BSÍ bus terminal at 7.30am every morning.

our pick Reykjavík City Hostel (Map pp68-9; ☎ 553 8110; www.hostel.is; Sundlaugavegur 34; sb 6-bed dm 1kr1800, sb 4- or 6-bed dm with bathroom 1kr2600, sb bed in 2-bed room with bathroom 1kr3700) Reykjavík's eco-friendly youth hostel sleeps 170 people and has excellent facilities. There are three guest kitchens, a library, four internet-linked computers, free wi-fi, a laundry room (1kr300 per washer/dryer) and bike hire, as well as regular film shows, pancake nights and pub crawls. Its lovely staff can book trips and the airport bus. The downsides are that it's a good 2km out of town; and screaming, door-slamming school kids may drive you to murderous despair. In summer and at weekends, make early reservations or bring a tent.

The bus from the airport should drop you off here directly. Bus 14 (1kr250, every 20 to 30 minutes) runs to Hlemmur and Lækjartorg in the city centre.

NIGHT-NIGHT, SLEEP TIGHT...

Restless sleepers may struggle in Iceland. Despite the 'light nights', a surprising number of hostels, guesthouses and hotels have transparent curtains, flimsy blinds or nothing at all across the windows. You might look a fool, but an eye mask will cut out that satanic 24-hour sunshine.

If you're staying in a city-centre hotel, something to consider is weekend noise – drunken partygoers falling out of bars and clubs can be irritating if you're desperate for sleep before that 7am excursion. Wear ear plugs, choose a room that doesn't overlook bar-lined streets or public squares, or decide that 'if you can't beat them, join them' and head for the nearest pub!

Central Guesthouse (Map pp68-9; ☎ 552 2822; www.central-guesthouse.com; Bólstaðarhlíð 8; sb/s/d/tr 1kr2500/4700/6100/8700; ☎) This welcoming place is about 10 minutes' walk from the BSÍ bus terminal and Perlan. Rooms are light, trim and uncomplicated; the attic room, with sloping ceilings and private balcony, has the most character. Breakfast isn't included, but there's a guest kitchen.

Litli Ljóti Andarunginn (Map p72; ☎ 552 2410; www.andarunginn.is; Lækjargata 6b; s/d without bathroom 1kr6900/7900) 'The Ugly Duckling' restaurant has a few simple rooms overhead. They're not a bad price for such a convenient central location but are in need of some tender DIY! One has a private bathroom (1kr8900); the others have washbasins. Noise from the restaurant-bar below may disturb light sleepers.

Salvation Army Guesthouse (Gistiheimili Hjálpræðishersins; Map p72; ☎ 561 3203; www.guesthouse.is; Kirkjustræti 2; sb 1kr2500, s/d/tr 1kr5500/8000/10,500) The rooms at this pleasant Christian guesthouse are small, functional and frill-free, but dorms are more spacious. Although it doesn't have the whizzy extras offered by the city hostel, its superb location makes it a attractive alternative – step outside and the whole of Reykjavík is at your feet. There's a backpackery atmosphere and a guest kitchen, and it's extra-cheap (private room prices include breakfast).

Midrange GUESTHOUSES

Reykjavík is packed with *gistiheimili* (guesthouses) and there are new places opening every year. Most are in converted houses, so rooms often have shared bathrooms, kitchens and TV lounges. Some offer sleeping-bag accommodation.

Guesthouse Butterfly (Map p72; ☎ 894 1864; www.kvasir.is/butterfly; Ránargata 8a; s/d/apt from 1kr6900/8900/13,900; ☂ Jun-Aug; ☎) On a quiet residential street within fluttering distance of the centre, Butterfly has neat, simply furnished rooms. There's a guest kitchen and wi-fi access, and the friendly Icelandic-Norwegian owners make you feel right at home. The top floor has two self-contained apartments with kitchen and balcony.

Álfhóll Guesthouse (Map p72; ☎ 898 1838; www.islandia.is/alf; Ránargata 8; s/d/tr 1kr6800/9000/11,000, 2- to 6-person apt 1kr12,000-18,000; ☂ Jun-Aug) Almost identical in feel and facilities to Butterfly is this neighbouring guesthouse, run by a family of elf enthusiasts.

Galtafell Guesthouse (Map pp68-9; ☎ 699 2525; www.galtafell.com; Laufavegur 46; s/d/apt Jun-Sep from 1kr7900/8900/16,900, Oct-May from 1kr6000/6900/12,000; ☂) Recommended by readers, this new guesthouse has a great location – in a quiet, well-to-do suburb within easy walking distance of town. The four spruce apartments each contain a fully equipped kitchen, a cosy seating area and a separate bedroom, and there are also three doubles with access to a guest kitchen. The only drawback is that they're basement rooms, so no views of anything but the pavement!

Guesthouse Andrea (Map pp68-9; ☎ 552 5515; www.aurora.house.is; Njarðargata 43; sb/s/d 1kr2900/7000/9000; ☂ mid-May–mid-Sep; ☎) Friendly Siggí runs this hidden place, tucked down a side street in a tranquil residential area. Its five private rooms have smart wooden floors and are ideal for self-caterers; each has a sink, a cooker, a fridge and a tiny two-seater table.

Gistiheimilið Aurora (Map pp68-9; Freyjugata 24; ☂ mid-May–mid-Sep; ☎) Just around the corner from the Andrea, this place is also run by Siggí. Room 33, with a balcony and sea view, is the best (the sleeping-bag accommodation is a little cramped). The non-sleeping-bag prices include breakfast, and there's an internet computer plus wifi access.

Gistiheimilið 101 (Map pp68-9; ☎ 562 6101; www.iceland101.com; Laugavegur 101; s/tw/tr/q 1kr7300/9600/11,900/13,900) Slightly cheaper than the 4th Floor Hotel on the floor above (especially as a breakfast buffet is included), these rooms in a converted office building are good value for such a central location. White is the dominant colour, with startling splashes of red here and there. All rooms have washbasins.

Guesthouse Baldursbrá (Map pp68-9; ☎ 552 6646; baldursbra@centrum.is; Laufavegur 41; s/d 1kr6700/9700; ☎) This great little guesthouse, on a quiet street close to Tjörnin and the BSÍ bus station, has helpful owners and decent-sized, comfy rooms, all with washbasins. Additional facilities are admirable – a sociable sitting room-TV lounge, wi-fi, and a private garden with a fab hot pot, sauna and barbecue. Rates include breakfast.

Guesthouse Óðinn (Map p72; ☎ 861 3400; www.odinnreykjavik.com; Óðinngata 9; s/d/tr from 1kr7600/9800/12,200; ☎) New owners took over this guesthouse in April 2005, bringing extra touches (like the handsome breakfast room with sea views) to this long-standing favourite. You'll find simple white rooms here with dashes of colourful artwork, and an excellent

buffet breakfast is included in the rates. Some en-suite rooms are available.

Gistiheimilið Ísafold (Map p72; ☎ 561 2294; isafold@itn.is; Báraugata 11; s/d from 1kr7300/9800) This recommended, rambling old house (a former rehab centre/bakery/bookshop) lies in peaceful old Reykjavík. Sun-filled bedrooms contain washbasins and rustic beds; there are tea-making facilities in the lounge; and solemn Icelandic dolls keep an eye on diners in the attic breakfast room. At the nearby annex (Báraugata 20), all accommodation comes with private bathrooms (around 1kr1000 extra).

our pick 4th Floor Hotel (Map pp68-9; ☎ 511 3030; www.4thfloorhotel.is; Laugavegur 101; s/d/tr without bathroom 1kr7900/9900/11,900, d/tr/ste with bathroom 1kr11,900/13,900/15,900, d with balcony 1kr11,900; ☎) Close to Hlemmur bus station, the 17 squeaky-clean rooms here (most with shared bathrooms) have great accoutrements – desk, fridge, kettle, TV, washbasin, wifi access... and duvets printed with zebra stripes! Four have sea views, and two have balconies. The owners are very helpful, there's a guest sitting room, and breakfast (1kr950) may be available.

Bolholt Guesthouse (Map pp68-9; ☎ 517 4050; www.bolholt.is; Bolholt 6; d/1kr10,500/13,900; ☎) This new guesthouse tries to tempt you 1.5km out of the city centre by offering large 'studio' rooms with great kitchenettes, satellite TV, and free laundry and internet access. It's all very smart, clean and modern, and the family rooms are especially good value. The big, busy road outside calms down at night.

our pick Gistiheimilið Sunna (Map pp68-9; ☎ 511 5570; www.sunna.is; Þórsgrata 26; s/d from 1kr8400/10,700; ☂ ☂ ☎) Rooms at this guesthouse are simple and sunny with honey-coloured parquet floors, and several at the front have good views of Hallgrímskirkja. You can choose to pay extra for a private bathroom. Families are welcomed; there's a handful of brand-new studio apartments for one to four people (1kr13,300 to 1kr22,500). Breakfast – with home-baked bread – is included.

Garður Inn (Map pp68-9; ☎ 562 4000, 551 5900; www.inns-of-iceland.com; Hringbraut; sb dm/s/tw 1kr2400/4400/3400, s/d 1kr8300/10,900; ☂ Jun-late Aug; ☂) In summer once the students have left, the university campus offers visitors utilitarian rooms with shared bathrooms. The cheapest sleeping-bag accommodation is in 16-person dorms. Single/double rates include breakfast.

Domus Guesthouse (Map p72; ☎ 561 1200; www.domusguesthouse.is; Hverfisgata 45; sb/s/d 1kr2900/9500/

11,300) Once the Norwegian embassy, Domus's rooms have stately old proportions but vaunt modern touches such as radio alarms and TVs. The 1st-floor rooms are best, with hardwood floors, leather sofas and artwork on the walls (none has a private bathroom). Breakfast is included in accommodation above sleeping-bag level, and there's a kitchen.

Alba Guesthouse (Map pp68-9; ☎ 552 9800; www.alba.is; Eskihlíð 3; s/d/tr lkr9000/11,500/14,500; (P) ☒ ☑) In a quiet residential area fairly close to Perlan, Alba is a peaceful choice. It's relatively new, with fresh, modern, attractive rooms (shared bathrooms) and pleasant staff; even in the short time it's been open plenty of guests have returned. There's free wi-fi and a garden, and breakfast is included.

Travel-Inn Guesthouse (Map pp68-9; ☎ 561 3553; www.dalfoss.is; Sóleyjargata 31; s/d lkr10,500/12,300; ☒ ☑) A short walk from the BSÍ bus terminal, this guesthouse was recommended by a reader largely due to its dynamic host Einar! Besides the exuberant service, rooms are basic but large and bright, and breakfast is included in the rates. Extras include a sauna in the basement, free wireless internet access, and bike hire.

our pick Tower Guesthouse (Map p72; ☎ 896 6694; www.tower.is; Grettisgata 6; d lkr9900-13,900, 1-4-person apt lkr18,900-32,900) This castlelike place has a sweeping spiral staircase and elegant apartments, and you can stargaze from the rooftop Jacuzzi. The guesthouse is popular with gay travellers, and there's the odd phallus-shaped plant pot around, but everyone is welcome. Breakfast isn't provided, but there are kitchen facilities.

Gistihúsið Hvíti Svanurinn (Map p72; ☎ 533 4101; www.whitesvanur.com; Vatnssígur 11; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast lkr12,100/18,500/21,200/28,800; ☒ May-Sep; ☑) The brand-new White Swan Guesthouse, tucked down a quiet side street near the city centre, may not look much from outside, but it's a damn decent choice. Its 23 fresh-looking rooms all come with TVs, internet connection points and space-age coffee machines, and are decorated in inoffensive Scandinavian style (pale-wood floors, blond furnishings...oh, and fluorescent-green bedside lamps!). They're remarkable for their size – these must be the largest guesthouse rooms in Reykjavík.

APARTMENTS

Apartments in Reykjavík are often very good value.

Forsæla Guesthouse (Map p72; ☎ 551 6046; www.apartmenthouse.is; Grettisgata 33b; s/d lkr8000/11,000, 2-/3-

/4-person apt lkr14,000/17,000/20,000, house lkr40,000; ☒) This is a really lovely option in Reykjavík's conservation area. Star of the show is the 100-year-old wood-and-tin house, for four to eight people, which comes with all the old beams and tasteful mod-cons you could want. Three apartments have small but cosy bedrooms and sitting rooms, fully equipped kitchens, and washing machines. There's a minimum three-night stay, and the friendly owners prefer prebookings; B&B may be possible.

our pick Three Sisters (Þrijar Systur; Map p72; ☎ 565 2181; www.threesisters.is; Ránargata 16; 1-/2-person apt €98/148, family apt €210; ☒ Jun-Aug; ☒ ☑) A twinkly eyed former fisherman runs the Three Sisters, a scrumptious townhouse in old Reykjavík, now divided into eight studio apartments. Comfy counterpaneled beds are flanked by old-fashioned easy chairs and state-of-the-art flatscreen TVs. Each room comes with a cute fully equipped kitchen. A second building has sleeping-bag accommodation in six-bed dorms (around lkr2600).

Room with a View (Map p72; ☎ 552 7262; www.roomwithaview.is; Laugavegur 18; 1-/2-/3-/4-bedroom apt around lkr12,900/25,900/29,900/39,900) This ridiculously central apartment hotel offers one- to four-bedroom apartments, decorated in Scandinavian style and with private bathrooms, kitchenettes, CD players, TVs and washing machines. Half have those eponymous sea and city views, and most have access to a Jacuzzi. They're very varied – check the website for a wealth of details.

HOTELS

Many of Reykjavík's midrange hotels are places built for and favoured by business travellers, and the places can be pretty bland. Rooms have private bathrooms unless mentioned otherwise.

Hótel Frón (Map p72; ☎ 511 4666; www.hotelfron.is; Laugavegur 22a; s/d/studio/2-bed apt lkr11,900/13,900/14,900/21,900) If you can overlook the city's moodiest receptionists, this bright blue hotel has lots in its favour – particularly its excellent location overlooking Laugavegur, and stylish apartments in the new wing. They come with TV, safe, hardwood floors, modern bathrooms and well-equipped kitchenettes (cooker, fridge and microwave) – try to bag one with a balcony. Older rooms are less inspiring. Breakfast costs lkr800, and there's wireless internet access.

Metropolitan Hotel (Map p72; ☎ 511 1155; www.metropolitan.is; Ránargata 4a; s/tw/tr lkr11,600/15,600/18,800;

☑) In the peaceful old town, within a few blocks of the city's core, the Metropolitan received a top-to-toe makeover in 2004. This couldn't alter the small size of its 31 rooms, but they certainly look much better! Facilities stretch to TVs, mini-fridges and wireless internet access (for a fee), and there's a decent buffet breakfast. Essentially, this is a fairly basic three-star hotel, given a shine by its good location and friendly staff.

Hótel Leifur Eiríksson (Map pp68-9; ☎ 562 0800; www.hotelleifur.is; Skólavörðustígur 45; s/d/tr lkr14,200/17,400/20,500) This hotel glories in one of the best locations in Reykjavík: it's slap on the end of arty Skólavörðustígur, and half its 47 rooms have inspiring views of Hallgrímskirkja. They're fairly small and plain (with blue carpeting, narrow beds, TVs and phones), but you're paying for the hotel's coordinates rather than its interior design. There's no lift, but there is free coffee downstairs.

Hótel Plaza (Map p72; ☎ 590 1400; www.plaza.is; Aðalstræti 4; s/d lkr15,600/19,500; (P) ☑ ☒) The 104-room Plaza has the feel of a smaller, family-run affair. Rooms have all mod-cons (digital TVs, kettles, bathrobes and free broadband connections) and come in two styles. Half are modern and businesslike, with navy furnishings and clean-lined wooden furniture – most look onto bustling Ingólfstorg. Those in the new extension feature antique beams and a softer beige décor, although some are a little dark. The superior double (lkr25,700) on the 6th floor has superb views of the square, sea and mountains from its glassed-in balcony. Buffet breakfast is included.

Fosshotel Barón (Map pp68-9; ☎ 562 3204; www.fosshotel.is; Barónsstígur 2-4; standard s/d lkr16,200/20,900, 1-/2-bed apt lkr23,900/27,900; (P) ☑) The corporate chain-hotel Barón is fairly central, and its 4th and 5th floors have marvellous views of the sea and Esja. There are 14 apartments with cooking facilities. Laptop users have free wi-fi coverage, or there's internet access in the lobby.

Parkinn Ísland (Map pp68-9; ☎ 595 7000; www.reykjavik.rezidorparkinn.com; Armúli 9; ☑ ☒) Standard-issue rooms have good facilities, and some even manage to break free of the chain-hotel mould. Go for ones with kitchenettes, or stunning panoramic views of Reykjavík and the mountains. All have TV, telephone, minibar and tea-making kit. There's wi-fi throughout, guests (rather sweetly) get free admission to the city's swimming pools, and there's a filling hot-and-cold breakfast buffet.

our pick CenterHotel Klöpp (Map p72; ☎ 595 8520; www.centerhotels.is; Klapparstígur 26; s/d from 14,900/19,900; ☒ closed 18-27 Dec; (P) ☑) This is a very mellow place with a boutique-hotel spirit. The foyer-breakfast area sets the tone, with gleaming hardwood floors, genial staff and lots of light pouring in. Rooms are modest in size with minimal furnishings, but warm woody tones, textured mauve textiles and stylish slate-floored bathrooms give them a modern yet cosy feel. All contain TV, fridge, radio, kettle and internet connection point, and you can just about see the sea and mountains from the 5th-floor rooms.

CenterHotel Skjaldbreið (Map p72; ☎ 595 8510; www.centerhotels.is; Laugavegur 16; s/d from 14,900/19,900; ☒ closed 18-27 Dec; ☑) Once a dental surgery, this old townhouse has large rooms decorated with grandma-style orange-and-green chintz. If you can ignore the décor, it's ideally situated – right in the thick of things, with most rooms overlooking Laugavegur (the curved corner rooms are best). Rates include breakfast in a light and modern rooftop room. There are internet connections in the rooms, and a computer for guest use.

Top End

All rooms in this category have bathroom, TV, phone and minibar; rates rarely include breakfast!

Hótel Reykjavík (Map pp68-9; ☎ 514 7000; www.hotel.reykjavik.is; Raudarásstígur 37; s/d from lkr17,200/22,500; (P) ☑ ☒) In a commercial area close to the Hlemmur bus station, the Hótel Reykjavík is a no-nonsense business hotel that offers decent rates. Many of its respectably sized rooms have been Ikea-ified recently, with hardwood floors and new fixtures – TVs, mini-fridges, phones, wireless internet access and tea-making facilities. A good buffet breakfast is included, and there's a cosy, classy steak restaurant.

our pick Hótel Óðinsvéi (Map p72; ☎ 511 6200; www.hotelodinsvei.is; Þórsgrata 1; s/d from lkr16,900/22,900; ☑) A boutique hotel with bags of personality, Óðinsvéi contains 43 sun-drenched rooms with wooden floors, original artwork and classic furnishings. They're all very different – some are split-level, some have balconies and many have bathtubs – but only room 117 has a resident ghost! The restaurant is run by Siggí Hall, Iceland's most famous TV chef, with Icelandic-Mediterranean fusion dishes taking precedence.

Hótel Reykjavík Centrum (Map p72; ☎ 514 6000; www.hotelcentrum.is; Aðalstræti 16; s/d from lkr20,700/25,900; ☎) This central hotel has striking architecture – mezzanines and a glass roof unite two buildings, giving the whole place a spry, light feel. Its 89 neatly proportioned rooms come in two styles – ‘traditional’, with patterned wallpaper and white-painted furniture, and ‘deluxe’, with leather seats and a more contemporary feel. Both have safes, minibars, pay TVs (with films to order), tea-making facilities and wi-fi internet access.

Radisson SAS 1919 Hotel (Map p72; ☎ 599 1000; www.1919.reykjavik.radissonsas.com; Pósthússtræti 2; standard/deluxe d lkr20,900/27,600; ☎) Although this is part of a large chain, the catchily named Radisson SAS 1919 Hotel is a boutique place with plenty of style. Attractive rooms sport wooden floors, large beds, flatscreen TVs and wireless access. Keep walking up the carved iron stairwells to the 4th floor and you reach the large, comfy suites (rooms 414 and 412). Other bonuses include a fantastic location, a gym, a restaurant and the cool Salt Lounge Bar.

Hótel Nordica (Map pp68-9; ☎ 444 5000; www.icehotel.is; Suðurlandsbraut 2; s/d from lkr25,100/27,900; ☎) Bring your autograph book to the Nordica, Icelandair’s huge flagship hotel – it’s where visiting pop stars often stay. Cool Scandinavian chic oozes from every part, with amenities such as 24-hour room service, gym, spa (lkr2500), and the gourmet restaurant Vox (see p88). Rooms are decorated in restful shades of cream and mocha; those on the upper floors have super sea views. Rates exclude breakfast (an extra lkr1500). The hotel’s about 2km from the city centre, but it runs a free city-centre shuttle service.

Our pick **Hótel Borg** (Map p72; ☎ 551 1440; www.hotelborg.is; Pósthússtræti 9-11; s/d/ste lkr23,500/29,500/45,000; ☎) This striking 1930s Art Deco palace is the most characterful of Iceland’s hotels – it’s like stepping back in time. A copper-and-wood elevator rattles up to individually designed rooms, decorated with antique furniture but complete with all mod cons, and bathrooms containing enormous showerheads. It’s located in prime position on Austurvöllur square, and its newly renovated restaurant, Silfur, is run by the same people as the city’s favourite Sjávarkjallarinn (p89). The buffet breakfast costs an extra lkr1300.

101 Hotel (Map p72; ☎ 580 0101; www.101hotel.is; Hverfisgata 10; s/d/ste from lkr27,900/29,900/37,900; ☎) Reykjavík’s newest boutique hotel is

devilishly divine. Its sensuous rooms – with yielding downy beds, iPod sound docks and Bose speakers, rich wooden floors, and glass-walled showers – may mean you skip the bars and opt for a night in instead. A spa with masseurs, a small gym and a glitterati restaurant-bar add to the opulence. Some people have been underwhelmed by the service, but all in all this is one of the city’s sexiest places to stay.

EATING

Reykjavík’s eateries vary from hot-dog stands to world-class restaurants. Two things are consistent: high quality, and high prices. For the types of eatery and opening hours, see p60. Reykjavík’s dining places are found mainly along Laugavegur, Hverfisgata and also Austurstræti.

Restaurants

ASIAN

Nuðluhúsið (Map p72; ☎ 552 2400; Vitastígur 10; mains from lkr900; ☎) 11.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 5-9pm Sat & Sun) City workers flock to this good-value Thai place for spicy lunchtime hits of spring rolls, curry and a huge selection of noodle dishes. There are a few basic tables, plus a handy takeaway.

Ning’s (Map pp68-9; ☎ 588 9899; Suðurlandsbraut 6; mains lkr1000-1700; ☎) 11.30am-10pm) A mouthwatering smell of frying pork greets you at this Chinese fast-food restaurant, handy for the City Hostel. There’s a good, cheap menu of noodles and stir-fries, and the cooking is MSG-free. The set lunch is very popular at lunchtime, or there’s a takeaway counter.

Krua Thai (Map p72; ☎ 561 0039; www.kruathai.is; Tryggvagata 14; mains lkr990-1900; ☎) noon-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 6-9.30pm Sun) Look beyond the simple interior to the tasty food: here you’ll find genuine recipes, popular with Thai residents of Reykjavík. The glossy photo-menu shows soups, spicy salads, curries and stir-fries; you order at the counter, and generous, freshly-cooked dishes appear looking just like they do in the snaps.

Maru (Map p72; ☎ 511 4440; www.maru.is; Aðalstræti 12; lkr1800-3000; ☎) 5.30-10pm Sun-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat) Sushi is the focus of this stylish restaurant, which uses fresh Icelandic fish to create dainty Japanese dishes. It also serves up all manner of miso soups, rice-noodle dishes and *yakitori* (Japanese kebabs), and there’s a pleasant amount of choice for vegetarians. Eat in with moonlike lampshades glowing overhead, or make use of the takeaway service.

INDIAN

Our pick **Austur India Félagið** (Map p72; ☎ 552 1630; Hverfisgata 56; mains lkr2200-3700; ☎) 6-10pm Sun-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat) The northernmost Indian restaurant in the world is an upmarket experience, with a minimalist interior and a select choice of sublime dishes (a favourite is the tandoori salmon). One of its finest features, though, is its lack of pretension – the atmosphere is relaxed and the service warm. Apparently Harrison Ford likes it – and who dares argue with Indy?

Indian Mango (Map p72; ☎ 551 7722; www.indianmango.is; cnr Frakkastígur & Grettisgata; mains lkr1900-3000; ☎) 11am-10pm Mon-Sat) This new restaurant specialises in Goan food, serving beef, duck, fish and some veggie mains. Its chef – poached from a five-star restaurant – makes up light, spicy, delicious dishes. Its bestselling creation is an Icelandic-Indian hybrid completely unique to this restaurant – *svartfugl* (guillemot) marinated in Indian spices (lkr2000). The only downside is the furniture, crammed in higgledy-piggledy and creating a rather chaotic atmosphere.

ITALIAN

Hornið (Map p72; ☎ 551 3340; Hafnarstræti 15; pizzas lkr1200-2000, mains lkr1700-3000; ☎) 11.30am-11pm) There’s an easy-going air at this bright Art Deco café-restaurant, with its warm terracotta tiles, weeping-fig plants and decently spaced tables. Pizzas are freshly made before your eyes, the prettily presented pasta meals will set you up for the day, and you can sample traditional Icelandic fish dishes.

Ristorante Italia (Map p72; ☎ 562 4630; www.italia.is; Laugavegur 11; dishes lkr1700-3500; ☎) 11.30am-11.30pm) One of the better Italian options, this family-run place has a proper wood-fired pizza oven, and good pasta and *secondi piatti* (mains). It’s a romantic option for a candle-lit dinner.

Our pick **La Primavera** (Map p72; ☎ 561 8555; www.laprimavera.is; Austurstræti 9; mains lkr1600-3650; ☎) noon-2.30pm & 6-10.30pm Mon-Fri, 6-10.30pm Sat & Sun) Pizza Hut it ain’t. This is a cultivated eatery serving contemporary Italian dishes – the pastas, gnocchi and polenta are all homemade. The menu is select, with some imaginative combinations – for example, pan-fried scallops with pomegranate and lime.

STEAKHOUSES

Hereford Steakhouse (Map p72; ☎ 511 3350; www.hereford.is; Laugavegur 53b; mains lkr2500-4000; ☎) 6-10pm) This modern 1st-floor steakhouse grills up

top-class steaks (of beef, lamb, turkey, veal and whale), priced by weight and cut. You can pick from fillets, T-bones, rib eyes and entrecôtes, and watch as they’re cooked at the grilling station in the centre of the dining room. There’s a good red-wine list. [Whale meat served.]

Café Ópera (Map p72; ☎ 552 9499; www.cafeopera.is; Lækjargata 2; mains lkr3000-5000; ☎) 5-10.30pm Mon-Thu, to 11.30pm Fri-Sun) Soothing Café Ópera, based upstairs in an old merchant’s house, occasionally has a piano player tickling the ivories. The house speciality is the entertaining ‘Hot Rock Fantasy’ – sizzling meat or fish steaks that you get to ‘cook’ yourself on slabs of mountain granite.

Argentina (Map p72; ☎ 551 9555; www.argentina.is; Barónsstígur 11a; mains lkr3000-5000; ☎) 6-10.30pm Sun-Thu, to 11.30pm Fri & Sat) This dark, fiery steakhouse rightly prides itself on its succulent locally raised beef – the best red meat you’ll eat in Reykjavík. It also serves tender char-grilled salmon, reindeer, lamb, pork and chicken, with a wine list to complement whatever choice you make.

GOURMET/ICELANDIC

Most upmarket restaurants (including those in the city’s top hotels) take great national pride in presenting Icelandic ingredients in their finest possible glory. Gourmet menus generally feature *bacalao* (salt cod), smoked lamb and seafood, and more unusual dishes such as guillemot, puffin and reindeer. Also see Seafood, p88.

Lækjarbrekka (Map p72; ☎ 551 4430; www.laekjarbrekka.is; Bankastræti 2; mains lkr2000-5000; ☎) 11am-11.30pm) This top-notch restaurant has built up its reputation over 20 years, cooking traditional Icelandic dishes (game, lobster, juicy pepper steak and mountain lamb) with half an eye on the tourist dollar. From June to August it puts on a high-quality fish buffet every evening from 6pm.

Perlan (Map pp68-9; ☎ 562 0200; www.perlan.is; Óskjuhlíð; mains lkr3000-5000; ☎) from 6.30pm) Perched on top of the city’s water tanks is the revolving restaurant Perlan, which spins at one sedate revolution every two hours. The views are superb, and, if you can tear your eyes away from the city-and-mountain vista, the grub (reindeer, lamb, flounder, guillemot) isn’t bad either. [Whale meat served.]

Our pick **Einar Ben** (Map p72; ☎ 511 5090; www.einarben.is; Ingólfstorg; mains lkr2600-4500; ☎) 6-10pm Mon-Thu, to 11pm Fri-Sun) One of the city’s finest restaurants, Einar Ben is frequented by diplomats

and is renowned for its top-class service and gastronomic marvels. Dishes are Icelandic with a continental twist – think puffin terrine, and lamb Dijon with blueberries and thyme.

our pick **Vox** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 444 5050; www.vox.restaurant.com; Suðurlandsbraut 2; mains lkr3500-5500; ☎ 6-10pm) The head chef at the Hótel Nordica's five-star restaurant serves up superb seasonal dishes – think pink-footed goose with caramelised apples – and there's usually a veggie option. The waiters sometimes bring out extra little treats for you to try – for example their amazing 'invisible gazpacho'! The daytime bistro puts on a recommended Sunday-brunch hot buffet (lkr2300/1150 for adults/children six to 12) – gorge on fruit, bread, shrimps, bacon, eggs, sausage and pancakes until you burst.

Skólábrú (Map p72; ☎ 562 4455; Skólábrú 1; mains lkr2500-6000, 4-course gourmet menu lkr8900; ☎ noon-2pm & 6-10pm Tue-Fri, 6-10pm Sat) The wonderfully cosy and romantic Skólábrú is in an old wood-and-tin house just off Austurvöllur. It specialises in Icelandic fare presented with a nouvelle cuisine-style perfection – langoustines on puff pastry, glazed breast of duck with vanilla sauce, and various lamb and fish creations. If you just can't choose, go for the 'surprise' menu (lkr6900).

INTERNATIONAL

Café Victor (Map p72; ☎ 561 9555; www.cafévictor.is; Ingólfstorg; light meals lkr790-1500, mains lkr1300-3000; ☎ 11.30am-10pm) The Victor is a scruffy bar-bistro with a beery smell, reminiscent of an English pub (there's even an old red phone box and premiership footy matches). British families gravitate here for lunch or early-evening meals – English breakfast, burgers, nachos and pizza, or more substantial spare ribs and seafood. At weekends its large spaces fill with drinkers and it turns into a big, loud club.

Enrico's (Map p72; ☎ 552 0077; www.enricos.is; Laugavegur 3; lunch specials lkr850-1300, evening mains lkr1500-2700; ☎ 11.30am-11pm Sun-Thu, to 11.30pm Fri & Sat) Low-slung coffee tables and leather sofas line the windows, with a more classical set-up at the back for evening dining. Prices are lower than you might expect from the décor, and the wide-ranging world menu contains some stomach-pleasing items. Lunchtime soups, salads, noodles and sandwiches are particularly good value.

Askur Brasserie (Map pp68-9; ☎ 553 9700; www.askur.is; Suðurlandsbraut 4; mains lkr2000-3500; ☎ 11.30am-10pm)

Close to the big hotels on Suðurlandsbraut, this relaxed family restaurant is popular with tourists and locals alike. Despite its noncentral location, it's wise to book on Friday and Saturday. There's a long menu of burgers, steaks, pasta, lamb, fish and sizzling fajitas, many of which come with soup and a free visit to the salad bar (loosen your belts). The weekday lunchtime buffet is good value at lkr1590.

Apótek (Map p72; ☎ 575 7900; www.veitingar.is; Austurstræti 16; mains lkr2300-4500; ☎ 11.30am-1pm Mon-Thu, to 11.30pm Fri & Sat, 3pm-midnight Sun) Apótek's cheerful café presents Asian food along with workaday staples such as ham sandwiches. The restaurant proper is all hard modern lines, softened slightly by velvet drapes and delicate Chinese-silk light shades. It's a little clinical, but the sophisticated Asian-Icelandic fusion dishes (such as grilled tuna with wasabi) are full of clean, sharp flavours.

our pick **Tapas Barinn** (Map p72; ☎ 551 2344; www.tapas.is; Vesturgata 3b; tapas plates from lkr450; ☎ 5-11pm Sun-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat) Indecisive types will have a tough time at this outstanding tapas bar, with over 50 different dishes on the menu – a thousand possible combinations! Alongside familiar Spanish nibbles such as mixed olives and *patatas bravas*, you'll find Icelandic ingredients turned into tasty tidbits – puffin with blueberries, saltfish, and pan-fried lobster tails. Expect to spend around lkr3500 per person for a full meal.

SEAFOOD

our pick **Sægreifinn** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 553 1500; Verubúð 8, small-boat harbour; mains lkr900-2000; ☎ 11am-10pm) Eccentric Sægreifinn serves up fresh seafood in what looks almost like a 1950s English chip shop...except for the stuffed seal. The owner is a sprightly old gent who buys and cooks all the fish himself – lobster soup (lkr650) and fish kebabs (lkr600) are specialities. He only speaks Icelandic, so make sure you know what you're asking for! [Whale meat served.]

Litli Ljótí Andarunginn (Map p72; ☎ 552 2410; www.andarunginn.is; Lækjargata 6b; mains lkr1500-2500; ☎ noon-midnight Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat) Descend into this old wooden building to sample home-style cooking in cosy candle-lit surroundings. This relaxed bar-restaurant serves hearty Icelandic food at reasonable prices. Between May and October its nightly all-you-can-eat fish buffet (lkr2500, with salad and soup) is good value.

Lauga-Ás (Map pp68-9; ☎ 553 1620; www.laugaas.is; Laugarásvegur; mains lkr2000-3500; ☎ 11am-9pm Mon-Fri,

3-9pm Sat & Sun) For about 30 years this small, friendly restaurant, close to the City Hostel, has been quietly cooking up some great-tasting grub. It's particularly well known for its seafood soup and lobster but it also serves deceptively large portions of pasta, steaks and lighter meals. Book ahead on Friday and Saturday night.

Vín og Skel (Map p72; ☎ 534 4700; www.vinogskel.is; Laugavegur 55b; mains lkr2000-4000) Tucked inside a courtyard off Laugavegur, this simple restaurant (which feels like a French seaside eatery) devotes itself wholeheartedly to perfect seafood. Bouillabaisse soup, scallops, langoustines, cod and mussels all feature on its menu, chalked up on a big Gallic-looking blackboard. [Whale meat served.]

our pick **Við Tjörnina** (Map p72; ☎ 551 8666; www.vitjornina.is; Templarásund 3; lkr2000-4000; ☎ from 6pm) People return again and again to this famed seafood establishment, tucked away near Tjörnin. It serves up beautifully presented Icelandic feasts such as guillemot with port, garlic langoustine, or the house speciality marinated cod chins (far more delicious than they sound!). The restaurant itself is wonderfully distinctive – it feels like a quirky upperclass 1950s drawing room.

Þrið Frakkur (Map pp68-9; ☎ 552 3939; www.3frakkur.com; Baldursgata 14; mains lkr2700-4000; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6-10pm Mon-Fri, 6-11pm Sat & Sun) Owner-chef Úlfar Eysteinnsson has built up an excellent reputation at this snug little restaurant – apparently a favourite of Jamie Oliver's. Specialities include salt cod, anglerfish and *plokkfiskur* (fish stew) with black bread. You can also sample nonfish items, such as seal, puffin...and lovingly prepared whale steaks. [Whale meat served.]

Siggihall (Map p72; ☎ 511 6677; www.siggihall.is; Hótel Óðinsvé, Þórsgrata 1; mains lkr3500-4500; ☎ from 6pm Tue-Sun) Run by Iceland's most famous TV chef, this upmarket seafood restaurant is regarded as one of the finest in Reykjavík. The menu features many fishy favourites, with Icelandic-Mediterranean fusion dishes taking precedence. Siggihall is best known for its *bacalao*, served in different styles.

Tveir Fiskar (Map pp68-9; ☎ 511 3474; www.restaurant.is; Geirsgata 9; mains lkr3000-5000; ☎ from 5pm) Right on the harbour, with a great view of the boats, this is one of Reykjavík's most famous fish restaurants. It's an upmarket place serving everything from langoustine and caviar to *bacalao* (salt cod). Its chef has won prizes for his delectable seafood, as fresh as it comes and highly

recommended. The speciality here is bouillabaisse. [Dolphin and whale meat served.]

Humarhúsið (Map p72; www.humarhusid.is; ☎ 561 3303; Amtmannsstígur 1; mains lkr3100-5000) Understated and utterly elegant, the Lobster House is justly celebrated for its succulent shellfish, langoustine and lobster. Although crustaceans feature in most dishes, you can also sample game, fish, lamb and beef; plus there's a vegetarian option for that awkward critter in your dining party.

our pick **Sjávarkjallarinn** (Map p72; ☎ 511 1212; www.sjavarkjallarinn.is; Aðalstræti 2; dishes lkr3000-5800; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & from 6pm) Currently the best dining experience to be had in Reykjavík, this atmospheric subterranean restaurant serves up exotic dishes. Shimmering fish and succulent crustaceans are combined with the unexpected – pomegranate, coconut, litchi and chilli – and presented like miniature works of art. It's at the top end of the price scale but worth every króna – go on, treat yourselves.

VEGETARIAN

Grænn Kostur (Map p72; ☎ 552 2028; www.graennkostur.is; Skólavörðustígur 8; daily special lkr1100; ☎ 11.30am-9pm Mon-Sat, 1-9pm Sun) Tucked away in a small shopping arcade off Skólavörðustígur, this friendly little café serves great-tasting veggie set meals, with a daily-changing menu. There are also lighter snacks such as pizza, pies and salads. The high round tables and bar stools aren't particularly relaxing, but it's worth sitting up straight for good food.

our pick **Á Næstu Grösom** (First Vegetarian; Map p72; www.anaestugrosom.is; ☎ 552 8410; Laugavegur 20b; daily special lkr1350; ☎ 11.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 5-10pm Sun) This first-rate veggie restaurant, in a cheerful orange room overlooking Laugavegur, offers several daily specials. It uses seasonal organic veg, and inventive dressings guaranteed to give even lettuce new appeal. Things get extra spicy on Indian nights (Friday and Saturday), and organic wine and beer are available.

Cafés

Reykjavík's cool and cosy cafés are one of the city's best features. Lingering is encouraged – many offer magazines and free wi-fi access. They're the best places to go for morning coffee and light, tasty lunches. As the evening wears on, most undergo a Jekyll-and-Hyde transformation – coffee becomes beer, DJs materialise in dark corners, and suddenly you're not in a café but a kick-ass bar! Magic. Because the dividing line is so blurred, also see p92.

Babalú (Map p72; ☎ 552 2278; Skólavörðustígur 22a) More inviting than your own living room, this new café is übercute (if smoky). It only sells tea, coffee, hot chocolate and the odd crepe, but once you've settled into one of its snug corners you won't want to move. In summer there's occasional live music.

Ömmu Kaffi (Map p72; ☎ 552 9680; Austurstræti 20; snacks lkr250-500; ☎ closed Sun; ☒) Friendly faces greet you at this cosy nonsmoking coffee shop. A short list of edibles includes soup, lasagne, cakes and Icelandic doughnuts, and there are some unusual coffees on offer. Grab a paper or zone out to the mellifluous sound of live jazz (Thursday).

Kaffi Mokka (Map p72; ☎ 552 1174; Skólavörðustígur 3a; ☎ 9.30am-11.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-11.30pm Sun) Reykjavík's oldest coffee shop is an acquired taste. Its décor hasn't changed since the 1950s, and its original mosaic pillars and copper lights either look retro-cool or dead tatty, depending on your mood! It has a very mixed clientele – from older folk to tourists to trendy young artists – and a selection of sandwiches, cakes and giant waffles.

Kofi Tómasar Frænda (Koffin; Map p72; ☎ 551 1855; Laugavegur 2; snacks around lkr600; ☎ 10am-1am Mon-Thu, to 5.30am Fri & Sat, 11am-1am Sun) Subterranean Koffin has a studenty feel. Relax with magazines and a snack (nachos, lasagne, sandwiches, cakes or chocolate-coated marzipan) and watch disconnected feet scurry along Laugavegur. At night the place turns into a candle-lit bar with DJs. It's a wireless hot spot.

Café Paris (Map p72; ☎ 551 1020; Austurstræti 14; snacks lkr450-870; ☎ 8am-1am Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri, 9am-3am Sat, 9am-1am Sun) This old favourite has undergone a recent refit and is now better than ever – leather-upholstered chairs provide a level of bum-comfort previously missing. Although there's a selection of light meals – sandwiches, crepes, tacos – people come here for coffee and cakes, and to check out the crowds.

Café Konditori Copenhagen (Map pp68-9; ☎ 588 1550; www.konditori.is; Suðurlandsbraut 4a; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) For pure cake porn, head to this café near the city hostel – Danish-influenced delicacies flaunt glazed strawberries, curls of chocolate and dribbled cream. It also does more prosaic sandwiches and good coffee, which you can consume from supercomfy leather seats. There's a branch at the Kringlan shopping centre.

Café Garðurinn (Map p72; ☎ 561 2345; Klappargistur 37; soup/main/both lkr650/1050/1500; ☎ 11am-6.30pm Mon-

Fri, noon-5pm Sat, closed Aug) This tiny but tasteful veggie café is based round seven tables and the hum of civilised conversation. Choice is limited, but the daily soup and main are always delicious and unusual (we can vouch for the weird-sounding Catalanian tofu balls!). Half portions are available.

Té og Kaffi (Map p72; ☎ 562 2322; www.teogkaffi.is; Laugavegur 24; snacks lkr600-1100; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 11am-6pm Sun) A Starbucks-style café, complete with barristas and a huge coffee menu (including Baileys and Swiss chocolate flavours). There are plenty of yummy cakes, quiches, salads and soups too. It's popular with families, footsore Saturday shoppers and LP readers.

Kaffitár (Map p72; ☎ 511 4540; www.kaffitar.is; Bankastræti 8; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun; ☒) Another of the modern breed of coffee shops, Kaffitár has opted for barristas, flavoured syrups, merchandised mugs and Italian biscuits by the till. The service is personal, and there's even a small play area for toddlers. It's a wireless hotspot, and there's a branch at the Kringlan shopping centre.

Kaffi Hjómáland (Map p72; ☎ 517 1980; Laugavegur 21; www.kaffihjomalind.org; snacks lkr650-1100; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Fri, 11am-11pm Sat & Sun; ☒) This commendable organic and Fair Trade café is run on a not-for-profit basis. It looks like a 1950s home with 1970s flourishes (prayer flags, patterned chairs, hand-painted cups and saucers), and is a meeting-place for Reykjavík's radicals. Wireless hot spot.

our pick Café Cultura (Map p72; ☎ 530 9314; www.cultura.is; Hverfisgata 18; snacks/light meals lkr800-1400; ☎ 11.30am-1am Mon-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat, 1pm-1am Sun) Cosmopolitan Cultura has scratched-up wooden floors, mosaic tables, and well-priced Asian, Mediterranean- and Arabic-influenced nosh – stir-fries, felafel, spicy meatballs and couscous cuisine. There's a tolerant attitude to kids. Free tango lessons start at 8pm on Wednesday, and it becomes a funky bar at weekends.

Svarta Kaffið (Map p72; ☎ 551 2999; Laugavegur 54; snacks/light meals lkr800-1450; ☎ 11am-1am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat; ☒) Order the thick homemade soup (one meat and one veg option daily for lkr1090) at this quirky cavelike café – it's served piping hot in fantastic bread bowls. Other light lunches include nachos, burritos, toasted sarnies and lasagne. It's also a whimsical nightspot, with African masks and dim lighting adding a certain frisson.

Vegamót (Map p72; ☎ 511 3040; www.vegamat.is; Vegamótastígur 4; snacks/light meals lkr800-2190) A long-running café-bar-club, but still a voguish place to eat, drink, see and be seen. There's a startling choice on the 'global' menu, including Mexican salad, seafood *quesadilla*, sesame-fried monkfish, and blackened chicken. The attached takeaway charges 10% less.

Kaffi Sólón (Map p72; ☎ 562 3232; www.solon.is; Bankastræti 7a; snacks/light meals lkr900-2000; ☎ 11am-1am Mon-Thu, to 5am Fri & Sat, noon-midnight Sun) Decked out with white-leather seats and oversized artwork, this ultracool bistro (and nightspot) offers tasty international dishes at reasonable prices. There's a separate 'health' menu with calorie-lite meals, and veggies should head here for the best quiche in town. Wireless hot spot.

our pick b5 (Map p72; ☎ 552 9600; www.b5.is; Bankastræti 5; light lunch lkr800-1200, evening mains lkr1500-3000; ☎ 11am-midnight Sun-Wed, to 1am Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) With its barely there name (short for Bankastræti 5), supersleek interior, and sketchpads in case you're seized by artistic inspiration, you may suspect this new bistro-bar of great pretentiousness. Thankfully, you'd be wrong: customers loll on the huge leather sofa wolfing down light Scandinavian-style bistro meals without the slightest hint of snobbery. On Friday and Saturday night it becomes a laid-back bar playing ambient tunes. Wireless hot spot.

Grái Kötturinn (Map p72; ☎ 551 1544; Hverfisgata 16a) This tiny six-table café looks like a cross between an eccentric bookshop and a lop-sided art gallery – quite charming! Opening hours are odd, but it serves breakfast from 7am weekdays and 8am weekends – toast, bagels, American pancakes, or bacon and eggs served on thick, buttery slabs of freshly baked bread.

Quick Eats

HOT DOGS, KEBABS & PIZZAS

Icelanders are utterly addicted to hot dogs, and they swear the best come from **Bæjarinis Beztu** (Map p72; Tryggvagata; ☎ 10am-1am Sun-Thu, 11am-4am Fri & Sat), a van near the harbour patronised by Bill Clinton! Use the vital sentence *Eina með öllu* ('One with everything') for mustard, ketchup, rémoulade and crunchy onions. The kiosks of **Hlöllla Bátar** (Map p72; ☎ 11am-2am Sun-Thu, 10am-7am Fri & Sat) and **Emmessis & Pylsur** (Map p72; ☎ 10am-11pm) on Ingólfstorg sell ice cream and hot dogs (lkr330 to lkr790).

Nonnabiti (Map p72; ☎ 551 2312; Hafnarstræti 18; snacks lkr280-690; ☎ to 2am) serves burgers and hot dogs; when you've overdone the fried meat, **Kebabhúsið** (Map p72; ☎ 561 3070; Lækjargata 2; ☎ to 11pm Sun-Thu, to 7am Fri & Sat) offers falafel and fish and chips (around lkr800).

Reykjavík residents are devoted to the pizzeria **Eldsmiðjan** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 562 3838; www.eldsmidjan.is; Bragagata 38a; pizzas around lkr1100; ☎ 11.30am-11.30pm), tucked away on a quiet residential street. Its fiercely busy takeaway serves the best pizzas in the city, baked in a brick oven fired by Icelandic birch, or you can sit down to devour.

There is a **food court** (Map pp68-9; Miklabraut; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Wed, to 9pm Thu, to 8pm Fri, 10am-6.30pm Sat, noon-5.30pm Sun) upstairs in the Kringlan shopping centre.

WORKERS' CANTEENS

Several workers' canteens around town serve cheap, filling traditional grub.

Fljótt og Gott (Map pp68-9; ☎ 552 1288; Vatnsmyrarvegur 10; mains lkr1100-1700; ☎ 7am-11.30pm) Inside the BSÍ bus terminal, this cafeteria serves burgers, sandwiches and 'food like Mum makes it': big roast dinners and Icelandic delicacies such as *svið* (singd sheep's head), *plokkfiskur* (creamy haddock and potato mash) and salt cod.

Múlakaffi (Map pp68-9; ☎ 533 7737; www.mulakaffi.is; Hallarmúli; canteen meals lkr1100-1600; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat, 11am-8pm Sun) Múlakaffi has recently been renovated, but the shining-white walls and brand-new tables can't disguise its old-fashioned soul, and the clientele is still 100% working men. Hearty local meals such as meatballs, salt cod, roast pork and rye bread are dished up from the hotplate.

Self-Catering

ALCOHOL

Alcohol is prohibitively pricey in all bars and restaurants. The only shop licensed to sell alcohol is the government-owned liquor store **Vín Búð**, which has six branches across Reykjavík. The most central branch is on **Austurstræti** (Map p72; ☎ 562 6511; Austurstræti 10a). There are also branches in **Kringlan shopping centre** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 568 9060) and **Smáralind shopping centre** (☎ 544 2112). All open 11am-6pm Monday to Thursday and Saturday, and 11am to 7pm Friday.

BAKERIES

Iceland has fantastic bakeries with good coffee, sandwiches, soup and drool-inducing cakes, and many have tables for eating them.

Kornið (Map pp68-9; ☎ 564 1828; Hrísteigur 47; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-4pm Sat, 8.30am-4pm Sun) Handy for the City Hostel and camp site.

Kornið (Map p72; ☎ 552 1803; Lækjargata 4; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) Central bakery, open till 10pm in summer.

Bakarí Sandholt (Map p72; ☎ 551 3524; www.sandholt.is; Laugavegur 36; ☎ 7.30am-6.15pm Mon-Fri, to 5.30pm Sat, 8.30am-5pm Sun) An old favourite on Laugavegur.

SUPERMARKETS

Bónus (☎ 11am-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 10am-7.30pm Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, Kringlan also noon-6pm Sun) The cheapest supermarket, at Laugavegur 59 (Map p72) and Kringlan shopping centre (Map pp68-9).

10-11 (☎ 8am or 9am-11pm or midnight) Has many branches in the city, at Austurstræti (Map p72), Hverfisgata (Map pp68-9) and Laugalækur (Map pp68-9).

DRINKING

See the boxed text, opposite, for all the low-down on Reykjavík's infamous pub crawl.

Bars

our pick Café Oliver (Map p72; ☎ 552 2300; www.caféoliver.is; Laugavegur 20a) One of Reykjavík's newest café-bars, Oliver is the most in-vogue place for brunch, and for partying late in superstyle. DJs pump out the tunes on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, with long queues snaking back from the doors.

our pick Sirkus (Map p72; ☎ 511 8022; Klapparstígur 31) Our personal favourite, this kooky bar has dinky fairy lights, bus seats in the attic, an annual Tom Selleck Moustache Competition, and a loyal local following. DJs and bands play regularly, and there's a summer garden where you can snatch gulps of fresh air.

Kaffibarinn (Map p72; ☎ 551 1588; Bergstaðastræti 1) This old house, with the London Underground symbol over the door, contains one of Reykjavík's coolest bars; it even had a starring role in cult movie *101 Reykjavík*. At weekends you'll need a famous face or a battering ram to get in. At other times it's a place for artistic types to chill with their Macs. Wireless hot spot.

Vegamót (Map p72; ☎ 511 3040; www.vegamot.is; Vegamótstígur 4) Vegamót is another smart café-by-day, club-by-night – wear your best togs if you want to fit in. The buzzy balcony is a fine place to watch the fashion-conscious flocks. There are usually top DJs and a thronging dance floor. The minimum age here is 22.

Thorvaldsen Bar (Map p72; ☎ 511 1413; www.thorvaldsen.is; Austurstræti 8-10) This understated modernist bar is ultraposh, from the fusion-style food to the clientele. There are DJs from Thursday to Saturday – dress up well or you won't get in, and after midnight be prepared to queue...and queue. There's a tiny dance floor, and 'theme nights' from Caribbean Wednesday, Mojito Thursday and Sushi Sunday.

our pick Salt Lounge Bar (Map p72; ☎ 599 1000; Pósthússtræti 2) A lustrous bar-restaurant attached to the Radisson SAS 1919 Hotel, Salt is gloriously upmarket. It's all clean Scandinavian lines, low luxurious seats and soft purple-toned lighting – and they even bring the cocktails to your table. It's not a place to get raddled in, but maybe one for early-evening drinkies.

101 Hotel Bar (Map p72; ☎ 580 0101; www.101hotel.is; Hverfisgata 10) Frankly, we fear being ejected as riffraff from this beautiful granite-and-white-leather cocktail bar. Based inside the ultracool 101 Hotel, this long, thin, sleek, chic space is favoured by local glamourpusses and celebrities. Although it gets rammed to the rafters at weekends, it also closes early (at 1am) – dress to the hilt, and get on down there.

Q Bar (Map p72; ☎ 551 9660; Ingólfsstræti 3) This is one of the smallest bars in Reykjavík. It's smart, stylish and minimalist, with tables outside in summer – perfect for a mellow early-evening pint. There's live jazz/blues on Thursday.

Hressingarskálinn (Map p72; ☎ 561 2240; www.hresso.is; Austurstræti 20) 'Hressó' to its friends, this spacious L-shaped café-bar serves a diverse menu till 10pm daily (everything from porridge to *plokkfiskur*; mains 1kr980 to 1kr1180). At weekends it loses its civilised veneer and concentrates on beer, bar and dancing till 5.30am; a garden out the back provides fresh air. There's also usually a DJ or live music on Thursday night. Wireless hot spot.

Barinn (Map p72; ☎ 578 7800; Laugavegur 22) At the time of writing the jury was still out on Barinn. Its previous incarnation was a laid-back bluesy-grungy kind of place, but it's since been revamped and has yet to find its crowd. It's all much whiter and brighter, with chalkboard menus, bistro food and weekend DJs. Drop by to see how it's shaping up.

Kaffi Reykjavík (Map p72; ☎ 552 3030; www.kaffireykjavik.is; Vesturgata 2) Kaffi Reykjavík is more restaurant than hot nightspot, but it's mentioned here because of its USP – a small ice bar carved from chunks of a glacier. Pop in

if you're restless for novelty – ponchos and mittens are provided.

Pubs

The following are our picks for a more relaxed night on the town.

our pick Kaffi Brennslan (Map p72; ☎ 561 3600; www.brennslan.is; Pósthússtræti 9) All kinds of folk frequent Brennslan, an unpretentious Art Deco café-bar – conventional types mix with the avant-garde. It entices a 20s and 30s crowd with beers from 20 countries, but it never gets so packed that you can't move.

Bar 11 (Map p72; ☎ 511 1180; Laugavegur 11) This bar has calmed down over the last couple of years: it's now more of a place for groups of younger blokes to have a matey beer. It has a great jukebox (a rare thing in DJ-obsessed Reykjavík) and there's table football upstairs.

Ólstofan (Map p72; ☎ 552 4687; Vegamótastígur 4) Locals come to this no-nonsense bar specifically to avoid all that dancing rubbish. You turn up to drink beer and relax. It's one of the few drinking holes in the capital without music.

THE RUNTUR

Reykjavík is renowned for its Friday- and Saturday-night *runtur*, when industrious Icelanders abandon work and pub crawl with passion. Friday night is the big one; midweek drinking is not really done, although it's gradually becoming more common for people to go out on Thursday night, when many bars have DJs or live music.

Much of the partying happens in the city's cafés and bistros, which transform into raucous beer-soaked bars at the weekend; there are also dedicated pubs and clubs. But it's not the quantity of drinking dens that makes Reykjavík's nightlife special – it's the upbeat energy that pours from them!

Places usually open until 1am Sunday to Thursday, and until 3am or later on Friday and Saturday. 'In' clubs have long queues at weekends.

Thanks to the high price of alcohol, things don't get going until late. Icelanders brave the melee at the alcohol store Vín Búð (see p91), then toddle home for a prepub party. Once they're merry, people hit town around midnight, party till 5am, queue for a hot dog, then topple into bed or the gutter, whichever is more convenient. Considering the quantity of booze swilling around, everything is amazingly good-natured – it's rare to witness the kinds of ugly scenes you get in most English towns on a Friday night.

Rather than settling into one venue for the evening, Icelanders like to cruise from bar to bar, getting progressively louder and less inhibited as the evening goes on. Most of the action is concentrated on Laugavegur and Austurstræti. Budget for Icelandic prices – you'll pay at least 1kr700 per pint of beer, and some venues have cover charges (about 1kr1000) after midnight. Things change fast – check *Grapevine* for the latest listings. You should dress up in Reykjavík, although there are pub-style places with a more relaxed dress code. The minimum drinking age is 20.

If you're in a small group but want to witness the nightlife with a crowd, the **Reykjavík Pub Crawl** (The Night Circle; ☎ 847 5337; per person 1kr3000) wheels round a selection of bars from 10pm onwards in summer; the 1kr3000 fee includes one hour of free drinking, admission to a nightclub, a cocktail, and a free hot dog! – not a bad deal if you can stay standing.

Prikið (Map p72; ☎ 551 2866; Bankastræti 12) Atmospheric Prikið draws in a youngish crowd, particularly towards the end of the night – it's one of the later-closing bars (5.30am). Dancers grind away cheek to cheek on the jammed dance floor. If you survive the night you can come back at noon the next day for a 'hangover sandwich'.

Nelly's (Map p72; ☎ 551 2477; Þinghólfstræti 2) By serving the cheapest beer in town (1kr900 for 1.5L), publike Nelly's naturally pulls in a young, studently crowd. There's a cheerful atmosphere, DJs and live bands play regularly, it opens until 6am at weekends, and there are daily offers on alcohol.

our pick Dillon (Map p72; ☎ 511 2400; Laugavegur 30) Beer, beads and the odd flying bottle...after changing hands the other year, atmospheric Dillon has turned into more of a RRRRRROCK pub. There are occasional live concerts, and an unusual DJ in white-haired white-wine-and-rum-swilling 'rokkmamman' Andrea Jonsdóttir, a kind of female Icelandic John Peel.

Grand Rokk (Map p72; ☎ 551 5522; www.grandrokk.is; Smiðjustígur 6) This down-to-earth pub was once

a great live-music venue, but in a recent shock-horror statement the owners announced that they're going to install large-screen TVs upstairs and turn it into a sports bar.

If Viking beer isn't doing it for you, head for a pint of Guinness at one of Reykjavík's two Irish pubs – **Celtic Cross** (Map p72; ☎ 511 3240; Hverfisgata 26), done up like a funeral parlour and with bands in the basement at weekends, and **Dubliner** (Map p72; ☎ 511 3233; Hafnarstræti 4), with live music every night from 10.30pm.

Clubs

The clubs below tend to shut between 5am and 6am at the weekend. Some charge admission.

Pravda (Map p72; ☎ 552 9222; Austurstræti 22) Based in an old police lock-up, Pravda is full of cutting-edge design, and has four bars and one of the city's largest dance floors. It hosts the longest-running club night held in Reykjavík – a drum-and-bass (*bumba & bassi*) night on the first Thursday of the month – and thrives on a 20s-30s clientele. Admission is 1kr500 after midnight.

ourpick **Kaffi Sólon** (Map p72; ☎ 562 3232; www.solon.is; Bankastræti 7a) This great bistro becomes a swish club (admission free) for a beautiful, martini-drinking set by night. There are long queues, in-demand DJs, moody lighting and a dance floor containing around 17 people per sq m. There are usually DJs or live music on Thursday.

Glaubar (Map p72; ☎ 552 6868; Tryggvagata 20) This American-style sports bar is young, brash and boisterous, with a huge video screen showing matches, deafening music, and weekend DJs. It's where very drunk people tend to end up at dawn, thanks to its late opening hours (to 6am).

Hverfisbarinn (Map p72; ☎ 511 6700; www.hverfisbarinn.is; Hverfisgata 20) Although it's been around for years now, Hverfisbarinn is still a strong runner for the title of Reykjavík's most popular club. Attracting a stylish, student crowd, it has long queues at weekends. It's decorated in cool Scandinavian style, there's cheap Carlsberg and live music on Thursday from 9.30pm, and DJs do their stuff till late on Friday and Saturday.

NASA (Map p72; ☎ 511 1313; nasa@nasa.is; Austurvöllur) The biggest nightclub in Reykjavík, NASA is a stripped-pine affair filled with Prada-clad crowds. It plays chart music and club anthems, and is also a venue for live bands – email for upcoming music. Admission is 1kr1000.

Rex (Map p72; ☎ 552 5599; www.rex.is; Austurstræti 9) Rex caters to an older, richer and more beautiful crowd than your average club. It's a place where business deals are made over perfect cocktails, and where visiting celebs can party in peace. Its three floors glow with rich red wallpaper, soft velvet seats and chandeliers.

ENTERTAINMENT Cinemas

Cinemas in Reykjavík are usually American-style multiplexes showing American blockbusters. Movies are screened in their original language with Icelandic subtitles. All cinemas charge 1kr800/450 per adult/child under six, and films are usually shown at 6pm, 8pm and 10pm. The free newspaper *Morgunblaðið* lists shows and times, or click on the 'Í Bío' tab at www.kvikmyndir.is.

Háskólabío (Map pp68-9; ☎ 525 5400; Hagatorg) At the university; sometimes shows arts films.

Laugarásbío (Map pp68-9; ☎ 553 2075; Laugarás) Near the City Hostel.

Regnboginn (Map p72; ☎ 551 9000; Hverfisgata 54) Central cinema, sometimes shows arts films.

Sambíoinn (Map pp68-9; ☎ 588 0800; Kringlunni 4-6) In Kringlan shopping centre.

Smárabío (☎ 564 0000; Kópavogur) Iceland's biggest cinema, in Smáralind shopping centre.

Cultural Activities

Reykjavík has several theatre groups, an opera house and a symphony orchestra. Information on current events can be found in *What's On in Reykjavík*, *Grapevine* or the daily papers.

Íslenska Óperan (Map p72; ☎ box office 511 4200; www.opera.is; Ingólfstræti) The Icelandic Opera has a busy programme of international operas. Lunchtime concerts cost 1kr1000 and evening shows 1kr2900 to 1kr4800.

Iceland Symphony Orchestra (Map pp68-9; ☎ 545 2500; www.sinfonia.is; Háskólabío, Hagatorg; tickets 1kr2500-3800) The orchestra will move to flashy new harbourside premises in 2009, but for now it's based at the Reykjavík University cinema. There are around 60 classical performances per season, normally on Thursday at 7.30pm.

National Theatre (Map p72; ☎ 585 1200; www.leikhusid.is; Lindargata 7; tickets adult/under 16yr 1kr3000/2300; ☎ box office 12.30-6pm Mon & Tue, to 8pm Wed-Sun, theatre closed Jul & Aug) The most important of several venues in the city, the National Theatre has three separate stages and puts on around 12 plays, musicals and operas per year, from modern Icelandic works to Shakespeare.

Reykjavík City Theatre (Map pp68-9; ☎ 568 8000; www.borgarleikhus.is; Kringlan, Listabraut 3; adult/concession/under 12s 1kr2900/2200/free) The other important theatre in Reykjavík, this venue is behind Kringlan shopping centre. It stages at least six plays and musicals per year, showing at around 8pm from Thursday to Sunday. The **Icelandic Dance Company** (☎ 588 0900; www.id.is) is in residence there.

Íónó Theatre (Map p72; ☎ 551 9181; Baldursgata 37; tickets adult/7-12yr 1kr2500/1800; ☎ 8.30pm) In July and August there are tourist performances at this lakeside venue. 'The Best of Light Nights', a mixed bag of Icelandic history, dance, folk tales, ghost stories and a slide show, usually runs on Monday and Tuesday. 'How Do You Like Iceland?', a two-actor romp through history, is shown on Wednesday.

Live Music

At the time of writing, Reykjavík was reeling with shock as one of the city's oldest venues went bankrupt and a second pronounced that it no longer wanted to stage live bands! But the Reykjavík scene is robust and strangely organic, and other venues are already beginning to emerge. **Café Amsterdam** (Map p72; ☎ 551 3800; Hafnarstræti 5) has been around for aeons, but it now seems to be evolving as *the* new place to catch up-and-coming bands, and there are frequent live performances at various bars, pubs and clubs, including **Nelly's** (p93), **Sirkus** (p92) and **NASA** (opposite).

To catch up with the current state of Icelandic music, consult the free English-language paper *Grapevine* (widely available), or pop into one of the city's two independent music shops (see p96), where you might even catch a live performance.

Sport

The country's passion for football (soccer) is huge. However, the Icelandic league is on a tiny scale and matches are generally played at suburban sports grounds. One of Reykjavík's biggest teams is **KR** (www.kr.is), who play in Newcastle United strip! Their home ground is KR-völlur. Cup and international matches are played at the **national stadium** (Laugardalsvöllur; Map pp68-9; ☎ 510 2914) in Laugardalur; see the sports sections of Reykjavík's newspapers for fixtures, and buy tickets directly from the venue.

The Reykjavík Marathon (see p81), held annually in August, is tremendously popular. Contact your local running club for informa-

tion on how to participate, or turn up to cheer the runners on.

SHOPPING

Spending sprees in Reykjavík are an expensive business – most items are cheaper back home. However, there are some tantalising shops selling unusual presents. Look out for well-made Icelandic sweaters, cutting-edge T-shirts and jewellery, CDs of the latest bands, bags of dried fish, chocolate-covered liquorice, and bottles of the Icelandic schnapps *brennivín* (your friends may not thank you!).

Austurstræti and Hafnarstræti contain tourist stores selling puffin mugs and troll trinkets; Skólavörðustígur sells arty-crafty one-offs; and Laugavegur is the main shopping street.

For information about tax-free shopping, see p317.

Antiques & Bric-a-Brac

There are several 'antique' shops about, but they're basically overpriced junk shops. For details of the Kolaportid Flea Market, see p79.

Friða Frænka (Map p72; ☎ 551 4730; Vesturgata 3; ☎ noon-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) This place is a two-storey treasure trove of everything from antique furniture to '60s plastic kitsch. Items are piled precariously in tiny side rooms – the art-installation effect adds to the experience.

Clothes

Reykjavíkurs are style crazy, and new clothing boutiques are always opening up. For international brand-name clothing, try the two big shopping centres (see p96).

66° North (Map p72; ☎ 517 6020; www.66north.is; Bankastræti 5; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) Iceland's outdoor-clothing company began by making all-weather wear for Arctic fishermen. This metamorphosed into weatherproof but fashionable streetwear – coats, fleeces, hats and gloves. The branch at Kringlan shopping centre also opens on Sunday.

ELM (Map p72; ☎ 511 0991; www.elm.is; Laugavegur 1; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) Black-and-cream women's fashion is on sale here – the designs are unmissable Icelandic, with sharp, eccentric but very flattering cuts.

Handknitting Association of Iceland (Map p72; ☎ 552 1890; www.handknit.is; Skólavörðustígur 19; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) Traditional handmade hats, socks and sweaters are sold at this knitting collective, or you can buy yarn and knitting patterns and do it yourself! There's a smaller branch at Laugavegur 64 (☎ 562 1890; shorter hours, closed Sunday).

Naked Ape (Map p72; ☎ 551 1415; www.dontbenaked.com; Bankastræti 14; ☎ 11am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 4pm or 5pm Sat) This 2nd-floor boutique-gallery has just celebrated its first birthday. Drop in for ultracool T-shirts and hoodies, mostly in bright graffiti-like colours, designed by a bunch of artist-friends.

Liborius (Map pp68–9; ☎ 551 6811; nonni@dead.is; Mýrargata; ☎ 11am–6pm Mon–Sat) The complete opposite of Naked Ape's jolly technicolour designs are clothes designed by artist Jón Auðarson, whose 'Dead' range was popular with celebs from Metallica to Scarlett Johansson. This is his new shop; stop by to see what he's getting up to next.

Jewellery

Various shops along Laugavegur specialise in Icelandic jewellery.

Aurum (Map p72; ☎ 551 2770; Bankastræti 4; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, 11am–4pm Sat) Guðbjörg at Aurum is one of the more interesting designers; her whisper-thin gold and silver jewellery is sophisticated stuff, its shapes often inspired by leaves and flowers.

Guðbrandur Jósef Jezorski (Map p72; ☎ 552 3485; Laugavegur 48; 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 1pm Sat) Tasteful silver and gold jewellery incorporating little lumps of lava and Icelandic stones.

Music

Skifan Kringlan shopping centre (Map pp68–9; ☎ 591 5320; ☎ 10am–6.30pm Mon–Wed, to 9pm Thu, to 7pm Fri, to 6pm Sat, 1–5pm Sun); Laugavegur (Map p72; ☎ 525 5040; Laugavegur 26; ☎ 10am–10pm Mon–Sat, noon–10pm Sun); Smáralind shopping centre (☎ 591 5330; ☎ 11am–7pm Mon–Fri, to 6pm Sat, 1–6pm Sun) Reykjavík's biggest, slickest music chain store has lots of choice, bargain-bin offers, and listening headsets so you can try CDs before you buy.

Smekkleysa Plötubúð (Map p72; ☎ 534 3730; www.smekkleysa.net; Klapparstígur 25; ☎ noon–6pm Mon–Thu, to 7pm Fri, to 5pm Sat) Bad Taste records is the label that launched The Sugarcubes, and they're still producing new music – if you're lucky, you might catch the next big thing playing live in the shop.

12 Tónar (Map p72; ☎ 511 5656; www.12tonar.is; Skólavörðustígur 15; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 2pm or 4pm Sat) Another very cool place to hang out is 12 Tónar, responsible for launching some of Iceland's favourite new bands. In the three-floor shop, you can listen to CDs, drink coffee and maybe catch a live performance or two.

Outdoor Equipment

Útilif (Map pp68–9; ☎ 545 1500; www.utilif.is) Climbing, camping, cycling and fishing equipment and repairs are available from Útilif, in Kringlan and Smáralind shopping centres and the small Glæsibær arcade.

Shopping Centres

Mallrats can choose between two large shopping centres. Both contain big-name clothing chains, home-furnishing outlets, a Vin Búð alcohol shop, banks, a food court and a cinema.

Kringlan (Map pp68–9; ☎ 588 788; www.kringlan.is; ☎ 10am–6.30pm Mon–Wed, to 9pm Thu, to 7pm Fri, to 6pm Sat, 1–5pm Sun) Reykjavík's biggest shopping centre, 1km from town, has more than 130 shops. Take bus 51-6, 13 or 14.

Smáralind (☎ 528 8000; www.smaralind.is; Hagasmári 1; ☎ 11am–7pm Mon–Wed & Fri, to 9pm Thu, to 6pm Sat, 1–6pm Sun) A smaller centre 6km away in the suburb of Kópavogur. Take bus 52.

Souvenir Shops

Rammagerðin (Map p72; ☎ 551 1122; www.icelandgiftstore.com; Hafnarstræti 19) This 60-year-old tourist shop is the oldest and biggest. Besides the usual trinkets (coffee-table books, souvenir mugs and plastic Viking helmets), it has a large range of knitwear and a handmade glass and ceramics section.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Reykjavík's **domestic airport** (Innanlandsflug; Map pp68–9) is based just south of Tjörnin. Morning till evening, planes fly between Reykjavík and Akureyri (Ikr8300 one way), Egilsstaðir (Ikr9400) and Ísafjörður (Ikr8300); as well as to Greenland and the Faeroes. Internal flight operator **Flugfélag Íslands** (Air Iceland; ☎ 570 3030; www.flugfelag.is) has a desk at the airport, but you can usually save money if you book over the internet (a computer terminal is provided near the check-in desks).

International flights operate through **Keflavík Airport** (www.keflavikairport.com), 48km west of Reykjavík. The easiest way to get there is on the Reykjavík Excursions Flybus – see opposite. For international airlines, see p326.

Bus

Almost all long-distance buses use the **BSÍ bus terminal** (Map pp68–9; ☎ 562 1011; www.bsi.is; Vatnsmýrarvegur 10), near the domestic airport – the company name is pronounced *bee ess ee*. The desk here can book you onto bus services around Iceland. You can pick up summer (June to August or mid-September) or winter (mid-September to May) bus timetables, and there's also a rack of tourist information available. There's a good cafeteria (see p91) with internet access.

In summer regular direct services include those listed in the table below (there's reduced or no service the rest of the year).

For other destinations on the northern and eastern sides of the island (eg Egilsstaðir, Mývatn and Húsavík), you'll need to change buses in Höfn or Akureyri, which may involve an overnight stop.

Buses to Reykjanes, Snæfellsnes and the main towns on Rte 1 run year-round, with the exception of the section from Akureyri to Höfn. Services are less frequent on all routes between September and May.

Buses to the Westfjords (see p170) only run from June to August, and routes across the interior also close down for winter.

Ferry

For information on the Viðey ferry service, see p101.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

From Keflavík International Airport it's easy: the **Flybus** (☎ 562 1011; www.re.is) meets all international flights. Tickets cost Ikr1100/550 per adult/child 12 to 15 (credit cards are accepted) and the journey to Reykjavík takes around 50 minutes. On the return journey the bus leaves

the BSÍ bus terminal two hours before international departures. Reykjavík City Hostel and the main hotels can arrange free transfers to the bus station. The Flybus will also drop off and pick up in Garðabær and Hafnarfjörður, just south of Reykjavík, if you book in advance. Taxis to/from the airport cost at least Ikr8000 one way.

From the domestic airport terminal it's a 1km walk into town or there's a taxi rank outside. Bus 15 runs from here to Hlemmur bus station.

Bicycle

Reykjavík has a steadily improving network of well-lit cycle lanes – ask the tourist office for a map, or see www.rvk.is/paths. At times, though, you will probably end up on busy roads. Be cautious, as drivers show little consideration for cyclists. Refreshingly, you are actually allowed to cycle on pavements as long as you act sensibly and don't cause pedestrians any problems.

Bicycles are available for hire from **Borgarhjól SF** (Map p72; ☎ 551 5653; www.borgarhjol.net; Hverfisgata 50; 10hr/24hr/week Ikr1500/2000/10,500; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat), and available from Reykjavík City Hostel (p82) and the camp site (p82).

BUS SERVICES FROM REYKJAVÍK

Destination	Duration	Frequency	Price	Year-round
Akranes	50min	several daily	Ikr250	Yes
Akureyri	6hr	daily	Ikr6600	Yes (reduced winter)
Blue Lagoon	45min	several daily	Ikr3800 (incl lagoon admission)	Yes
Borgarnes	1¼hr	several daily	Ikr1600	Yes
Geysir/Gullfoss	2½hr	daily	return Ikr4400	Jun–Aug
Höfn	8hr	daily	Ikr7400	Yes (reduced)
Hveragerði	40min	many daily	Ikr950	Yes
Keflavík	40min	several daily	Ikr900	Yes
Kirkjubæjarklaustur	5hr	daily	Ikr4400	Yes (reduced)
Landmannalaugar	4½hr	daily	Ikr4800	early Jun–early Sep
Ólafsvík	3hr	several daily	Ikr4200	Yes
Þorlákshöfn (for the Vestmannaeyjar ferry)	1hr	daily	Ikr1000	Yes
Þórsmörk	3½hr	1 or 2 daily	Ikr3700	Jun–mid-Sep
Reykholt	2hr	Fri & Sun	Ikr2200	May–Aug
Selfoss	1hr	many daily	Ikr1200	Yes
Skaftafell	6hr	daily	Ikr5400	Jun–mid-Sep (stops at Freysnes winter)
Vík í Mýrdal	3½hr	3 daily	Ikr3800	Yes (reduced)

THIS MAP
NOT AVAILABLE
IN PICK & MIX

Bus

Reykjavík's excellent **Strætó city bus system** (☎ 540 2700; www.bus.is/english) offers regular and easy transport around central Reykjavík and out to the suburbs of Seltjarnarnes, Kópavogur, Garðabær, Hafnarfjörður and Mosfellsbær.

Strætó loves to fiddle with its bus routes and numbers. For the most up-to-date information, pick up a copy of the clear and useful *Reykjavík Bus Map* from tourist offices or bus stations.

Buses run from 7am until 11pm or midnight daily (from 10am on Sunday). Services depart at 20-minute or 30-minute intervals. A limited night-bus service (just the buses S1 to S6) runs until 2am on Friday and Saturday. Buses only stop at designated bus stops, marked with a big, yellow letter 'S'.

TICKETS & FARES

The fare is 1kr250/75 per adult/child six to 12 (no change is given). You can also buy books of 10 tickets for the price of eight (1kr2000). If you need to take two buses to reach your destination, *skiptimiði* (transfer tickets) are available from the driver – you have a limited time (30 to 45 minutes) to use them.

The Reykjavík Tourist Card (see p67) includes a free Strætó bus pass.

BUS STATIONS

The two central terminals are **Hlemmur** (Map pp68–9), at the far end of the main shopping street Laugavegur; and **Lækjartorg** (Map p72), right in the centre of town. Check your route carefully, as not all buses stop at both.

Big suburban bus stands include Grensás (Map pp68–9), Hamraborg in Kópavogur, Fjörður in Hafnarfjörður (Map p102), Háholt in Mosfellsbær, Ártún in the suburb of Höfðar and Mjódd in the suburb of Breiðholt.

Useful routes:

51 Hlemmur bus station, Lækjartorg bus station, National Museum, BSÍ bus terminal, hospital, Hamraborg bus station (Kópavogur), Fjörður bus station (Hafnarfjörður).

14 Lækjartorg bus station, National Museum, BSÍ bus terminal, hospital, Hlemmur bus station, Laugardalur (for swimming pool, and City Hostel and camp site).

15 Domestic airport terminal, BSÍ bus terminal, hospital, Hlemmur bus station, Laugardalur, Háholt bus station (Mosfellsbær).

Car & Motorcycle

A car is fairly unnecessary in the city, because it's so easy to travel round on foot and by bus. However, if you want to get into the country-

side and don't fancy the bus tours (see p80), it's worth hiring a car.

The capital's drivers can be inconsiderate: beware of people yattering into mobile phones (illegal, in case you're wondering), drifting across lanes or cutting corners at junctions.

PARKING

The youth hostel, camp site and top-end hotels have private parking for guests; at other guesthouses and hotels, you'll have to scrum for spaces. In central Reykjavík metred street parking and municipal car parks are divided into zones – P1 is the most expensive, then P2 and P3. An hour's city-centre parking costs about 1kr150; parking is free on Sunday and in the evening.

GETTING OUT OF TOWN

Getting out of town is easy – follow the signs for Rte 1. Getting back into Reykjavík can be a more confusing, as there are dozens of exits from the highway and road signs are marked with abbreviations rather than full street names. To help you, the main road into Reykjavík is Vesturlandsvegur, which turns into Miklabraut and then Hringbraut. Exit by the Kringlan shopping centre for the Laugardalur area; at Snorrabraut for the Hallgrímskirkja area; and at Suðurgata for the town centre.

Taxi

Taxi prices are high – flagfall starts at 1kr520. Tipping is not required but expect to pay at least 1kr1000 to cross town.

There are usually taxis outside the bus stations, domestic airport, youth hostel, and pubs and bars on weekend nights (there are huuuge queues for the latter). Alternatively, call **Borgarbilastöðin** (☎ 552 2440), **BSH** (☎ 555 0888), **BSR** (☎ 561 0000) or **Hreyfill-Bæjarleiðir** (☎ 588 5522).

Walking

Reykjavík's compact layout means that it's very easily walkable. Most restaurants, bars, hotels and attractions are clustered within a 1.5-sq-km area.

AROUND REYKJAVÍK

One of the fantastic things about Reykjavík is the sea that practically surrounds it. Get closer to the ocean by visiting the island Viðey, a nugget of nature just a few minutes offshore,

or the stony beaches at Seltjarnarnes, on the western tip of the Reykjavík peninsula.

Several nearby towns have been sucked into Reykjavík's sprawl and are now part of its suburbs. Kópavogur, Garðabær, Hafnarfjörður and Mosfellsbær, which are of varying degrees of interest to visitors, can all be easily reached by city bus.

VIÐEY

If the weather's fine, the tiny uninhabited island of Viðey makes a wonderful day trip. It's just 1km north of Reykjavík's Sundahöfn Harbour, but it feels like another world. Strange modern artworks, an abandoned village and shipwreck sites add to its melancholy spell. Here, life slows right down – the only sounds are the wind, the waves, and golden bumblebees buzzing among the tufted vetch and hawkweed.

History

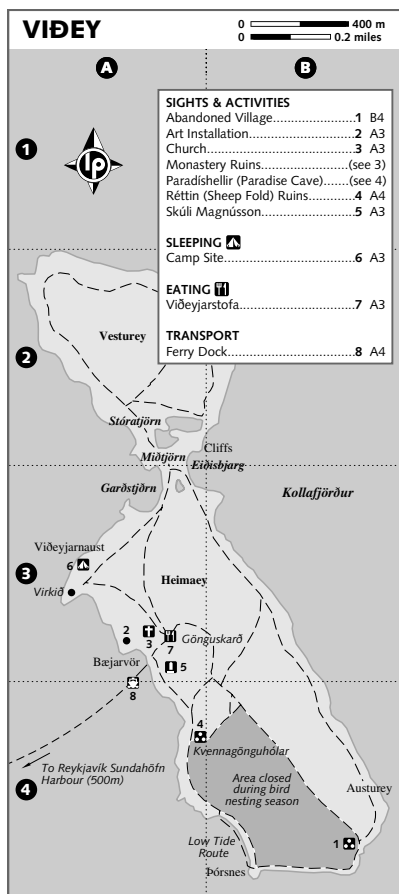
Viðey had an explosive beginning – it's actually the tip of a long-extinct volcano. Despite its tiny size, the island has played a prominent part in Iceland's history. Its main roles were as a pilgrimage place and religious battleground.

In 1225 a wealthy Augustinian monastery was founded here; it kept the coffers full by imposing a cheese tax on a massive area of land round about. During the 16th-century Reformation, the monastery was sacked by Danish Lutherans and all its riches taken. Incensed by this cultural and religious outrage, Iceland's last Catholic bishop, Jón Arason, made a stand. He seized the island in 1550 and built the fort Virkið (no longer visible) to protect it, but he was captured and then beheaded in November that year.

Skúli Magnússon, the founder of the modern city of Reykjavík, built the fine mansion Viðeyarstofa here in 1751–55. It's now Iceland's oldest stone building. The island existed quietly for the next few centuries before it was donated to the city of Reykjavík in 1986, on the 200th anniversary of its municipal charter.

Sights

Just above the harbour, you'll find Viðeyarstofa, an 18th-century wooden church, and a small monument to Skúli Magnússon. Excavations of the old monastery foundations turned up some 15th-century wax tablets and a runic love letter, now in the National Museum; less precious finds can be seen in the basement of Viðeyarstofa. Higher above the harbour is



Ólafur Eliasson's interesting art installation *The Blind Pavilion* (2003).

The whole island is crisscrossed with walking paths. Some are cycleable if you bring a bike with you; others are more precarious. A good map at the harbour shows which paths are which. The whole island is great for birds (30 species breed here) and budding botanists (over one-third of all Icelandic plants grow on the island). In August, some Reykjavík inhabitants come here to pick wild caraway, originally planted by Skúli Magnússon.

From the harbour, trails to the southeast lead you past the natural sheep fold Réttin, the tiny grotto Paradishellir (Paradise Cave), and then to the old abandoned fishing village at Sundbakki. Most of the south coast is a pro-

tected area for birds and is closed to visitors from May to June.

Trails leading to the northwest take you past low ponds, monuments to several shipwrecks, the low cliffs of Eiðisbjarg and basalt columns at Vesturey at the northern tip of the island. Richard Serra's artwork, made from huge pairs of basalt pillars, rings this part of the island.

Sleeping & Eating

Viðeyjarstofa (☎ 660 7886; ☎ 1-5pm Jun-Aug) is a lovely restored mansion where coffee and waffles are served. It's possible to camp at Viðeyjarnaust – ask permission at the café.

Getting There & Away

The summer-only Viðey ferry (☎ 892 0099) takes a mere seven minutes to skip across to the island from Reykjavík. It operates from Sundahöfn (Map pp68–9) from early May to early September, leaving at 1pm, 2pm, 3pm, 4pm, 5pm and 7pm, returning 15 minutes later. There's also a boat from Reykjavík harbour from June to early September, leaving at noon and returning at 3.15pm. The return fare is 1kr750/330 per adult/child under 12.

SELTJARNARNES

pop 4660

Visiting the coast at Seltjarnarnes is a strange feeling. Head 1.5km west from the bustle of Lækjartorg, and you reach a red-and-white lighthouse and a strip of lava-strewn beach. Waves rush in, the air has that salt-sea tang, fish-drying racks sit by the shore, and arctic terns scream overhead – it all feels a million miles away from Reykjavík. It's a haven for bird-watching – 106 visiting species have been recorded here. The offshore island Gróttá, where the lighthouse stands, is accessible at low tide but closed from May to July due to nesting birds. Across the water of the fjord there are super views of Esja (909m), and on clear days you can even see the glacier Snæfellsjökull.

Lots of people visit Seltjarnarnes specifically to drink in the glass-domed square Rauða Ljónið (☎ 551 6600; Eiðistorg 15), which is alleged to be the largest pub in the world – it's more like a covered market square with beer vendors.

One of the nicest ways to get to Seltjarnarnes is by walking or cycling along the good coastal path. You can also take bus 11 from Hlemmur or Lækjartorg bus station.

KÓPAVOGUR

pop 26,510

Kópavogur, the first suburb south of Reykjavík, is just a short bus ride away – but it feels far from the tourist trail. There are a few culture-vulture attractions in the complex next door to the distinctive arched church.

Sights

The cultural complex Menningarmiðstöð Kópavogs (Map pp68–9) contains Kópavogur's Natural History Museum (Náttúrufræðistofa Kópavogs; ☎ 570 0430; www.natkop.is; Hamraborg 6a; admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Thu, 11am-5pm Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun), which explores Iceland's unique geology and wildlife. There's an orca skeleton, a good collection of stuffed animals and geological specimens, and a fish tank housing some of Mývatn lake's weird marimo balls.

You'll also find Iceland's first specially designed concert hall there, built entirely from Icelandic materials (driftwood, spruce and crushed stone). Salurinn (☎ 570 0400; www.salurinn.is; Hamraborg 6) has fantastic acoustics – see the website for details of its (mostly classical) concert programme. Tickets cost from 1kr1500 to 1kr3000 depending on the concert.

Next door, there are changing modern-art exhibitions in the beautifully designed Gerðarsafn Art Museum (Map pp68-9; ☎ 554 4501; www.gerdarsafn.is; Hamraborg 4; adult/under 14yr 1kr400/free, free Friday; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun). Its small café has mountain views.

If you're testing out the city's geothermal pools, try the Olympic-sized Sundlaug Kópavogs (Map pp68-9; ☎ 570 0470; Borgarholtsbraut 17; adult/child 1kr280/120; ☎ 6.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, plus 8am-7pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep & 8am-6pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar), popular with families, with children's pool, slide, sauna and hot pots.

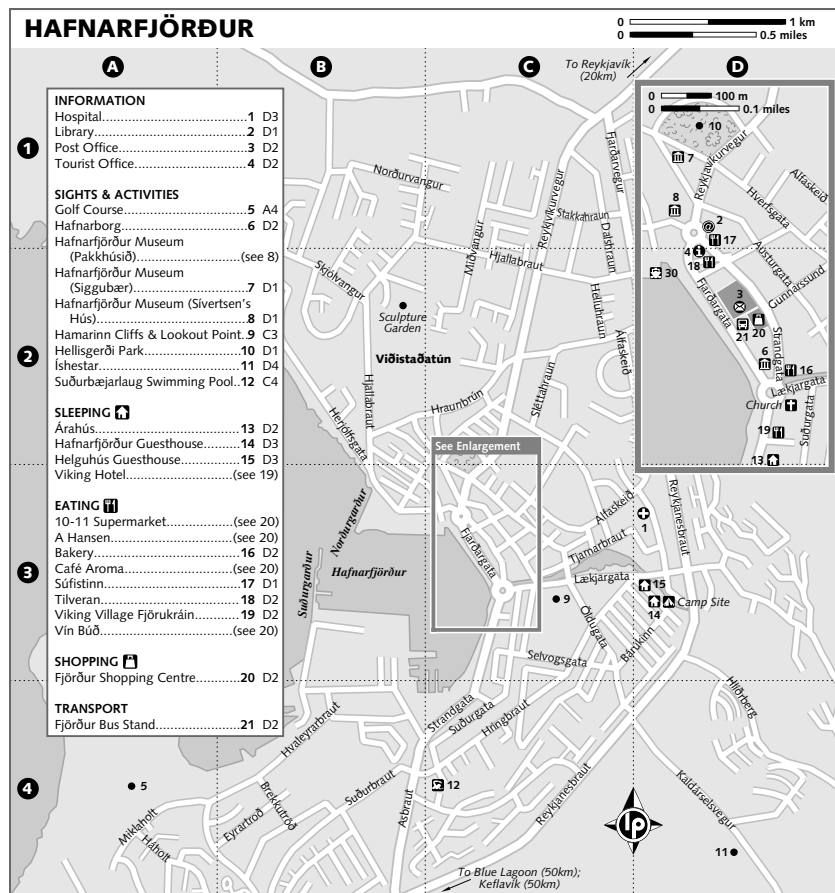
Getting There & Away

Buses S1 and S2 leave every few minutes from Hlemmur or Lækjartorg in central Reykjavík, stopping at the Hamraborg stop in Kópavogur (look out for the church). The journey takes about 10 minutes.

HAFNARFJÖRÐUR

pop 22,500

The 'Town in the Lava' rests on a 7000-year-old flow and hides a parallel elfin universe, according to locals. Its old tin-clad houses and numerous lava caves are overshadowed by heavy marketing of the hidden people and



Vikings – 10 out of 10 to the tourist office for effort! It's worth a visit on a sunny summer's day, but in winter, unless the Christmas market is on, tumbleweeds roll.

Hafnarfjörður was once a major trading centre, monopolised by the British in the early 15th century, the Germans in the 16th, and the Danes in the 17th. Many of the finest houses in town once belonged to rich merchants. Today the town is spreading like spilt milk, but the endless new-building estates east of the harbour hold nothing of interest for visitors.

Information

The friendly **tourist office** (☎ 565 0661; www.hafnarfjordur.is; Strandgata 6; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-

3pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) is in the town hall (Raðhús).

Internet access is available at the **library** (☎ 585 5690; Strandgata 1; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Wed, 9am-9pm Thu, 11am-7pm Fri year-round, plus 11am-3pm Sat Oct-May) for 1kr200 per hour.

There are banks with foreign-exchange desks and ATMs at the Fjörður shopping centre, right by the bus station.

Sights

The **Hafnarfjörður Museum** (Byggðasafn Hafnarfjarðar; ☎ 585 5780; adult/under 16yr 1kr300/free) is divided over three buildings. **Pakkhúsið** (Vesturgata 8; ☎ 1-5pm daily Jun-Aug, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Sep-May) is the main section, with three storeys of exhibits. The ground floor may interest English visi-

tors. It deals with the British invasion of (neutral) Iceland in WWII – how many of us were taught that in history lessons?! Upstairs, there are displays on the history of Hafnarfjörður, and a small toy museum in the attic.

Next door, **Sivertsen's Hús** (Vesturgata 6; ☎ 11am-5pm Jun-Aug) is a beautiful 19th-century home belonging to merchant Bjarni Sivertsen. It's the most important man in Hafnarfjörður. It's decked out with period pieces – a piano, rich drapes, woven wallpaper, mahogany furniture, delicate crockery and silver spoons.

To take on board the huge contrast between Bjarni's lifestyle and the typical impoverished Icelander's, you can visit another home from the same period – the tiny restored fishing hut **Siggbær** (Sigga's House; Kirkjavegur 10; ☎ 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug), next to the park at Hellisgerði.

The upbeat modern-art gallery **Hafnarborg** (☎ 555 0080; www.hafnarborg.is; Strandgata 34; adult/under 12yr/concession 1kr400/free/300; ☎ 11am-5pm Wed-Mon, free Fri) has two floors of regularly changing exhibitions, and occasional musical concerts.

The tourist office publishes a **sculpture trail** map; the highlight is **Hellisgerði** (Reykjavíkurvegur), a peaceful park filled with lava grottoes and apparently one of the favourite places of the hidden people. As well as tiny residents, the park exhibits tiny trees in the world's most northerly **bonsai collection** (admission free; ☎ 3-10pm Mon-Fri, 1-6pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep). Another pleasant stroll is to the home of elfish royalty, **Hamarinn Cliffs**, where there's a lookout and view disc.

Activities & Tours

Find out if you have second sight on a 1½-hour **Hidden Worlds tour** (☎ 694 2785; www.alfar.is; per person 1kr2500; ☎ 2.30pm Tue & Fri year-round). Your guide, Sibba, leads you around the homes of

the hidden people, telling folktales and stories about elf spottings. Various locals in costume put in an appearance and the tours are great fun for kids. A copy of the (otherwise rather overpriced) *Hidden Worlds* map is included, which marks the Hafnarfjörður homes of elves, fairies, hermits and dwarves.

Inland there are loads of **walking trails** in the tree plantations around lake Hvaleyrarvatn and on the slopes of the mountain Helgafell (338m) – shown on the free map *Ratleikur*, available from the tourist office.

There are two good swimming pools in town – the better (outdoor) pool is **Suðurbæjarlaug** (☎ 565 3080; Hringbraut 77; adult/child 1kr220/100; ☎ 6.30am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6.30pm Sat, 8am-5.30pm Sun), to the south of the centre. There's also a **golf course** (☎ 565 3360) surrounded by lava at Hvaleyrarvöllur.

If you fancy a trot, the horse farm Íshestar (see p79) is based in Hafnarfjörður.

Festivals

In mid-June the peace is shattered as Viking hordes invade town for the **Viking festival**. Its staged fights and traditional craft demonstrations are centred on the Fjörúkráin hotel.

Sleeping

Hafnarfjörður Guesthouse (☎ 565 0900, 863 4155; www.hafnarfjordurguesthouse.is; Hjalabraut 51; tw without/with linen & breakfast 1kr2500/3500; ☎ May-Aug; ☎) This place, overlooking the strange sculptures of the Víðistaðatún recreation grounds, once offered hostel-style accommodation in a stylish decking, glass and concrete building. It's now under new management and being revamped, but its good facilities (guest kitchen, laundry and internet access) are to be retained. Campers using

HIDDEN WORLDS

Many Icelanders believe that their country is populated by hidden races of little folk – *jarðvergar* (gnomes), *álfar* (elves), *ljósálfar* (fairies), *dvergar* (dwarves), *ljúflingar* (lovelings), *tívar* (mountain spirits), *englar* (angels) and *huldufólk* (hidden people).

Although most Icelanders are embarrassed to say they believe, around 90% of them refuse to say hand-on-heart that they *don't* believe. Most Icelandic gardens feature small wooden cut-outs of *álfhól* (elf houses) to house the little people in case the myths are true.

Hafnarfjörður is believed to lie at the confluence of several strong ley lines (mystical lines of energy) and seems to be particularly rife with these twilight creatures. In fact, construction of roads and homes in Hafnarfjörður is only permitted if the site in question is free from little folk. A local seer, Erla Stefánsdóttir, has drawn a map, available from Reykjavík and Hafnarfjörður tourist offices for 1kr1000, showing the best spots to catch a glimpse of these hidden worlds. There are also tours in Hafnarfjörður to find them – see above.

the camp site (Ikr1000 per person, open June to September) can also make use of them.

Arahús (☎ 555 1770; Strandgata 21; s/d Ikr5500/7500; ☹ Jun-Aug) A very central option on the pedestrian main street, Arahús has just been redecorated and looks very fresh and pleasant. It has a homy feel, with bookshelves, paintings, leather settees in the sitting room, and two good guest kitchens. Prices include breakfast. It becomes a student house from September, but there may still be room for guests – call to check.

Helguhús Guesthouse (☎ 555 2842; www.helguhus.is; Lækjarkinn 8; s/d/tr May-Sep Ikr5100/7900/9900, Oct-Apr Ikr3500/4500/5500; ☹ year-round) Close to a small lake a 10-minute walk out of town, Helguhús is a well-turned-out townhouse with cosy, cream-coloured rooms (all with shared bathrooms). Breakfast is included.

Viking Hotel (☎ 565 1213; www.fjorukrain.is; Strandgata 55; s/d Ikr11,300/14,500 Apr-Sep, Ikr6300/8600 Oct-May; ☹) The over-the-top Viking Village complex Fjörúkráin also offers 42 hotel rooms. Rather than being stuffed full of swords and battle-axes, they're surprisingly smart modern rooms, with TV, tea-making kit, phone and bathroom. There's also a hot tub for guests. Breakfast is included.

Eating

Our pick **Súfistinn** (☎ 565 3740; Strandgata 9; ☹ 8.15am-11.30pm Mon-Thu, to midnight Fri, 10am-midnight Sat, noon-11.30pm Sun) This great café-bar is the most cheerful place to eat in town – ladies lunch, readers read, kids play chess, and half of Hafnarfjörður gathers to gossip about the other half. There's a satisfying selection of salads, sarnies, pies, quiches and coffee.

Café Aroma (☎ 555 6996; www.aroma.is; Fjörður, Fjarðargata; ☹ 10am-midnight Mon-Wed, to 1am Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat, 1pm-midnight Sun) This café inside the shopping centre has less character, but it makes up for it with huge windows and stunning sea views. There's also a very popular salad bar (Ikr990). It becomes a bar later on.

Tilveran (☎ 565 5250; Linnestígur 1; mains Ikr1800-3300; ☹ noon-11pm) On the main pedestrian street, this dim little restaurant serves burgers and pizza, as well as more upmarket meals such as baked mushrooms stuffed with blue cheese, and tagliatelle with lobster.

Viking Village Fjörúkráin (☎ 565 1213; www.vikingvillage.is; Strandgata 50a & 55; mains Ikr2000-3500; ☹ from 6pm) The tacky but strangely endearing restaurant Fjörúkráin is housed in a to-

tally outrageous reconstruction of a Viking longhouse, complete with carved pillars and dragons on the roof. It offers Viking feasts (*hákarl*, dried fish, braised lamb, fish soup and *skyr*), served up by singing Vikings. If you're going to be a spoil sport, you can order Icelandic specialities from the Viking-free Fjaran restaurant in the same complex.

A Hansen (☎ 565 1130; www.ahansen.is; Vesturgata 4; mains Ikr2300-4000) This is the pick of the town's restaurants for a civilised meal. Housed in an old house built in 1880, A Hansen specialises in fine Icelandic food (fish, lobster, lamb) and has a nice old-world atmosphere. There's a bar upstairs, with a happy hour (8pm to 10pm Sunday to Thursday).

For self-caterers, there's a tiny **bakery** (☹ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) on the main street; or the Fjörður shopping centre has a 10-11 supermarket, a bakery and a Vín Búð liquor store.

Getting There & Around

It's an easy 30-minute bus ride from Reykjavík to the Fjörður bus stand at Hafnarfjörður. From Reykjavík, bus S1 (Ikr250) leaves every 10 minutes from Hlemmur or Lækjartorg.

If you book ahead, the **Flybus** (☎ 562 1011) to Keflavik airport will stop in Hafnarfjörður; confirm the exact location of the bus stop on booking.

Hafnarfjörður is small and easy to get around on foot. For a taxi, phone **BSH** (☎ 555 0888).

MOSFELLSBÆR

pop 6960

Fast-growing Mosfellsbær (www.mosfellsbaer.is) has more or less become another of Reykjavík's suburbs, although it's 15km from the city centre. There's some good walking in the surrounding hills, including long day treks to Þingvellir (p115) and the geothermal field at Nesjavellir (p118) – see the pamphlet *Útivist í Mosfellsbæ*, available from the town library.

The home of Nobel Prize-winning author Halldór Laxness is now open to visitors. The **Gljúfrasteinn Laxness Museum** (☎ 586 8066; www.gljufurasteinn.is; Mosfellsbær; adult/under 16yr Ikr500/250; ☹ 9am-5pm daily Jun-Aug, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Sep-May), just outside the suburban centre on the road to Þingvellir, is a superb example of an upper-class 1950s house, complete with original furniture and Laxness' fine-art collection. A guided audio-tour leads you round; highlights include the study where Laxness wrote his

defining works, and his beloved Jaguar parked outside.

Near to the museum are several **horse-riding farms** (see p79). If you're in need of retail therapy, the factory outlet shop **Alafoss** (☎ 566 6303; Alafossvegur 23; ☹ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) sells woollen goods that are slightly cheaper than at the city's tourist shops.

The town **camp site** (☎ 566 6754; sites per person Ikr600; ☹ Jun-Aug) is next to the river Varmá and has toilets, sinks and showers, and free admission to Mosfellsbær geothermal pool. **Fitjar** (☎ 565 6474; www.fitjarguesthouse.com; s/d without bathroom Ikr5000/7500, with bathroom Ikr6000/8500, self-catering apt from Ikr8000), 4km north of Mosfellsbær off Rte 1, is a stylish modern house. Some rooms (three en suite, three with shared bathroom) have views towards Reykjavík, and the house is surrounded by wonderful countryside. There's a guest kitchen and a laundry.

REYKJANES PENINSULA

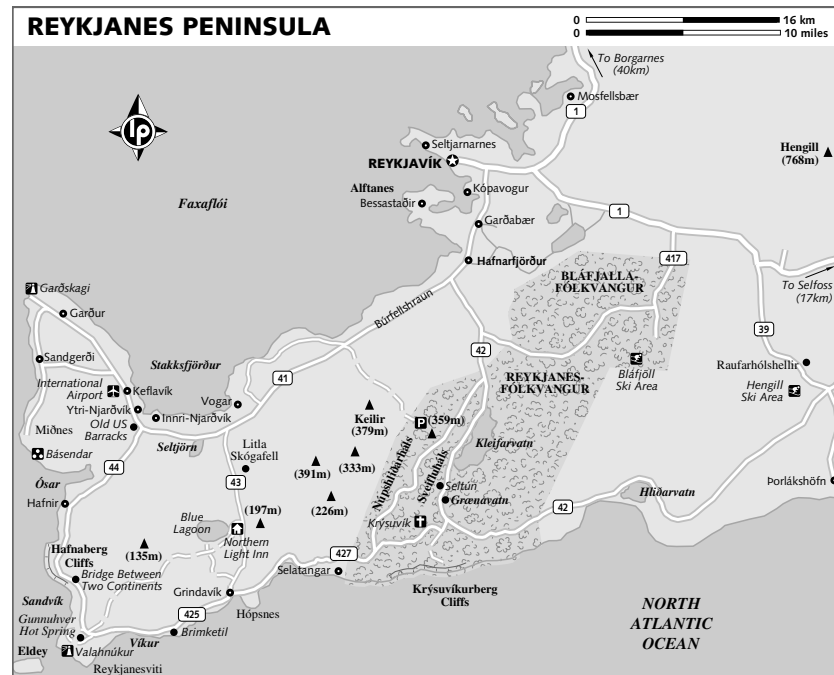
From the air, or when you're sitting on the bus between Keflavik airport and Reykjavík, the

Reykjanes Peninsula can look like the flattest, bleakest, most disheartening place on earth. Cast off your misery! Dispel the gloom! For isn't the Blue Lagoon somewhere amongst those lava fields?

Besides Iceland's most famous attraction, there are plenty of other marvels hidden in this forbidding landscape. Give it time, and the grey waves, smoking earth and mournful beauty of the black lava will mesmerise you.

Most towns – Keflavik, Njarðvík, Vogar – are squeezed into Miðnes, a small spur on the northern coast of the peninsula; the rest is wilderness. Northwest of the international airport are the wave-lashed fishing villages of Garður and Sandgerði, lost places where you can watch migrating birds while the wind blows all your thoughts away. A back road runs south from Keflavik along the rugged coast to Reykjanestá, a wonderful spot full of battered cliffs and strange lava formations.

The only town on the south coast is Grindavík, home to the Saltfish Museum. Northeast lies the Reykjanesfölkvangur wilderness reserve, full of wild lava landscapes and geothermal springs.



GOODBYE TO THE MILITARY BASE

Keflavík owes a great deal of its prosperity to the former American military base, which closed down in September 2006.

In 1951 a fear of Reds under the bed led the US to establish a military presence in Iceland, which was a handy submarine fuelling stop between America and Russia. Over the years various passionate protests were made demanding that the troops leave, but all came to nothing. It was only as submarines became more advanced and the Cold War ended that US operations in Iceland were scaled back.

America eventually made tentative noises about a complete closure. Contrarily, this time many Icelanders demanded that the soldiers stay – the jobs that the base provided and the money it brought into the economy were too valuable to lose; and how could Iceland defend itself without an army of its own?

But the units drifted home and the base powered down, until on 30 September 2006 a simple ceremony took place – the US flag was lowered, and the Icelandic flag was raised in its place, ending 55 years of occupation.

There are no plans yet for the enormous military zone on Reykjanes. The Lego-like barracks, the shooting ranges, the miles of razor wire – all lie abandoned. It's estimated that it will cost the Icelandic government 1kr5 billion to clean up toxic areas and demolish unwanted buildings. It will be interesting to see how these scarred, ugly sites are used in the future.

Public transport to Keflavík, Grindavík and the Blue Lagoon is fast and frequent, but you'll need private transport to reach more remote parts of the peninsula. Buses within Reykjanes are provided by **SBK** (☎ 420 6000; www.sbk.is). There's also a new bus company, **Blue Line** (☎ 421 1515), who run a service from Reykjanesbær to the Blue Lagoon and Grindavík.

KEFLAVÍK & NJARÐVÍK (REYKJANESBÆR)

combined pop 11,240

The twin towns of Keflavík and Njarðvík, on the coast about 50km west of Reykjavík, are a rather ugly mush of suburban boxes and fast-food outlets. Together they're known simply as 'Reykjanesbær'. Although they aren't somewhere you'd want to spend a massive amount of time, they're the largest settlement on the peninsula and make a good base for exploring the area. If you've an early flight they're handy for the airport.

If you're around at the beginning of September, the well-attended **Night of Lights** (Ljósanótt í Reykjanesbæ) festival is worth seeing, particularly its grand finale, when waterfalls of fireworks pour over the Bergið cliffs.

Orientation

Keflavík is the biggest of the settlements, with the best visitor facilities. To its east are the suburbs of Ytri-Njarðvík (Outer Njarðvík), which has a youth hostel and a swimming

pool, and forlorn little Innri-Njarðvík (Inner Njarðvík).

Information

There's a small **tourist information desk** (☎ 425 0330; www.reykjanes.is; ☎ 6am-8pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun) at Keflavík International Airport, and another in Keflavík **library** (☎ 421 5155, 421 6777; www.reykjanes.is; Hafnargata 57; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat), where net access is available for 1kr250 per hour. Ask for a free map of Keflavík and the booklet 'Enjoy More of Reykjanes'.

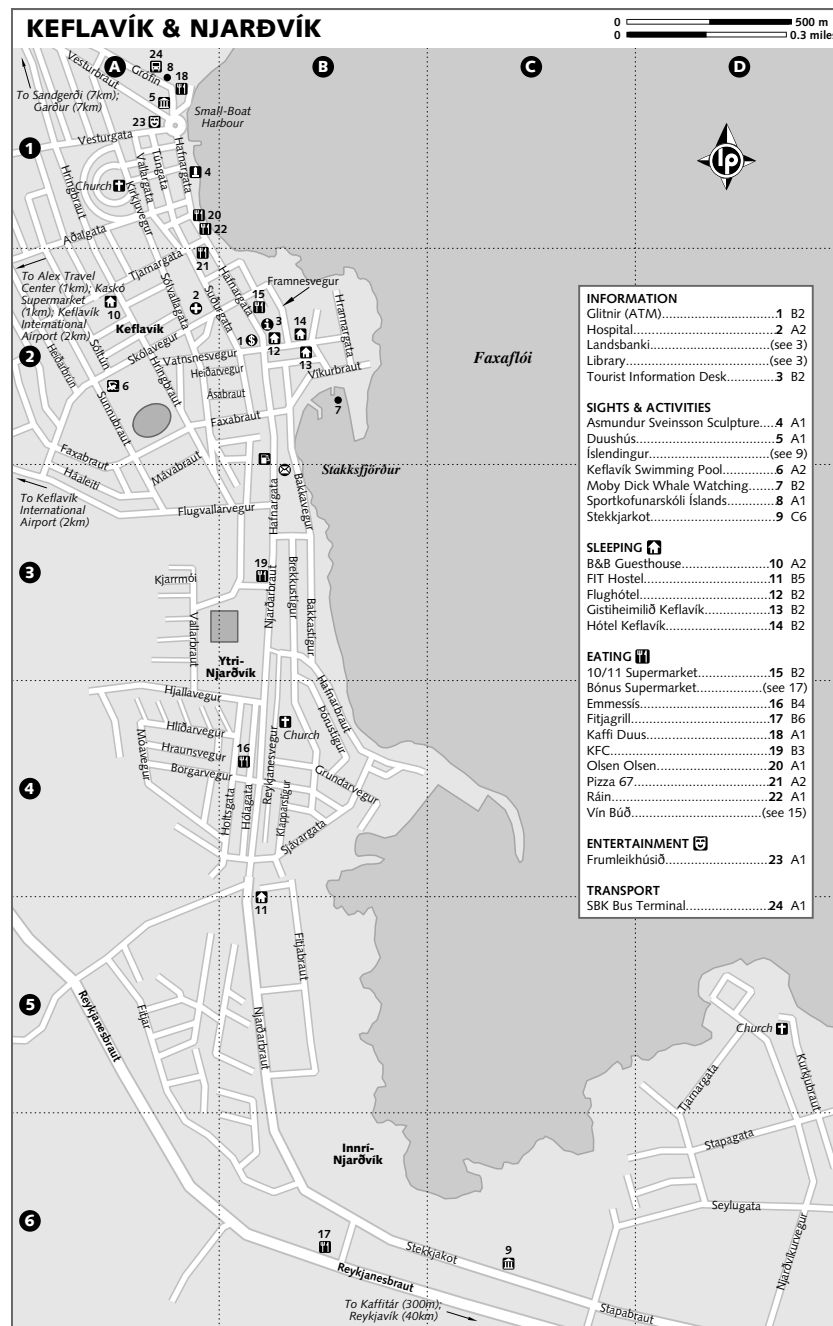
ATMs and foreign-exchange desks are located at Glitnir and also at Landsbanki on Hafnargata.

Sights

KEFLAVÍK

In a long red warehouse by the harbour, **Duushús** (☎ 421 6700; Grófin; adult/under 18yr 1kr450/free; ☎ 1-5.30pm) is Keflavík's culture house. There's a permanent exhibition of around 60 of Grímur Karlsson's many hundreds of miniature ships, made compulsively over a lifetime; a gallery where seven international art exhibitions are held each year; and a changing local-history display.

The area around Duushús is the prettiest part of Keflavík; just to the east on the seashore is an impressive **Ásmundur Sveinsson sculpture**, used as a climbing frame by the local kids. There are two other interesting artworks in front of



the terminal building at **Keflavík International Airport** – Magnús Tómasson's *Botuhreiður* (Jet Nest) resembles a Concorde emerging from an egg, while Rúri's *Regnbogi* (Rainbow) is a glittering arch of steel and coloured glass.

Keflavík has started its own Hollywood Blvd – Clint Eastwood, fresh from filming *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006), gamely left his **hand print** outside the theatre on the main street!

NJARÐVÍK

Close to the Bónus supermarket at Ytri-Njarðvík is a reconstructed turf farmhouse **Stekkjarkot** (☎ 421 3155; admission free; ☞ 1-4pm Thu-Sun summer) containing a small folk museum. Outside is the **Íslendingur**, a curvaceous reconstruction of the Viking Age *Gokstad* longship. It was built in 2000 by a direct descendent of Leifur Eiríksson, who then sailed it successfully from Iceland to America, proving it was possible using Viking technology. It's a lovely piece of engineering, and a ladder has been left so you can climb aboard.

Activities

The scuba-diving outfit **Sportkúfarnaskóli Íslands** (☎ 421 7100; www.dive.is; dives per person with 2 people or more 1kr14,000-19,000, with 1 person 1kr17,000-23,000, equipment hire 1kr5000) arranges dry-suit dives in the breathtaking rift between the North American and European plates at the bottom of Þingvellir lake, or off the coast at Keflavík. Also see p51.

Moby Dick Whale Watching (☎ 421 7777; www.dolphin.is; adult/6-12yr 1kr3400/1700) runs three-hour whale- and dolphin-spotting trips from May to October, usually at 9am (and at 1pm July and August). It may be possible to get dropped off afterwards at the Blue Lagoon (1kr700) – a great way of cramming in the sights if you're on a short stopover in Iceland.

Keflavík and Njarðvík both have pools, but the 25m outdoor **swimming pool** (☎ 421 1500; Sunnubraut; adult/child 1kr220/110; ☞ 6.45am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat, 9am-4pm Sun) in Keflavík is the better one.

Sleeping

All the sleeping options listed provide a free airport transfer, except for the FIT hostel, where it costs extra.

KEFLAVÍK

Alex Travel Center (☎ 421 2800; www.alex.is; Aðalgata 60; sites per person 1kr750, sb in dm 1kr1750, tw 1kr8900, hut

1kr10,900; ☎) A mere two-minute drive from the airport, Alex offers all things to all visitors. There's a small camp site for campers; 14-person dormitory accommodation for hostellers; simple bedrooms for guesthousers; and small wooden chalets for Swiss yodellers. Extras include a guest lounge and kitchen, free luggage storage, and bike and car rental. It's 1.5km from the town centre.

B&B Guesthouse (☎ 421 8989, 867 4434; Hringbraut 92; s/d/tr 1kr5500/7500/8200; ☎) This green-and-yellow guesthouse above a fresh-fish shop is neat as a pin inside. Rooms are all parqueted and non-idiosyncratic, but there are some quirky touches in the common areas – like the peacock tapestry over the stairs and the cosy curvy settee in the TV room. Prices include free internet and breakfast.

Gistiheimilið Keflavík (☎ 420 7000; www.hotelkeflavik.is; Vatnsnesvegur 9; s/d 1kr7800/9800) Run by Hótel Keflavík, this is a pricey option with slightly old-fashioned rooms (all with shared bathroom and TV), but you do have use of the hotel's four-star facilities. There's also a guest kitchen, and a continental breakfast is included in the price.

Flughótel (☎ 421 5222; www.icehotel.is; Hafnargata 57; s/d/tr 1kr15,600/19,500/21,500; ☎) The green-and-cream rooms at this typical Icelandic property are clean, comfortable and modern – but brrr! it's a chilly welcome. The standard rooms are just as comfortable as the deluxe, so don't pay extra unless you really want a kettle and a bathrobe. There's a hot pot, a sauna, a restaurant and free internet access. A new guesthouse (1kr8000/10,000 for singles/doubles) was due to open at the time of writing.

Hótel Keflavík (☎ 420 7000; www.hotelkeflavik.is; Vatnsnesvegur 12-14; s/d 1kr19,800/22,800; ☎) Almost next door to Flughótel is family-run Hótel Keflavík, where the people are far friendlier. There's a smell of clean laundry and coffee as you enter, and the lobby fairly thrums with activity. Its 70 rooms are comfy if much chintzier than the Flughótel, but the place has equally good facilities – there's a glass-walled restaurant, free internet access, and a large fitness centre with solarium and sauna. Deluxe rooms (with CD player, large TV and bath) are worth the extra 1kr2000. There are discounts for internet bookings.

NJARÐVÍK

FIT Hostel (☎ 421 8889; www.fithostel.is; Fitjabraut 6a; sb/s/d 1kr1750/3250/5500; ☎) In a gruesome indus-

trial estate off busy Rte 41, this hostel has an unfortunate location but quite decent facilities – good, clean rooms (holding up to seven people), left luggage (1kr250), internet access (1kr500 per hour), laundry (1kr400) and a hot tub. You can catch buses to Reykjavík and Keflavík in front of the hostel, but a car or a love of walking through concrete suburbs would be helpful here.

Eating

KEFLAVÍK

There are enough drive-through snack bars and greasy grills in Keflavík to give you an instant burger-induced coronary. For more civilised fare, there are several places along the main street; plus the two hotels (see opposite) have high-quality restaurants.

Olsen Olsen (☎ 421 4457; Hafnargata 17; snacks 1kr600-900; ☞ 11am-10pm) In the 1950s, thanks to rock and roll, Keflavík was the coolest place in Iceland. This American-style diner transports locals back to the glory days, with shiny silver tables, red plastic seats and pictures of Elvis on the walls. There's a gigantic range of hoagies, as well as sandwiches, burgers, and a kids' meal.

Pizza 67 (☎ 421 4067; Hafnargata 30; meals 1kr1500-2200) Popular with families and young couples, this chain restaurant sells pizzas named after 1960s songs. There's a takeaway service, with free delivery anywhere in Keflavík or Njarðvík.

Kaffi Duus (☎ 421 7080; Duusgata 10; mains 1kr700-2800; ☞ kitchen noon-10pm, bar to 1am Fri & 2am Sat) This friendly nautical-themed café-restaurant-bar, decorated with whale vertebrae and giant crabs, overlooks the small-boat harbour and cliffs. The menu is fish, fish, fish, fresh out of the sea, with a few pasta dishes, salads and burgers thrown in. It's a popular evening hangout with occasional live bands.

Ráin (☎ 421 4601; www.rain.is; Hafnargata 19a; mains 1kr2400-4000; ☞ 11am-3pm & 6-10pm) If you visit on a day like we did, Ráin's renowned panoramic views of sea, mountains and distant Reykjavík will be nothing but mist! Keflavík's finest restaurant is large but friendly and serves a familiar menu of Icelandic fish, lobster, lamb and beef.

Self-caterers have plenty of supermarkets to choose from, including the **10-11** (Hafnargata 53-55), next door to the tourist office, and a Kaskó close to the Alex Travel Center. There's also a **Vín Búð** (☎ 421 5699; Hafnargata 51-55; ☞ 11am-6pm Mon-Thu, to 7pm Fri, to 4pm Sat).

NJARÐVÍK

You're damned for food in Njarðvík unless you love drive-thrus and supermarkets. Choose from the car-friendly **Emmessis**, **KFC** or **Fitjagrill**; or the **Bónus supermarket** (Fitjum; ☞ noon-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 10am-7.30pm Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun) and giant **Kaffitár** (☎ 420 2710; www.kaffitar.is; Stapaubraut 7; ☞ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, 1-5pm Sun) on Rte 41.

Getting There & Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Most of Reykjavík's accommodation options offers free airport transfers for guests. A taxi will cost about 1kr2000 – call **Aðalbílar Nýung** (☎ 421 1515; www.airporttaxi.is) or **Hreyfillar-Bæjarleiðir** (☎ 588 5522; www.hreyfill.is). For information on the Flybus between the airport and Reykjavík, see p97.

AIR

Apart from flights to Greenland and the Faeroes, all of Iceland's international flights use Keflavík International Airport. For more information, see p326.

BUS

SBK (☎ 420 6000; www.sbk.is) runs five daily buses between Reykjavík and Njarðvík from Monday to Friday, and three on Saturday. The fare is 1kr1000/5000 per adult/child four to 11. A couple of buses run on weekdays from Keflavík to Sandgerði and Garður – see p110 for details.

Local Strætó buses run between Keflavík and Njarðvík – there are services every 30 minutes or so between 7am and 7pm, and hourly between 8pm and 11pm.

A new company, **Blue Line** (Bláa Línan; ☎ 421 1515), has just begun a service that runs around seven buses per day between Keflavík airport, Reykjavík (Alex Travel Center/Flughótel/Hótel Keflavík/Njarðvík bus stop) and the Blue Lagoon; three buses continue to Grindavík. The airport-Reykjavík leg is free, from the airport to the Blue Lagoon is 1kr500, and from the Blue Lagoon to Grindavík is 1kr500.

CAR

Car-rental representatives at the international airport include **Avis/Europcar** (☎ 421 1690; www.avis.is), **Bílaeiga Akureyrar/National** (☎ 425 0300; www.nationalcar.is) and **Hertz** (☎ 425 0221; www.hertz.is); prices are around 1kr13,000 for a day's hire in summer.

NORTHWESTERN REYKJANES

The western edge of the Reykjanes Peninsula is rugged and exposed – perfect if you love wild rain-lashed cliffs and beaches! There are several fishing villages and some quirky sights to be seen in among the lava fields.

Garðskagi

From Keflavík, if you follow Rte 41 for 9km, on through the village of Garður, you'll reach the beautiful wind-battered Garðskagi **headland** (www.sv-gardur.is), one of the best places in Iceland for bird spotting – it's a big breeding ground for sea birds, and it's often the place where migratory species first touch down. It's also possible to see seals, and maybe whales, from here.

Two splendid **lighthouses**, one old and one new, add drama – you can get near-360-degree sea views from the old lighthouse. There's also a small **folk museum** (☎ 422 7220; admission 1kr200; ☹ 1-5pm Apr-Oct), filled with a pleasing mish-mash of fishing boats, birds' eggs and sewing machines. It contains the balconied **Flösin Cafeteria** (☎ 422 7214; ☹ 1-5pm daily Apr-Dec, 1-5pm Fri, Sat & Sun Jan-Mar, sometimes later), with superb views over the ocean to Snæfellsjökull.

There's a tranquil, free camping area by the lighthouse, with toilets and fresh water.

Sandgerði

Five kilometres south of Garður, it's worth stopping at this industrious fishing village to see the classroom-like but interesting **Fræðasetrið nature centre** (☎ 423 7551; Gerðavegur 1; adult/child 1kr400/300; ☹ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun year-round), where there are stuffed Icelandic creatures (including a monstrous moth-eaten walrus), jars of pickled things (look out for the freaky Gorgonocephalus), and a small aquarium with sea squirts, crabs and anemones.

There are some quite nice **beaches** on the coast south of Sandgerði, and the surrounding marshes are frequented by more than 170 species of **birds**. About 7km south, you can walk to the ruins of the fishing village **Básendar**, which was destroyed by a giant tidal wave in 1799.

Getting There & Away

On weekdays, **SBK** (☎ 420 6000; www.sbk.is) has two buses (1kr300/200 per adult/child four to 11) from Keflavík to Sandgerði (10 minutes) and Garður (15 minutes). Heading back to Keflavík, you should book with SBK.

SOUTHWESTERN REYKJANES

The vast lava flows at Reykjanesviti were spewed out by a series of small shield volcanoes. The area is crisscrossed by walking tracks that are marked on the *Enjoy More of Reykjanes* map, available from most tourist offices, including those in Keflavík and at the international airport. However, the terrain is tough and not all the paths are clearly marked.

Keflavík to Reykjanesviti

If you turn off Rte 41 onto Rte 44 just outside Keflavík, you'll first pass the deserted barracks, barbed-wire fences and tank ranges of the **old US military base** (see p106).

After several kilometres the road zooms past the fading fishing village of **Hafnir**. There's nothing much to see here – just humps and bumps in a field, thought to be a 9th-century longhouse belonging to Ingólfur Arnarson's foster brother, and the anchor of the 'ghost ship' *Jamestown*, which drifted ashore mysteriously in 1870 with a full cargo of timber but no crew.

About 8km south, a 30-minute walk from the road will take you to the sea cliffs of **Hafnaberg**, an important bird-nesting area and a good lookout point for whales.

A little further south, just off the main road, is the so-called **Bridge Between Two Continents**. It's basically a photo stop – a bridge spanning a sand-filled gulf between the North American and European plates.

In the far southwest of the peninsula the landscape breaks down into wild volcanic crags and sea cliffs. Several bizarre-looking **factories** here exploit geothermal heat to produce salt from sea water. The black beaches near Sandvíkur also stood in for Iwo Jima in Clint Eastwood's WWII epic *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006).

One of the most wild and wonderful spots is **Valahnúkur**, where a dirt track leads off the main road through 13th-century lava fields down to the most desolate cliffs imaginable. You can clamber up to the ruins of the oldest lighthouse (1878) in Iceland, destroyed by a devastating earthquake, and contemplate the fragility of life and the futility of everything. From here you can see the flat-topped rocky crag of **Eldey**, 14km out to sea, which is home to the world's largest gannet colony. Some claim the last great auk was killed and eaten here, though this is disputed by Faeroe islanders, who insist that

the event occurred at Stóra Dímun. Today Eldey is a protected bird reserve.

Back towards the main road is a steaming multicoloured **geothermal area**. This includes the hot spring **Gunnuhver**, named after the witch Gunna, who was trapped by magic and dragged into the boiling water to her death.

Pick a bleak and blasted day to appreciate the last natural wonder before reaching Grindavík. About 7km east of Gunnuhver, slabs of cracked black lava are battered by grey breakers and waves spray up inside the churning, cauldron-shaped hole **Brimketil**.

Getting There & Away

There are no public bus routes in this area. If you're driving, you'll need enough petrol to last you from Keflavík to Grindavík.

BLUE LAGOON

As the Eiffel Tower is to Paris, as Disney World is to Florida, so the **Blue Lagoon** (Bláa Lónið; ☎ 420 8800; www.bluelagoon.com; adult/12-15yr 1kr1400/700, towel/swimsuit/robe hire 1kr300/350/700; ☹ 9am-9pm mid-May–Aug, 10am-8pm Sep–mid-May; ☹) is to Iceland... with all the positive and negative connotations that implies. Those who say it's too expensive, too clinical, too crowded are kind of right, but you'll be missing something special if you don't go.

Set in a tortured black lava field, just off the road between Keflavík and Grindavík, the milky-blue spa is fed by water (at a perfect 38°C) from the futuristic Svartsengi geothermal plant. The silver towers of the plant provide an off-the-planet scene setter for your swim; add roiling clouds of steam and people daubed in blue-white silica mud, and you're in another world.

The lagoon has been imaginatively landscaped with hot pots, wooden decks and a piping-hot waterfall that delivers a powerful hydraulic massage – it's like being pummelled by a troll. There are also two steam rooms and a sauna. At the time of writing the lagoon was being doubled in size; building work should be finished by 2007.

The superheated sea water is rich in blue-green algae, mineral salts and fine silica mud, which condition and exfoliate the skin – sounds like advertising-speak, but you really do come out as soft as a baby's bum. The water is always hottest near the vents where it emerges, and the surface is several degrees warmer than the bottom.

If lounging in this warm, salty, soothing water isn't relaxing enough, you can lie on a floating lilo and have a masseuse knead out your knots (1kr1300/2500/5800 per 10/20/50 minutes); be aware, though – you need to book spa treatments sometimes days in advance. The complex also includes a snack bar, a restaurant with good food but fairly poor service, and a shop selling Blue Lagoon products.

Three warnings: the Blue Lagoon requires the same thorough naked prepool showering that applies in all Icelandic swimming pools. The water can corrode silver and gold, so leave watches and jewellery in your locker. You'll also need bucketfuls of conditioner afterwards – all that briny water plays havoc with your hair.

Sleeping & Eating

There's nowhere to stay in the actual Blue Lagoon complex, but the Northern Light Inn is just across the lava.

ourpick Northern Light Inn (☎ 426 8650; www.northernlightinn.is; s/d/tr 1kr12,000/16,500/25,000; ☹ ☒) This large bungalow-style hotel has 21 spacious en-suite rooms with fridge, phone and TV. Free transfers are provided to the lagoon and international airport.

Kristjana's Kitchen (mains 1kr1700-3000; ☹ 11.30am-1.30pm & 5.30-9pm) The Northern Light Inn's fab panoramic restaurant serves 'hearty Nordic soul food' – this means herring platters, fish dumplings, smoked lamb and other Icelandic favourites; plus there's a choice of veggie dishes. Wireless hot spot.

Getting There & Away

The lagoon is 50km southwest of Reykjavík, but there are plenty of bus services that run there year-round. You'll need to book in advance.

The best and cheapest is **Pingvallaleið Bus Service** (☎ 511 2600; www.bustravel.is), which leaves every few hours from 9.30am to 6pm from the BSÍ bus terminal in Reykjavík, or the company picks up from hotels. You can return to the city, or three services continue to the international airport. The return journey (or journey there and then onward to the airport) is a bargainous 1kr3000, including lagoon admission.

Alternatively, **Reykjavík Excursions** (☎ 562 1011; www.re.is) runs a trip costing 1kr3400, including lagoon admission. And if you just can't wait, you can make it your first stop in Iceland. **Iceland Excursions** (☎ 540 1313; www.icelandexcursions.is) has two departures from the airport at 3pm and 4.30pm daily (1kr3700).

GRINDAVÍK

pop 2610

Grindavík (www.grindavik.is), the only settlement on the south coast of Reykjanes, is one of Iceland's most important fishing centres. If this were an English seaside town, its waterfront would be full of B&Bs, pubs and shops selling sticks of rock; here, all flimflam is rejected in favour of working jetties, cranes and warehouses. The busy harbour and tourist-free town are actually quite refreshing.

Sights & Activities

The main attraction here is **Saltfisksetur Íslands** (Saltfish Museum; ☎ 420 1190; www.saltfisksetur.is; Hafnargata 12a; adult/under 8yr/8-16yr 1kr500/free/250; ☹ 11am-6pm), a pretty well done museum dedicated to explaining the fish-salting industry. An audio-guide (English, German or French) leads you over wooden piers to tableaux showing various stages of the process. It's probably not for everyone, but if you're interested in Icelandic history, an understanding of the saltfish industry is vital – after all, it was so important that the country's coat-of-arms was a filleted cod until 1904. The museum contains a small **tourist information desk** (☎ 426 9700; www.grindavik.is), open the same hours.

There's a good modern **swimming pool** (☎ 426 7555; Austurvegur 1; adult/child 1kr300/150; ☹ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm or 6pm Sat & Sun), with a rather littery, grafted reconstruction of a **Viking temple** outside.

Sleeping & Eating

In summer, you can camp for free at the Austurvegur **camp site** (☎ 420 1190), near the swimming pool, with toilets, sinks and showers.

our pick **Heimagisting Borg** (☎ 895 8686; bjorksv@hive.is; Borgarhraun 2; s/d 1kr5700/7700; ☹) This wonderfully clean and congenial guesthouse is one of the best-value places to stay in Reykjanes. Mellow creamy-pink rooms have big squishy beds, there's a TV lounge with English satellite channels, internet computer, washing machine and kitchen, and prices include a great little serve-yourself breakfast. This is definitely a place you'd come back to.

Besides the usual petrol-station grills and snack bars, Grindavík actually has some very nice eating options.

our pick **Lukku Láki** (☎ 426 9999; Hafnargata 6; dishes 1kr750-2000; ☹ 6pm-1am Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri, 3pm-3am Sat, 3pm-1am Sun) The Lucky Luke sports bar-bistro is a crazy mixed-up place – African masks, big-

screen football, a bar made from old five-aux pieces, fairy lights, and blues on the stereo all compete for your attention. But the confusion somehow makes for a great atmosphere. Add free internet access, beer, and huge portions of well-priced bar meals (fish and chips, burgers, chicken nuggets) and you're on to a winner.

Veitingahúsið Brim (☎ 426 8570; www.brim-veitingar.is; Hafnargata 9; mains 1kr1800-2900) This restaurant, just opposite the museum, offers a taste of saltfish – with spinach and tomatoes in white-wine sauce – so you can see what the fuss is about. Alongside other superfresh fish dishes, you can sample lamb, beef and chicken mains, or go for a lighter burger (including one for veggies), soup or sandwich snack.

Salthúsið (☎ 426 9700; www.salthusid.is; Stamphólsvetur 2; dishes 1kr2000-4000; ☹ 5-9pm Tue-Fri, 11.30am-9pm Sat & Sun) The classy wooden Salthúsið is the first dedicated saltfish restaurant in Iceland. The *baccalao* is prepared in different ways (with ginger, chilli, olives and garlic; au gratin; as nibbly nuggets; or with mushrooms, red onion and capers), so there's plenty of variety. If the idea of saltfish doesn't grab you, fall back on perfectly prepared lobster, chicken or lamb.

Getting There & Away

Five daily buses travel between Reykjavík and Grindavík (1kr1000, one hour), past the Blue Lagoon.

REYKJANESFÓLKVANGUR

For a taste of Iceland's weird and empty countryside, you could visit this 300-sq-km wilderness reserve, a mere 40km from Reykjavík. Its three showpieces are Kleifarvatn, a deep grey lake with submerged hot springs and black-sand beaches; the spitting, bubbling geothermal zone at Seltún; and the southwest's largest bird cliffs, the epic Krýsuvíkurborg.

The reserve was established in 1975 to protect the elaborate lava formations created by the Reykjanes ridge volcanoes. The whole area is crossed by dozens of **walking trails**, which mostly follow old paths between abandoned farms. They're detailed in the good pamphlet map *Walking & Hiking in Krýsuvík* (in English) available from the tourist offices at Keflavík or Hafnarfjörður. There are parking places at the beginnings of most of the popular walks, including the loop around Kleifarvatn, and the tracks along the craggy Sveifuháls and Núpshliðarháls ridges.

Kleifarvatn

This huge, creepy 1km-deep lake sits in a volcanic fissure, surrounded by wind-warped lava cliffs and black-sand beaches. Legend has it that a worm-like monster the size of a whale lurks somewhere in its depths. At the southern end of the lake steam billows from dozens of hot springs. A walking trail runs right around the lake, offering dramatic views and the eerie crunch of volcanic cinders underfoot.

Krýsuvík & Seltún

The volatile **geothermal field** Austurengjar, about 2km south of Kleifarvatn, is often called Krýsuvík after the nearby abandoned village. Even by Icelandic standards, this area is prone to geological tantrums. The temperature below the surface is 200°C and the water is boiling as it emerges from the ground. A borehole was sunk here to provide energy for Hafnarfjörður during the 1990s, but it exploded without warning in 1999 and the project was abandoned.

At Seltún, boardwalks meander round a cluster of **hot springs**. The steaming vents, mud pots and solfataras (volcanic vents) shimmer with rainbow colours from the strange min-

erals in the earth, and the provocative eggy stench will make a lasting impression.

Nearby is the lake **Grænavatn**, an old explosion crater filled with weirdly green water – caused by a combination of minerals and warmth-loving algae.

Krýsuvíkurborg

South of Seltún, about half a kilometre past Krýsuvík church, a dirt track leads down to the coast at **Krýsuvíkurborg**. These bleak black cliffs stretch for 4km and are packed with puffins, guillemots and other sea birds in summer. A walking path runs along their length.

Getting There & Away

There's no public transport to the park, but you could get here on an organised bus trip. Reykjavík Excursions and other tour agents offer six-hour tours through the Reykjanes Peninsula (see p80).

Otherwise, you'll need a bike or hire car. Follow unsurfaced Rte 42 from Hafnarfjörður, which continues eastwards through lava fields to Þorlákshöfn, passing more dramatic volcanic scenery. Rte 427 from Grindavík will also get you to the reserve.

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