

Northwest Iceland



Three rugged peninsulas jut out into the Arctic Ocean between the Westfjords and Eyjafjörður to make up the little-visited region of northwest Iceland. Most travellers speed along the Ring Rd to Akureyri, Iceland's second-largest city, a bustling but relaxed place with friendly locals and plenty of green spaces. Although it's an excellent base for the area, if you make a headlong rush to circumnavigate the country you'll miss out on some fantastic scenery, historic remains and rugged offshore islands.

Much of northwest Iceland has an end-of-the-world feel to it. Little fishing villages cling tenaciously to life at the end of unsealed roads, their poignant history a constant reminder of the fickle fortunes of life in the north. Remote, enchanting Siglufjörður was once a thriving herring centre, Hofsós was the departure point for thousands of Icelandic emigrants and the bishopric at Hólar was the medieval centre of the universe.

Wildlife-rich Vatnsnes, rugged Tröllaskagi and historic Skagafjörður boast impressive wildlife and rugged mountains that are perfect for hikers, while the lonely islands of the area are home to large colonies of sea birds and an impressive bunch of hardy locals. Northwest Iceland is one of the country's prime destinations for outdoor activities, with some of the best whitewater rafting and fishing rivers around, and plenty of opportunities for wilderness riding, glorious hiking and ice fishing, and skiing and snowmobiling in winter.

To appreciate this area you've got to get off Rte 1, wind your way through the bays, fjords and braided river deltas that stretch north, and discover the spectacular scenery and quirky little towns that give this region its character.

TOP FIVE

- Enjoy the cosmopolitan vibe, good food and happening bars in **Akureyri** (p210)
- Explore the incredible turf houses and then relax with tea and cakes at the atmospheric café in **Glaumbær** (p204)
- Trek cross country on horseback or experience the whitewater thrills of the **Jökulsá Austari** (p203)
- Step back in time at the former herring capital of the North Atlantic, spectacularly situated **Siglufjörður** (p208)
- Take a boat trip out to Skagafjörður's bird-rich islands of **Drangey** and **Málmei** (p206) or cross the Arctic Circle on **Grimsey** (p223)



Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Iceland (☎ 570 3030; www.airiceland.is) has up to seven daily flights between Reykjavík and Akureyri (from Ikr5060 one way, 45 minutes) and at least three weekly to Sauðárkrúkur (Ikr5950, 50 minutes) and Grímsey (Ikr8135, 90 minutes).

BUS

From May to September two buses a day operate between Reykjavík and Akureyri (Ikr6600, 5¾ hours), via Brú (Ikr3500, 2¼ hours), Hvammstangi (Ikr4200, three hours), Blönduós (Ikr5000, four hours) and Varmahlíð (Ikr5900, 4½ hours). They depart Reykjavík at 8.30am and 5.30pm, arriving in Akureyri at 2.15pm and 11.15pm. From Akureyri, they depart at 8.30am and 5pm. There's a reduced service the rest of the year but still at least one bus daily. From mid-June to the end of August there is one daily service between Reykjavík and Akureyri along the interior's Kjölur route (Ikr8200, 10 hours) leaving at 8am in both directions.

Heading east, there are daily buses from Akureyri to Mývatn (Ikr2200, 1½ hours), Húsavík (Ikr2300, one hour) and Egilsstaðir (Ikr5400, four hours).

Getting Around

Away from the Ring Rd, getting around this area can be frustrating without your own transport. From May to August there are two daily buses between Varmahlíð and Sauðárkrúkur, and from June to August there's a service every day except Saturday between Sauðárkrúkur and Siglufjörður. There's also a weekday bus from Akureyri to Ólafsfjörður, via Dalvík.

EASTERN HÚNAFLÓI

HRÚTAFJÖRÐUR

Although sparsely populated and scattered with only a handful of tiny settlements, Húnaflói (Bear Bay – after the many Greenland bears that have come ashore there) and Hrutafjörður, the long, narrow fjord extending south from it, are rich in wildlife. The scenery of the area is far gentler than that of the Westfjords, and the low, treeless hills provide nesting sites for wild swans, ptarmigans, divers and golden plovers, while the rocky shore is favoured by seals. Add some

neatly manicured towns and a cluster of good museums, and there's plenty to keep you occupied en route to Akureyri.

Brú & Staðarskáli

No more than a busy road junction and petrol station, Brú acts as a connection point for buses between Reykjavík, Akureyri and Hólmavík. The name means 'bridge', and that fairly sums up the extent of the place.

There's no reason to stop in Brú other than to change buses, fill up with petrol or possibly for cyclists to take an overnight break. If you do want to stay, accommodation is available at **Gistihús Brú** (☎ 451 1122; sb/s/d Ikr2000/3500/6000), an austere-looking building with no-frills rooms and basic facilities. For more comfort, continue 5km north along the Ring Rd to **Staðarskáli** (☎ 451 1150; fax 451 1107; s/d incl breakfast Ikr7450/11,250; ☎ Jun-Aug; ☑), where the hotel has predictable but well-equipped rooms with bathroom, TV and wi-fi. There's also a free camp site here down by the river.

Across the road there's a petrol station with a small tourist information point, an ATM and a **restaurant** (mains Ikr530-1590). Food ranges from the usual hamburgers, hot dogs and chips to meat and fish dishes and hearty curry soup.

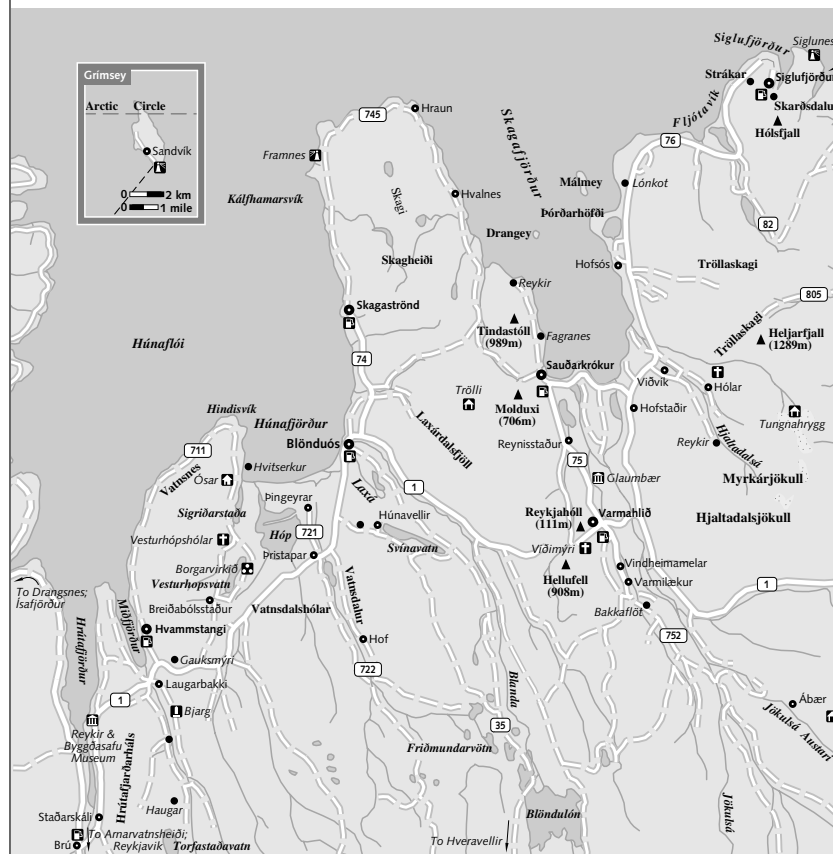
From here you can do a two-day return hike to the Hrutafjarðarháls highlands east of Staðarskáli, where you can see Iceland's largest colony of great northern divers.

Reykir

At Reykir, an active geothermal field 12km north of Staðarskáli, you'll find the **Byggðasafu museum** (☎ 451 0040; admission Ikr500; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Aug). This local folk exhibition features an array of household and agricultural implements from early Iceland, with an emphasis on the local black magic practised in early medieval times. Highlights are the well-reconstructed interior of a 19th-century homestead and the fantastic shark-fishing boat *Ófeigur*, built from driftwood in 1875 and used until 1915.

A few hundred metres from the folk museum at Reykir, the **Sæberg HI Hostel** (☎ 451 0015; saeberg@hostel.is; dm members/nonmembers Ikr1500/1900, d Ikr4600; ☎ Jan-Nov; ☑) is a good place to break up the trip between Reykjavík and Akureyri. It's a cosy, well-equipped little hostel with a geothermally heated swimming pool and hot tubs.

NORTHWEST ICELAND



HVAMMSTANGI & AROUND

pop 590

Small, sleepy and immaculately kept, Hvammstangi is the biggest town in the region but still a quiet place of only passing interest to travellers. A licensed trading centre since 1895, the town survives on shrimp and mollusc fishing today, and brightly coloured fishing boats dot the harbour.

Hvammstangi's newest attraction is the **Icelandic Seal Centre** (☎ 451 2345; www.selasetur.is; Brekkugata 2; adult/under 14yr 1kr500/250; ☎ 9am-6pm Jun-Aug), where you can learn about seals and their environment, historic seal products used in Iceland, seal conservation, and traditional folk tales involving seals. There's also a small tourist information point here.

If you'd like to get out and see the seals, **AKI** (☎ 451 2394; www.aki.is) runs one- and two-hour sightseeing tours to Hróúfjörður and Vatnsnes (1kr1500/3000 for one-/two-hour trips), as well as deep-sea fishing trips (1kr6000 for two to three hours).

There are also some excellent opportunities for **horse riding** in the area. Eco-friendly **Gauksmýri** (☎ 451 2927; www.gauksmyri.is; 1hr tours 1kr3000), on the Ring Rd about 6km south of Hvammstangi, offers horse hire, tuition and longer riding holidays on demand. Accommodation (from 1kr6600/8800 for singles/doubles) is also available here in newly renovated rooms. Rates include breakfast and drop by about 15% in winter. Internet access is available.



At the farm **Brekkulækur** (☎ 451 2938; www.geysir.com/brekkulaekur; d 1kr6600), 9km south of the Ring Rd, you can arrange adventurous and highly acclaimed multiday horse-riding (€1000 to €2500 for eight to 15 days) and hiking tours (€1290 to €2050 for eight to 11 days) around Arnarvatnsheiði and upper Borgarfjörður (in west Iceland). Shorter riding tours (1kr1900 per hour) and accommodation are also available.

Sleeping & Eating

Hanna Sigga (☎ 451 2407; www.simnet.is/gistih; Garðavegur 26; sb/s/d 1kr3000/4650/6000) Immaculately kept and very cosy, this lovely family-run guesthouse has bright, comfortable rooms, a guest kitchen and large lounge, organic breakfasts (1kr850), and a hot tub.

Pínghús Bar & Café (☎ 451 2630; Norðurbraut 1; ☎ Fri-Sun; ☎) This coffee shop, bar and restaurant (mains 1kr890 to 1kr1890) does light snacks, grills and pizza as well as cakes and sandwiches throughout the day. It also offers a range of simple guest rooms (1kr2000 for singles/doubles). Rates include breakfast.

There's a well-stocked supermarket and Vin Búð by the harbour.

Getting There & Away

Hvammstangi is 6km off the Ring Rd. There are two daily buses from Reykjavík (1kr4200, three hours) from May to September.

VATNSNES PENINSULA

Poking out into Húnaflói is the stubby Vatnsnes peninsula, a starkly beautiful place with a ridge of craggy hills marching down its spine, and lush, green fields along the shore. From the west coast you get wonderful views of dramatic peaks along the Strandir coast in the Westfjords, and on the east you'll find Iceland's largest readily accessible seal colony and breeding ground at **Hindisvík**. A short walk from here, and accessible from a parking area near the road, is the bizarre 15m-high sea stack **Hvítserkur**. Wave action has eroded the rock into a strange and whimsical formation. Legend has it that Hvítserkur was a troll caught by the sunrise while attempting to destroy the monastery at Þingeyrar. As with all trolls caught by the sunrise, he was turned to stone.

About 10km further south is the charming **Ósar Youth Hostel** (☎ 862 2778; osar@hostel.is; dm members/nonmembers 1kr1650/2000, d 1kr4500; ☎ May-Sep), one of Iceland's nicest hostels, thanks to friendly management, good views and the nearby wildlife. The hostel is on a working dairy farm, and the owner indulges his hobby of building more rooms each year. Bring your own food as there are no shops nearby.

South of the hostel is another seal colony near the partly enclosed Sigríðarstaða lagoon.

There is no public transport around the peninsula, but Rte 711, a narrow gravel road that can be rough in places, weaves along the coast. If you request a pick-up in advance the hostel can arrange transport from the Viðihlíð petrol station on the Ring Rd (about 1kr2500).

ÞINGEYRAR

Originally the site of a district assembly (*þing*), and later one of Iceland's greatest literary

centres, Þingeyrar is an important historic site, but as with so many in Iceland, little of its former glory remains.

Hoping to ease some of the famine and crop failure that had plagued northern Iceland in 1112, Jón Ögmundarson, the original Bishop of Hólar, vowed to build a church on the site of the Alþing. He cleared the foundations and, less than a week later, the soil regained its productivity. The bishop interpreted the miracle as a divine go-ahead for a Benedictine monastery, and by the late 12th century Þingeyrar was Iceland's greatest library, where monks wrote, compiled and copied histories and sagas.

The monastery no longer stands, but there's a wonderful stone church constructed by a Þingeyrar farmer between 1864 and 1877. The stones were dragged across Hóp on the ice. The pulpit, from the Netherlands, dates from the 17th century, and the 15th-century altarpiece was made in England and set with alabaster reliefs from the original monastery. Most impressive are the replica oak statues of Christ and the apostles. The originals, carved in the 16th century in Germany, stood in the church until early in the 20th century, when they were sold and later donated to the National Museum in Reykjavík.

Sitting alongside the 44-sq-km lagoon Hóp, Þingeyrar is 6km north of the Ring Rd along the unsealed dead-end Rte 721. The caretaker lives at the adjacent farm.

BLÖNDUÓS

pop 700

Although the little town of Blönduós isn't a particularly happening place, there are two interesting museums here, good food and accommodation, and a friendly welcome for tourists. It's the closest town to the northern end of the Kjölur route through the interior, and it's a great stop for hikers and cyclists.

The town is set on either side of the glacial river Blanda, and acts as a service centre for the local area and for limited shrimp- and shellfishing. It's a popular spot with visiting anglers in summer, as the nearby river Laxá offers some of Iceland's best salmon fishing. It's a game for the rich and famous, however, as a one-day licence costs from 1kr20,000 to a staggering 1kr250,000. If you'd like to fish but just can't pay those prices, smaller nearby lakes and rivers can be fished for about 1kr1500 per day.

For more information on fishing, visit the **tourist office** (☎ 452 4520; ferdamal@simnet.is; ☎ 9am-

6pm Jun & Aug, to 9pm Jul; ☑), just off the main road east of the river. Internet access is available here for 1kr100 for 15 minutes.

The Blanda is an extremely dangerous river with fast currents and undertows. Keep all children and pets well away from the banks.

Sights & Activities

Set in a modern building on the east bank of the Blanda, the small **Textiles Museum** (Heimilisiðnaðarsafnið; ☎ 452 4067; www.simnet.is/textile; Ábraut 29; adult/under 16yr 1kr500/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Jun-Aug) displays local textiles, handicrafts and early Icelandic costumes, and hosts changing exhibitions on modern Icelandic textile artists. Part of the museum is devoted to Halldóra Bjarnadóttir, a teacher, craftsworker and advocate of women's rights.

Housed in an ancient warehouse on the west bank of the river, the **Sea Ice Exhibition Centre** (Hafissetrið; ☎ 455 4710; www.blonduos.is/hafis; adult/under 16yr 1kr400/free; ☎ 10am-5pm late Jun-Aug) looks at the formation and types of sea ice, weather patterns, early Icelandic settlers, and ice in nearby east Greenland. One display also examines the possibility of an ice-free North Pole being used as a shipping lane. Although most of the information is in Icelandic, each display has a summary in English.

The islet of **Hrútey**, just upstream from the Blanda Bridge, is a nature reserve and the site of a reforestation project. Access is via a footbridge near the camp site.

The **swimming pool** (admission 1kr250; ☎ 8.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) is just below the prominent but ugly Blönduós church.

Sleeping & Eating

Camp site (☎ 452 4520; sites per person 1kr500) Occupying a lovely setting near the river, this camp site has good washing and toilet facilities.

Glaðheimar (☎ 452 4403; www.gladheimar.is; Blönduobyggð 10; s/d 1kr6000/7500) Set in the former post-office building, this comfy guesthouse has nine simple but tasteful rooms sharing three bathrooms and two kitchens. The owners also operate a series of cabins by the camp site sleeping two to eight people (1kr10,500 to 1kr16,000 per night). The larger cabins even have a hot tub and sauna.

Hótel Blönduós (☎ 452 4403; www.gladheimar.is; Aðalgata 6; s/d 1kr14,500/17,000; ☑) Run by the same people as the guesthouse and summerhouses, this is the top spot in town, and is popular with visiting anglers so it's often full on sum-

mer weekends. The restaurant (mains 1kr2250 to 1kr3650, open noon to 2pm and 6pm to 10pm) has good local fish and lamb dishes, a plush dining room and a bar that's the local hang-out on weekends.

Við Árbakkann (☎ 452 4678; Húnabraut 2; mains 1kr1280-3200) This fine country-style café east of the river serves wholesome coffee, waffles, cakes, baguettes, bagels and salads as well as meat and fish specialities. Not a burger in sight! There's also a bar and a summer terrace.

Getting There & Away

Buses travelling from Reykjavík (1kr5000, four hours) and from Akureyri (1kr3200, two hours) stop off in Blönduós.

SKAGAFJÖRÐUR

Renowned for its horse breeding and its wild, desolate landscape, the remote Skagi peninsula and the uninhabited islands of Drangey and Málmei are a little-visited region of Iceland's northwest. Hit by recession, rough weather and lonely winters, the area is littered with abandoned farms and chilling reminders of how difficult life in isolated rural Iceland can be. For visitors, however, the bleak landscape, historic remains, abundant bird life and adrenaline-infused activities make it a rewarding destination. For more information, see www.skagafjordur.com.

SKAGASTRÖND

pop 550

One of northern Iceland's oldest trading centres, Skagaströnd was first established in the 16th century, but today its main claim to fame is as the country-music capital of Iceland. Yes, you read it right. The main reason to venture the 20km north of the Ring Rd is to pop into **Kántrýbær** (☎ 453 2829; www.kantriybaer.is; Holanesvegur; ☎ Jun-Sep), Iceland's only country-music bar. With its rustic Wild West saloon atmosphere, booth seating, checked tablecloths and constant twang of country music, this place is a unique Icelandic experience. The menu (mains 1kr650 to 1kr1790) is mostly hamburgers, pizzas, nachos and pies, but the bar stays open until 3am on Friday and Saturday nights and it's the liveliest spot around. Upstairs is a small museum of country-music memorabilia and a working radio station.

ICELANDIC COWBOY

Hallbjörn Hjartason, the 'Icelandic Cowboy', fell in love with country-and-western music while working on the American base at Keflavík in the 1960s. Even after moving back to the remote fishing community at Skagaströnd, he continued to indulge his passion for playing and recording country music. He released his first record in 1975 and organised Iceland's first country-music festival in Skagaströnd in 1984. The four-day event was held annually until 2002 and attracted fans from all over Iceland.

Apart from the bar there's a busy fish-processing plant here, a bank, a post office and a supermarket.

VARMAHLÍÐ

pop 130

Southeast of Skagaströnd, this bustling service centre with petrol station, bank, supermarket and pool is more than a road junction and yet not quite a town. Named after nearby geothermal sites, it's a busy place and a great base for rafting, hiking, horse riding or boating. A good short hike (about one hour) climbs to the summit of 111m **Reykjahóll**, which affords a broad view over the surrounding green countryside.

The **Varmahlíð tourist office** (☎ 455 6161; www.northwest.is, www.vissitaskagafjordur.is; ☎ 9am-9pm Jun-mid-Aug, to 6pm mid-Aug-Sep, 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, 2-4pm Sat & Sun Oct-May; ☑) is in the little turf-roofed cottage beside the Esso petrol station. It's a helpful place with free internet access.

Activities

WHITEWATER RAFTING

Between May and September the area around Varmahlíð offers the best whitewater rafting in northern Iceland. **Activity Tours** (☎ 453 8383; www.rafting.is) specialises in rafting trips on three local rivers. Day trips include a four- to five-hour trip on the Jökulsá Vestari (1kr5500), with grade II to III rapids; an easy three- to four-hour paddle on the Blanda (adult/child under 14 1kr5000/3000) with grade I to II rapids; and an exciting six- to seven-hour trip on the Jökulsá Austari (1kr8500), where you can tackle grade III to IV+ rapids. The ultimate rafting adventure is the three-day 'River Rush' (1kr39,000), which starts in the

interior's Sprengisandur desert and follows the Jökulsá Austari back to the coast.

South along Rte 752, in Tungusveit, the farm **Bakkafliöt** (☎ 453 8245; www.bakkafliot.com) also offers rafting on the Jökulsá Vestari and the Jökulsá Austari (Ikr4400 to Ikr7400 per person). The centre also offers comfy accommodation (Ikr2500 for sleeping-bag room, Ikr4800/7000 for singles/doubles).

HORSE RIDING

One of Iceland's most respected riding outfits, **Hestasport** (☎ 453 8383; www.riding.is), offers one-hour horse rides for Ikr2300 and full-day rides for Ikr8300. Longer trips are also available, including a nine-day journey (€1750) across the Kjölur route, a 10-day desert trip from Sprengisandur to Mývatn (€2085), and the seven-day *réttir* (round-up, €1340) in September.

The farm **Lýtingsstaðir** (☎ 453 8064; www.lythorse.com), 20km south of Varmahlíð on Rte 752, offers a similar program of tours, including one-/two-hour rides (Ikr2000/3000) and a 'stop and ride' package that includes accommodation, breakfast, dinner and a two-hour ride for Ikr7300. Longer tours are also available.

Regular horse shows are also hosted by these and other operators and include demonstrations on the five gaits of the Icelandic horse, and history on the breed. Ask at the tourist office for an up-to-date schedule of events.

Sleeping & Eating

Camp site (☎ 453 8230; sites per person Ikr500) Varmahlíð has two camp sites, one on the southern side of the Ring Rd opposite the service station and a more secluded site in the forest near the swimming pool.

Adventure Cottages (☎ 453 8383; www.rafting.is; 2-person cottages Jun-Sep Ikr15,000, Oct-May Ikr8000) Perched on the hill above Varmahlíð (follow the gravel road past Hótel Varmahlíð), this group of self-contained timber cottages has good views, comfy rooms and a very inviting stone hot pool.

Hótel Varmahlíð (☎ 453 8170; www.hotelvarmahlið.is; s/d Jun-Aug Ikr14,200/17,300, Sep-May Ikr7700/9300) This big, white hotel dominates the community and has spacious but somewhat dated rooms. Its restaurant (mains Ikr1800 to Ikr3000) is the best place for a decent meal, with good local trout and lamb dishes.

Cafeteria (mains Ikr500-1500) The busy cafeteria inside the Esso petrol station in Varmahlíð

serves lamb chops, fish dishes and hamburger meals.

There's also plenty of farmhouse accommodation in the area – the tourist office has a list. A small supermarket is attached to the petrol station.

Getting There & Away

All buses from Reykjavík (Ikr5900, 4½ hours) and from Akureyri (Ikr2200, one hour) stop at the terminal between the tourist office and the supermarket. From May to August there are daily buses to Sauðárkrókur (Ikr600, 30 minutes) and from there to Siglufjörður (daily except Saturday, Ikr2200, 1¼ hours).

AROUND VARMAHLÍÐ

A lovely **turf-covered church** (admission Ikr150; ☎ 9am-6pm Jun-Aug) dating from 1834 is set on the old chieftain's residence, **Víðimyri**, about 3km southwest of Varmahlíð. The church is still in use and houses an altarpiece that dates from 1616. Look out for a signpost just off the Ring Rd.

Glaumbær

The 18th-century **turf farm** at Glaumbær, 8km north of Varmahlíð on Rte 75, is the best museum of its type in northern Iceland and well worth the short diversion. The fascinating collection of turf houses here are some of the finest remaining examples of early Icelandic buildings you'll see.

Stuffed full of period furniture, equipment and utensils, the 18th- and 19th-century buildings are now a beautifully restored **folk museum** (☎ 453 6173; adult/under 16yr Ikr500/free, combined ticket with Minjahúsið in Sauðárkrókur Ikr600/free; ☎ 9am-6pm Jun-late Sep), that gives a real insight into the cramped living conditions of that time. Twelve buildings here are strung out along a narrow passageway, as was traditional at the time. Each room had a specific function and today is shown with the household furniture, textiles, costumes, instruments, tools and equipment of the day. The only drawback is that the tiny rooms can get pretty crowded with tourists.

Also on the site are two 19th-century timber houses, both examples of early wooden homes that replaced the turf dwellings. Áshús houses a small historical and craft exhibition, and the wonderful **Áskaffi** (☎ 453 8855; ☎ 9am-6pm Jun-Sep) is home to an impossibly quaint café with a roaring turf fire, old-world atmosphere and exceedingly good cakes. It's a perfect spot

to while away some time sipping coffee and writing postcards.

The adjacent **church** dates from 1926 but has interesting Dutch pulpit paintings (1685) from a previous church on the site and an organ made entirely of pinewood: pipes, keys and all. Snorri Þorfinnsson, the first European born in North America (in 1003), is buried at Glaumbær, where he lived after his parents returned to their native Iceland.

Buses between Varmahlíð and Sauðárkrókur pass Glaumbær daily in summer.

SAUÐÁRKRÓKUR

pop 2600

The lovely little town of Sauðárkrókur is a fantastic base for travellers, with a gently happening vibe, a great museum, a clutch of beautifully restored houses and a wonderful selection of places to eat and sleep. It's also the jumping-off point for boat tours to Drangey and Málmey islands.

Economically, Sauðárkrókur is pretty well off, with fishing, tanning and trading keeping the community afloat and the population young and energetic. The community has all the services you'll need with a bank, a library, a laundry and a supermarket.

Sights & Activities

One of Sauðárkrókur's greatest pleasures just lies in wandering the streets of the old town around Aðalgata, where many of the houses have been restored and bear plaques showing when they were built. At the northern end of Aðalgata look out for **Villa Nova** (1903) a former hotel and merchant's residence.

The town museum, **Minjahúsið** (☎ 453 6870; Aðalgata 16b; adult/under 16yr Ikr500/free, combined ticket with Glaumbær Ikr600/free; ☎ 1-6pm Jun-Aug), gives a great insight into life in the town in times past with a series of restored workshops illustrating the day-to-day living conditions for local blacksmiths, carpenters, saddlers and watchmakers. A second exhibition reveals the results of recent archaeological digs in the area, which have uncovered some of the oldest graveyards in the country with perfectly preserved human remains dating back to about 1000. There are no written records from that time, and the exhibition pieces together the history of the area. In 2009 this exhibition will focus on the rich musical history of the region.

The small blue-and-white building south of the church is the **Blacksmith's Workshop**

(☎ 453 5020; Suðurgata 5; admission free) and has been left just as it was when the last blacksmith downed tools in the mid-20th century. It can be opened on request.

A fine day hike will take you to the summit of 706m **Molduxi** for a broad view over Skagafjörður. The walk starts just past Fosshotel Áning. There's also a nine-hole **golf course**, on the hillside above town (follow Hlíðarstígur), and a winter **ski tow** (day pass Ikr800).

Sleeping

Camp site (☎ 453 8860) The free camp site beside the swimming pool has toilets, hot water and power.

Gistiheimilið Mikligarður (☎ 453 6880; www.skagafjordur.com/mikligardur; Kirkjutorgi 3; sb Ikr2500, s/d without bathroom Ikr4900/6200, with bathroom Ikr6200/9200) This welcoming place across from the church has comfortable, modern rooms with TV and tasteful décor. There's also a spacious guest kitchen and TV lounge.

Fosshotel Áning (☎ 453 6717; aning@fosshotel.is; s/d without bathroom Ikr7500/9900, with bathroom Ikr10,900/13,900; ☎ Jun-Aug) The district boarding school becomes a basic but rather characterless hotel in summer. It's an option if everything else is full.

Ourpick Hótel Tindastóll (☎ 453 5002; www.hotel.tindastoll.com; Lindargata 3; s/d Ikr11,900/16,300; ☎) Tucked away in this understated town is one of Iceland's most charming boutique hotels, a historic place dating from 1884 and just dripping with character. The individually decorated rooms have a blend of period furniture and modern style, lots of luxuries such as mini-bar, bathrobe and slippers, and contemporary conveniences such as DVD players and internet connections. Legend has it that Marlene Dietrich stayed here in 1941, and it's every bit as seductive today. Outside is an irresistible stone hot tub, and in the basement there's a cosy bar to while away your evenings.

Eating

Sauðárkróks Bakari (☎ 455 5000; Hólavegi 16; ☎ 7am-6pm) For luscious breakfasts, afternoon pick-me-ups and decent lunchtime sandwiches, this bakery and country-style café is the best place to go.

Kaffi Krókur (☎ 453 6299; Aðalgata 16; mains Ikr900-3500) This cosy café-pub looks simple enough, but the menu covers everything from burgers and fish (Ikr2290) and lamb dishes (Ikr2890) to fillet of foal (Ikr2790), and authentic pasta

(Ikr1490). The bar fires up on weekend nights, and there's a pleasant summer terrace.

Ólafshús (☎ 453 6454; www.olafshus.is, Aðalgata 15; mains Ikr2200-3300, pizzas Ikr950-2600) Almost across the road from Kaffi Krókur, this is a good restaurant for decent pizzas and Icelandic specialities such as fish and lamb. There's also some choice for vegetarians. The restaurant bar is open until 3am on Friday and Saturday.

The supermarket is on Skagfirðingabraut and the Vín Búð store is at Smáragrund 2.

Getting There & Away

In summer, two buses run daily between Varmahlíð and Sauðárkrókur (Ikr600), connecting with the Ring Rd buses to Reykjavík and Akureyri. They leave from the store opposite Hótel Tindastóll.

AROUND SKAGAFJÖRÐUR

TINDASTÓLL

North of Sauðárkrókur, Tindastóll (989m) is a prominent Skagafjörður landmark, extending for 18km along the coast. The mountain and its caves are believed to be inhabited by an array of sea monsters, trolls and giants, one of which kidnapped the daughter of an early bishop of Hólar.

The summit of Tindastóll affords a spectacular view across all of Skagafjörður. The easiest way to the top is along the marked trail that starts from the high ground along Rte 745 west of the mountain. At the mountain's northern end is a geothermal area, Reykir, which was mentioned in *Grettir's Saga*. Grettir supposedly swam ashore from the island of Drangey in Skagafjörður, and one of the hot springs at Reykir is named Grettislaug (Grettir's Bath).

From the farm Tunga, at the southwestern foot of Tindastóll, it's an 8km climb to the Tröllli mountain hut at N 65°42.603', W 19°53.163'. The hut has 18 beds but no cooking facilities. To book, contact **Ferðafélags Skagafirðinga** (☎ 453 5718) in Sauðárkrókur or the tourist office in Varmahlíð.

DRANGEY & MÁLMEY ISLANDS

Guarding the mouth of Skagafjörður are the uninhabited islands of Drangey and Málmeý, tranquil havens for nesting sea birds. Both are accessible on summer boat tours.

The tiny rocky islet of Drangey, in the middle of Skagafjörður, is a dramatic flat-topped mass of tuff with 170m sheer cliff sides rising abruptly from the water. The cliffs serve as nesting sites for around a million sea birds, and have been used throughout Iceland's history for egg collection and bird netting. *Grettir's Saga* recounts that both Grettir and his brother Illugi lived on the island for three years and were slain there.

The island's sheer cliff coast means that there is only one landing place, from where a steep path leads to the summit. Icelanders maintain that a prayer is necessary before ascending, since only part of the island was blessed by the early priests and the northeastern section remains an abode of evil.

Traditionally, roughly 30,000 eggs were collected here annually, but now the collection has dropped to around 5000. You'll see kittiwakes, puffins and guillemots circling above you over the sheer drops to the churning sea.

The gentler 2.5-sq-km Málmeý is known mainly for its abundance of sea birds and rises to just over 150m. Legend has it that no couple could live here for more than 20 years or the wife would disappear. The island is home to Iceland's first lighthouse, which was built in a church on the island. Málmeý has been uninhabited since 1951.

Several operators offer boat tours to the islands, including **Jón Eiríksson** (☎ 453 6503; fagri@simnet.is; tours Ikr4500-5200), who offers a five-hour trip departing from his farm, Fagranes, 7km north of Sauðárkrókur. Ask at the tourist office or your hotel for more information.

TRÖLLASKAGI

The spectacular rugged scenery on the Tröllaskagi peninsula is more reminiscent of the drama of the Westfjords than the gentle hills of northern Iceland. A maze of craggy mountains, gushing rivers and even a number of miniglaciers make it ideal hiking country and offer wonderful views for drivers making their way round Rte 76.

Tröllaskagi's best-known historical attraction is Hólar, medieval Iceland's northern bishopric, but a drive to the far north passes the peninsula's most rugged scenery en route to the picturesque fishing village and one-time herring capital of Iceland, Siglufjörður.

For information on the villages of Ólafsfjörður and Dalvík, on the eastern side of Tröllaskagi, see p222 and p221.

HÓLAR Í HJALTADALUR

With its prominent red-stone church dwarfed by a looming mountain backdrop, this tiny **settlement** (www.holar.is) makes an interesting historical detour from the Ring Rd. The bishopric of Hólar was the ecumenical and educational capital of northern Iceland between 1106 and the Reformation, and it continued as a religious centre and the home of the northern bishops until 1798, when the bishop's seat was abolished.

Hólar then became a vicarage until 1861, when the vicarage was shifted west to Viðvík. In 1882 the present agricultural school was established, and in 1952 the vicarage returned to Hólar.

Sights

Completed in 1763, Hólar's red-sandstone **cathedral** (☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Aug), built from stone taken from looming Hólabyrða, is the oldest stone church in Iceland. The church was financed by donations from Lutheran congregations all over Scandinavia and is brimming with historical works of art, including a baptismal font carved from a piece of soapstone that washed in from Greenland on an ice floe. The extraordinary carved altarpiece was made in Germany around 1500 and was donated by the last Catholic bishop of Hólar, Jón Arason, in 1522. After he and his sons were executed at Skálholt for opposition to the Danish Reformation, his remains were brought to Hólar and entombed in the bell tower. The present church tower was built in 1950 as a memorial.

THE BISHOP'S LAW

A domineering and strict moral advisor, the first bishop at Hólar, Jón Ögmundarson, ruled with an iron fist from 1106 to 1121. Church attendance and memorisation of sacred recitations were obligatory at his school, and the only books available to students were those the bishop himself judged to be edifying.

Public dances, love songs and all merriment were forbidden in the parish as evil distractions from moral values. He even changed the names of weekdays named after Norse gods (those still used in English) to the more mundane ones used in Icelandic today. In short, Bishop Jón's word was law in northern Iceland, and although his Icelandic constituency later nominated him for sainthood the canonisation was never recognised by Rome.

The first timber cathedral at Hólar, which replaced a small turf church, was constructed by Bishop Jón using Norwegian wood. Until 1135, when the Skálholt cathedral was completed, it was the world's largest wooden church.

It contains a mosaic of the good reverend, a chapel and his tomb.

You can pick up a church leaflet from the information desk in the accommodation block.

An informative historical-trail brochure (available at the info desk) guides you round some of the other buildings at Hólar and is well worth picking up. **Nýbær** is a series of turf huts dating from the mid-19th century and inhabited until 1945. Although the rooms here are unfurnished, a leaflet gives a good insight into how the buildings would have looked when in use.

Also worth seeing is **Auðunarstofa**, a replica of the 14th-century bishop's residence. Built using traditional techniques and tools, Auðunarstofa houses the current bishop's office and study room, and has an exhibition of 13th-century chalices, vestments and books in the basement.

High on a hill behind the church is **Prestssæti**, a wonderful vantage point offering great views over the valley.

Ongoing archaeological digs in Hólar can be seen to the right of the road as you drive in. Finds from Iceland's first printing press and a 12th-century farmhouse here are on display in the main accommodation building.

Sleeping & Eating

Ferðapjónustan Holum Hjaltadal (☎ 455 6333; www.holar.is; sb/s/d Ikr2300/4900/7400; ☎ Jun-Aug; 📺 📺) The college accommodation block operates as a summer hotel, with functional rooms and shared bathrooms. Alternatively, wooden cabins in the grounds sleep between two and 12 people and cost Ikr7800 to Ikr23,100 per night. There's also a small camp site (Ikr600 per person). The onsite restaurant specialises in local

foods (mains 1kr2850 to 1kr3200) and not-so-local pizza (1kr1450), and there's a swimming pool (1kr300/200 for adults/children under 12, open 7am to 9pm).

HOFÓS

pop 170

The sleepy but attractive fishing village of Hofós, on the eastern shore of Skagafjörður, has been a trading centre since the 1500s. Today its main attraction is the Icelandic Emigration Center, where families of Canadian and American emigrants seek their Icelandic roots. There's a bank, a post office and a petrol station here, and the Siglufjörður bus stops in town.

Sights

Housed in three lovely old buildings down by the harbour, **Vesturfarasafnið** (Icelandic Emigration Center; ☎ 453 7935; www.hofos.is; admission all exhibits 1kr900; ☹ 11am–6pm Jun–Sep) explores the reasons behind Icelanders' emigration to the New World, their hopes for their new life and the reality of conditions when they arrived. It's a fascinating place even if you're not a descendant of Icelandic emigrants.

The main exhibition 'New Land, New Life' follows the lives of emigrating Icelanders in photographs, letters and displays, while 'Prairies Wide and Free' looks at Icelandic settlers in North Dakota. Two other exhibitions focus on the emigrant experience of Icelandic poet Stephan G Stephansson and the history of portrait photography in North America during the period of Icelandic emigration.

Also at the harbour is the historic, black-tarred **Pakkhúsið**, a log warehouse built in 1777 by the Danish Royal Greenland Company. It's one of the oldest timber buildings in Iceland.

South of town, on the shore almost directly opposite the village church, are some unusual hexagonal **basalt formations**, and near Grafarós, at the mouth of the Grafará River, are the remains of a 19th-century **trading post**.

The farm Gröf, 3km south of the river, has an old **turf-roofed church** surrounded by a circular turf wall. The church was built in the late 17th century but renovated and reconsecrated in 1953. If the key isn't in the door, ask at the farm.

Sleeping & Eating

The Emigration Center handles all accommodation queries.

Gistiheimilið Sunnuberg (☎ 453 7310; gisting@hofos.is; Sudurbraut 8; s/d 1kr5500/7700) Opposite the petrol station and run by the Emigration Center, this place has rather old-fashioned rooms with the redeeming features of private bathrooms and plenty of space.

Sigtún (☎ 453 7393; mains 1kr900–2500) Next door to Gistiheimilið Sunnuberg, this restaurant serves coffee, burgers and tasty Icelandic meat and fish dishes. There's also a small but atmospheric bar.

Sólvik (☎ 453 7930; mains 1kr1000–1800; ☹ 10am–9pm Jun–Aug) Down at the small harbour among the museum buildings, this pleasant country-style café has a summer veranda where you can recharge with coffee, cakes and pancakes. The evening menu includes pasta, salt cod, marinated trout and other fish and lamb dishes.

Sleeping-bag space is also available for 1kr2000 at two simple cottages, Prestbakki and Kárastígur 9, in the village.

AROUND HOFÓS

Lónkot

Battered by the wind and wonderfully blustery, this **gourmet pit stop** (☎ 453 7432; www.lonkot.is; sb/d per person 1kr2900/3900; ☹ Jun–Aug) is well worth the 11km drive from Hofós. A traditional farmhouse with pleasant accommodation, Lónkot is also an innovative gourmet restaurant with a changing three/four-course evening menu (around 1kr3900/4500) featuring trout or perch, lamb and sometimes puffin. You can order just one or two courses, and light lunches, coffee and cakes are available all day.

Iceland's largest tent is pitched in the field nearest the road and is used for group functions and for a flea market on the last Sunday of June, July and August. There's also a sunken barbecue pit, a nine-hole golf course and a fishing pond stocked with trout, as well as a small viewing tower in a converted silo. The tower provides super sea views across to Málmei and the bizarre promontory **Pórðarhöfði**, which is tethered to the mainland by a delicate spit.

SIGLUFJÖRÐUR

pop 1340

The remote and isolated fishing village of Siglufjörður sits precariously at the foot of a steep slope overlooking the fjord of the same name. Once one of Iceland's boom towns, it's a quiet but endearing kind of place with

a dramatic setting, plenty of historic buildings and a wonderful museum explaining the town's history as the former herring-fishing centre of Iceland.

In its heyday Siglufjörður was home to 10,000 workers, and fishing boats crammed into the small harbour to unload their catch for the waiting women to gut and salt. After the herring abruptly disappeared from Iceland's north coast in the late 1960s, Siglufjörður declined and has never fully recovered.

Today it's a sleepy kind of place with an enduring charm and it's a great base for hiking in the nearby mountains. Iceland's northernmost town, just 40km south of the Arctic Circle, it's reached along one of northern Iceland's most scenic coastal routes, a precarious but stunning paved road that winds around the northwest of Tröllaskagi.

There's a small but helpful **tourist office** (www.siglo.is) in the museum.

Sights & Activities

The big attraction in town is **Síldarminjasafnið** (Herring Era Museum; ☎ 467 1604; http://herring.siglo.is/en; Snorrágata 15; adult/12–16yr 1kr800/400; ☹ 10am–6pm late Jun–mid-Aug, 1–5pm May–late Jun & mid-Aug–Sep), a fantastic recreation of Siglufjörður's boom days between 1903 and 1968. Set in an old Norwegian herring station, the museum brings the work and lives of the town's inhabitants vividly to life. In the first building, photographs, displays and 1930s film show the fishing and salting process, while the accommodation block is left much as it would have been when in use. Next door is a re-creation of the reducing plant, where the majority of herrings were separated into oil (a valuable commodity) and meal (used for fertiliser). The third and newest building is a re-creation of harbour life, with actual trawler boats and equipment based on life on the busy pier during the boom days.

If you're travelling in midsummer it's worth planning to visit on a Saturday when **herring-salting demonstrations** (admission 1kr1000; ☹ 3pm early Jul–mid-Aug) are held accompanied by lively concertina music and theatrical performances. The ticket price includes admission to the museum.

Thanks to its proximity to the bishopric in Hólar, music has always been of particular importance in Tröllaskagi, and Siglufjörður has a strong musical tradition. The **Icelandic Folk Music Centre** (☎ 467 2300; http://siglo.is/setur; adult/under 14yr 1kr600/free; ☹ 1–5pm 1–15 Jun & 15–31

Aug, 10am–6pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug) opened in 2006 and explores the history and development of Icelandic folk music. The collection is housed in the former home of Rev. Björn Thorsteins-son, who collected many of the instruments and recordings of traditional songs, nursery rhymes and chants on display.

Siglufjörður is a great base for hikers, with a series of interesting walks in the area. Seven of these routes are described in detail on the town website, www.siglo.is.

For a short hike you can walk north along the western shore of Siglufjörður to the abandoned herring factory, which was destroyed by an avalanche in 1919. Longer hikes will take you over the passes Hósarð and Hussarð to the wild, beautiful and uninhabited Heðinsfjörður, the next fjord to the east.

The most popular hike, however, is along the old road between Siglufjörður and Fljótavík. This allegedly haunted road was once the main route into town but was closed when an 800m-long tunnel was built. The route is prone to avalanches and only opens between early July and late August. It climbs up to the 630m Siglufjarðarskarð pass and then heads north along the ridge to Strákar, where there are wonderful views over the fjord and out to sea.

In winter a **ski lift** (day pass 1kr600) operates in Skarðsdalur above the head of the fjord. From there, it's a lovely day walk over Hólsfjall to the abandoned valley above Héðinsfjörður. In summer you can opt for a nine-hole round of golf at the Hóll sports centre.

Festivals & Events

Despite the utter demise of the herring industry, Siglufjörður remains nostalgic about the good old days and hosts a lively **herring festival** on the bank holiday weekend in early August. It's one of Iceland's most enjoyable local festivals with much singing, dancing, drinking, feasting and fish cleaning.

An annual Icelandic and foreign **folk-music festival** is staged over five days in mid-July, with workshops and several concerts every evening.

Sleeping

Camp site (☎ 460 5600; sites per person 1kr500; ☹ Jun–Aug) Right in the middle of town near the harbour and town square, the municipal camp site has a toilet block and a laundry.

Þróttamiðstöðin Hóll (☎ 467 1817; sites per person 1kr500, sb 1500; ☹ Jun–Aug) The local sports hall

offers basic beds in three- to six-person rooms, camping and a simple guest kitchen. To get there go past the harbour and museum to the end of Lanjaneggar.

Gistiheimilið Hvanneyri (☎ 467 1378; alla@simnet.is; Aðalgata 10; sb/s/d lkr1800/4000/6000) Siglufjörður's top spot is this rather dated 1930s guesthouse, which now only has a glimmer of its former grandeur. The spacious, clean and comfortable rooms all have private bathroom but are past their best. There's a TV lounge, a huge dining room and a guest kitchen.

Eating

Aðalbakari (☎ 467 1720; Aðalgata 36; ☎ 7am-5pm) Ideal for breakfast or lunch, this bakery and café serves the usual selection of bread, cakes, pastries and filled rolls as well as the Icelandic speciality *ástar pungur* (love balls) – deep-fried spiced balls.

Biobarinn (☎ 467 1111; Aðalgata 30; mains lkr800-1800; ☎ 11.30am-9pm) This cinema-inspired diner is the only genuine restaurant in town and serves good-value burgers, pizza, and fish and lamb dishes. The small upstairs bar is open until 1am on Friday and Saturday nights and is a great place to go and meet the locals.

Pizza 67 (☎ 467 2323; Aðalgata; pizzas lkr900-2000; ☎ noon-9pm Mon-Fri, 3-9pm Sat & Sun Jun & Jul, 5-9pm Aug-mid-Sep) Just down the road, this basic pizzeria is the only other dining choice in town.

There's a supermarket across from the harbour, and fishmonger Fiskbuð Siglufjörður is opposite Biobarinn. The Vín Büð alcohol shop is on Tungata.

Getting There & Away

From June to August there is a bus service that runs every day except Saturday (with two services on Tuesday and Friday) between Varmahlíð and Siglufjörður with a change in Sauðárkrúkur.

If you're heading east toward Akureyri in your own car, it's possible to take a short cut across Tröllaskagi on Rte 82 to Ólafsfjörður. From the turn-off to Varmahlíð (at the junction of Rtes 76 and 82, near Fljótavík) it's 37km along a narrow gravel road. Although it's a scenic route, it's usually closed in winter, so check beforehand. A planned tunnel through the mountain will cut the journey between Siglufjörður and Ólafsfjörður to only 15km, but it's not expected to be finished until 2008.

ÖXNADALUR

If you haven't the time to head north around Tröllaskagi, you'll pass instead along the Öxnadalur valley, a 30km-long narrow valley on the Ring Rd between Varmahlíð and Akureyri. The mountain pass is flanked by dramatic peaks and thin pinnacles of rock. The imposing 1075m spire of **Hraufdrangi** and the surrounding peaks of **Háafjall** are probably the most dramatic in Iceland.

Early settlers considered the summit of Hraufdrangi inaccessible and perpetuated legends of a hidden cache of gold that awaited the first climber to reach the top. It was finally climbed in 1956, but the treasure seemed to have already gone.

If you want to break the journey, **Halastjarna** (☎ 461 7997; www.halastjarna.com; Háls; 5-course set dinner lkr5900; ☎ noon-10pm Jun-Aug), near the summit of the pass, does a great selection of organic and local dishes, including fish, lobster, seafood, lamb and sea birds, served alongside home-grown salads.

AKUREYRI

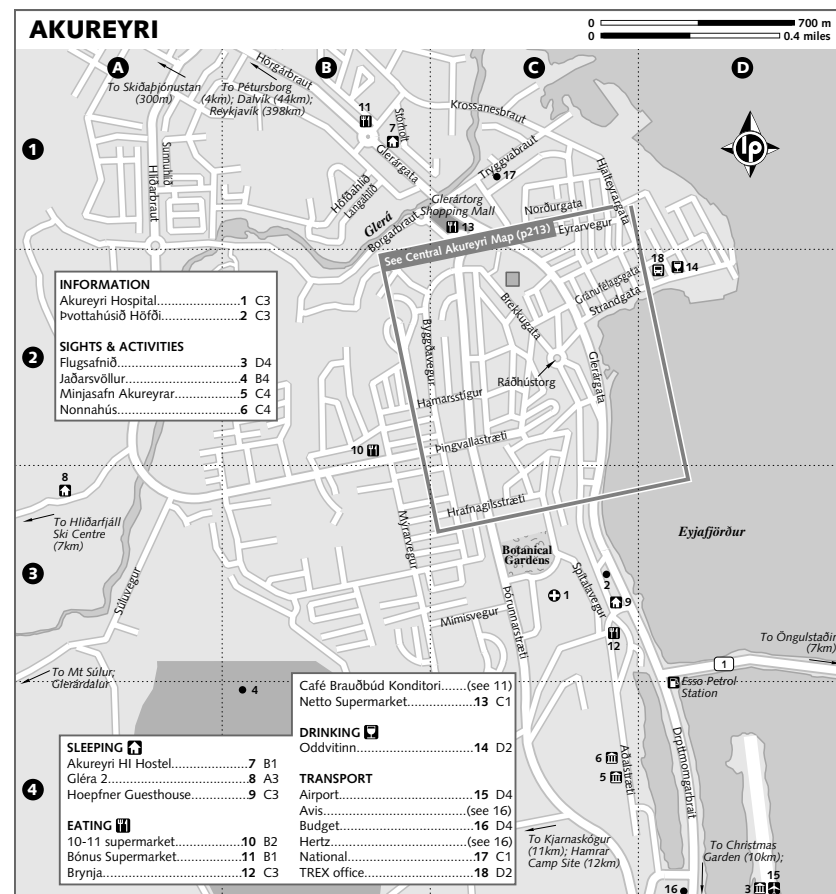
pop 16,580

Set at the head of a long fjord, Akureyri is a bustling, cosmopolitan town and Iceland's second-largest city. Although it falls a long way behind the capital in terms of population and facilities, its fine selection of museums, shops, cafés, bars and restaurants sets it apart from the sleepy, rural towns found elsewhere in Iceland.

Snowcapped peaks rise behind the town and across the city flower boxes, trees and well-tended gardens belie the city's location just a stone's throw from the Arctic Circle. With a lively summer festival season, some of Iceland's best winter skiing, and a relaxed and easy attitude, it's the natural base for exploring Eyjafjörður and further east to Mývatn.

HISTORY

The first permanent inhabitant of Eyjafjörður was Norse-Irish settler Helgi Magri (Helgi the Lean), who arrived in about 890. Although Helgi worshipped Þór and let the gods choose an auspicious site for him to settle by tossing his high-seat pillars overboard (they washed up 7km south of present-day Akureyri), he hedged his bets by naming his farm Kristnes (Christ's Peninsula).



By 1602 a trading post had been established at present-day Akureyri. There were still no permanent dwellings, though, as all the settlers maintained rural farms and homesteads. By the late 18th century the town had accumulated a whopping 10 residents, all Danish traders, and was granted municipal status.

The town soon began to prosper and by 1900 Akureyri numbered 1370 people. The original cooperative, Gránufélagssins, had begun to decline and in 1906 it was replaced by Kaupfélagið Eyjafirðinga Akureyrar (KEA; the Akureyri Cooperative Society), whose ubiquitous insignia still graces many Akureyri businesses.

Today Akureyri is thriving. Its fishing company and shipyard are the largest in the coun-

try, and the city's university (established in 1987) gives the town a youthful exuberance.

ORIENTATION

Akureyri is small and easy to get around on foot, with a compact knot of cafés, bars, museums and shops just west of the busy commercial harbour. The town centre is concentrated around pedestrianised Hafnarstræti, with the small square Raðhústorg at its northern end. The bus station is to the south of the centre and the airport about 2km further south.

It'll take at least a day to see the museums, churches and botanical gardens in the centre of town. The bustling harbour and the oldest part of town along Hafnarstræti and Aðalstræti are also worth a visit.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Fróði (Map p213; Kaupvangsstræti) Second-hand bookshop next to Karolina Café, full of books in several languages.

Penninn Bókval (Map p213; ☎ 461 5050; Hafnarstræti 91-93; ☎ 9am-10pm) Excellent bookshop with souvenir books in English, French and German, Icelandic titles, popular foreign-language paperbacks, DVDs, CDs and videos.

Emergency

Fire and ambulance (☎ 112, 462 2222)

Police (Map p213; ☎ 462 3222; Þórunnarstræti 138)

Internet Access

Akureyri Municipal Library & Archives (Map p213; ☎ 460 1250; Brekkugata 17; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug, to 7pm Mon-Wed & Fri, to 10pm Thu, noon-5pm Sep-May; per hr 1kr200) Plenty of terminals and fast connections in a light and airy space.

Tourist Office (Map p213; ☎ 462 7733; Hafnarstræti 82; 15 min 1kr150) Three internet terminals.

Laundry

Self-service washing machines are at the camp site and youth hostel.

Þvottahúsið Höfði (Map p211; ☎ 462 2580; Hafnarstræti 34; loads up to 10kg 1kr1500; ☎ 8am-noon 3-5pm Mon-Fri) Service laundry.

Libraries

Akureyri Municipal Library & Archives (Map p213; ☎ 460 1250; www.amtsbok.is; Brekkugata 17; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug, to 7pm Mon-Wed & Fri, to 10pm Thu, noon-5pm Sep-May) Has books and magazines in English (including novels) and extensive historical archives; book loan is free and available to travellers.

Medical Services

Akureyri Hospital (Map p211; ☎ 463 0100; Spítalavegur) Just south of the botanical gardens.

Heilsugæslustöðin Clinic (Map p213; ☎ 460 4600; Hafnarstræti 99) Doctors on call around the clock.

Money

All central bank branches (open 9.15am to 4pm) offer commission-free foreign exchange and have 24-hour ATMs. After hours, ask at Hótel KEA.

Íslandsbanki (Map p213; ☎ 460 7800; Skipagata 14)

KB Banki (Map p213; ☎ 444 6000; Geislagata 5)

Landsbanki Íslands (Map p213; ☎ 460 4000;

Strandgata 1)

Sparisjóður Norðlendinga (Map p213; ☎ 460 2500; Skipagata 9)

Post & Communications

Main Post Office (Map p213; ☎ 460 2600; Skipagata 10; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Tourist Offices

Ferðafélag Akureyrar (Map p213; ☎ 462 2720; www.ffa.is; Strandgata 23; ☎ 4-7pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug) Local branch of the Icelandic Touring Association. Good for maps and hiking information.

Tourist Office (Map p213; ☎ 462 7733; www.eyjafjorður.is, www.nordurland.is; Hafnarstræti 82; ☎ 7.30am-7pm daily Jun-Aug, 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat & Sun mid-May-Jun & Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr) Friendly, efficient tourist office with internet access. The office may move to the new Culture House (Map p213) by the harbour in 2008.

Travel Agencies

Ferðaskrifstofa Akureyrar (Map p213; ☎ 460 0600; Raðhústorg 3) Domestic and international flights and ferries.

Nonni Travel (Map p213; ☎ 461 1841; www.nonni.travel.is; Brekkugata 5; ☎ 8am-6pm) Offers day trips, excursions, car rentals and flights. See p215 for details of tours.

Sporttours (Map p213; ☎ 461 2968; www.sporttours.is; Hafnarstræti 82) Agent for whale-watching, horse-riding, rafting and super-Jeep tours.

SIGHTS

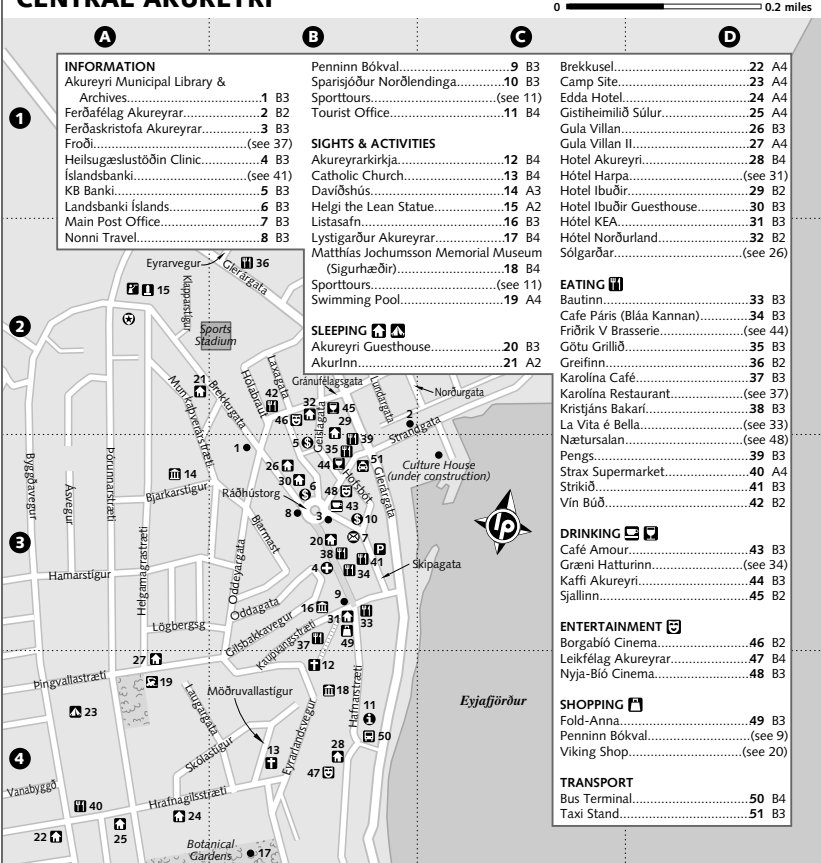
Churches

Dominating the town from high on a hill, **Akureyrarkirkja** (Map p213; Eyrarlandsvegur) was designed by Guðjón Samúelsson, the architect responsible for Reykjavík's Hallgrímskirkja. The church continues his geological theme but is less blatantly 'basalt' and has a more traditional interior.

Built in 1940, Akureyrarkirkja contains a large and beautiful 3200-pipe organ and a series of rather untraditional reliefs of the life of Christ. There's also an unusual interpretation of the crucifixion and a suspended ship hanging from the ceiling. The ship reflects an old Nordic tradition of votive offerings for the protection of loved ones at sea. Perhaps the most striking feature, however, is the beautiful central window in the chancel, which originally graced Coventry Cathedral in England.

The **Catholic church** (Map p213; Eyrarlandsvegur 26) is an attractive old house built in 1912 and acquired by the church in 1952. On the nearby roundabout is Einar Jónsson's sculpture *Útlaginn* (The Outlaw).

CENTRAL AKUREYRI



Museums

Akureyri has a large selection of museums, many of them honouring local boys made good. Although it's laudable that the town celebrates its artists, poets and authors, unless you have a particular admiration for a specific artist's work, many are of limited interest.

Minjasafnið á Akureyrar (Akureyri Folk Museum; Map p211; ☎ 462 4162; www.akmus.is; Aðalstræti 58; adult/under 16yr 1kr400/free, joint ticket with Nonni House 1kr550; ☎ 10am-5pm daily Jun-mid-Sep, 2-4pm Sat mid-Sep-May) houses an interesting collection of art and historical items from the Settlement Era to the present. Among the displays are photographs, fish-drying racks, farming tools and re-creations of early Icelandic homes. Themed exhibitions are mounted each summer.

The **church** outside the folk museum is constructed in typical 19th-century Icelandic style. It was originally built at Svalbarðseyri on the eastern shore of Eyjafjörður and moved to its present site in 1970. The **museum garden** became the first place in Iceland to cultivate trees when a nursery was planted here in 1899.

The most interesting of the artists' homes, **Nonnahúsið** (Map p211; ☎ 462 3555; www.nonni.is; Aðalstræti 54; adult/under 16yr 1kr350/free, joint ticket with folk museum 1kr550; ☎ 10am-5pm Jun-Aug) was the childhood home of the renowned children's writer Reverend Jón Sveinsson (Nonni, 1857-1944). The house dates from 1850 and its cramped rooms and simple furnishings give a poignant insight into life in 19th-century Iceland.

A collection of old photographs and original books completes the display.

Listasafn (Akureyri Art Museum; Map p213; ☎ 462 2610; www.listasafn.akureyri.is; Kaupvangsstræti 12; admission lkr400; ☎ noon-5pm Tue-Sun), opposite Karólína Café, hosts changing exhibitions by local artists as well as a number of permanent works. The museum complex also houses artists' studios, commercial galleries and an art school.

Situated beside the Akureyrarkirkja stairs, the **Matthías Jochumsson Memorial Museum** (Sigurhæðir; Map p213; ☎ 466 2609; Eyrarlandsvegur 3; adult/under 12yr lkr400/free; ☎ 3-5pm Mon-Fri 1 Jun-13 Aug) honours the former Icelandic poet laureate and dramatist Matthías Jochumsson. The ground floor of his former home is much as it would have been when he lived here and houses a collection of his works and personal property.

Northwest of the centre, **Davíðshús** (Map p213; ☎ 462 2874; Bjarkarstigur 6; admission lkr150; ☎ 1-2.30pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug) remains much as it was on the day Icelandic poet laureate, novelist and playwright Davíð Stefánsson died in 1964.

Flugsafnið (Aviation Museum; Map p211; ☎ 863 2835; www.flugsafn.is; admission lkr400; ☎ 2-5pm Thu-Sun Jun-Aug, 2-5pm Sat Sep-May), in a hangar at Akureyri airport, charts the history of aviation in Iceland from the first flight in 1919 to the present. Photographs and memorabilia are on display, and you can visit the workshop where historic gliders and small aircraft are stored and repaired.

Botanical Gardens

A host of exotic species from as far away as New Zealand, Spain and Tanzania flourish in Akureyri's botanical gardens, **Lystigarður Akureyrar** (Map p213; ☎ 462 7487; Eyrarlandsvegur;

admission free; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10pm Sat & Sun Jun-Oct), thanks to the region's moderate microclimate. The wealth of plant life on display is truly astonishing considering the gardens' proximity to the Arctic Circle. You'll find examples of every species native to Iceland here, as well as an extensive collection of high-latitude and high-altitude plants from around the world, all meticulously labelled with scientific names and countries of origin.

The lawns are sheltered from the wind and make a nice place to sit in the sun. Around the gardens are statues of poet Matthías Jochumsson, and Margrethe Schiöth, who voluntarily managed the gardens for 30 years, along with local contemporary art and sculptures.

Helgi the Lean

On the hill northeast of Klapparstigur, a five-minute walk from the city centre, is a **statue** (Map p213) of Helgi the Lean, the first settler in the Akureyri area. There's also a **view disc**, but the view, of shops and office buildings obscuring the fjord, isn't brilliant.

Kjarnaskógur

About 3km south of town is Iceland's most visited 'forest', the Kjarnaskógur woods. This bushland area has a 2km-long athletic course, walking tracks, picnic tables, an amusing children's playground and some novel fitness-testing devices. Check out the amusing log sundial designed by Icelandic Scouts.

ACTIVITIES Swimming

The superb **swimming pool** (Map p213; ☎ 461 4455; pingvallastræti 21; adult/6-15yr lkr310/150, sauna lkr500;

TEEING OFF AT MIDNIGHT

For anyone who loves golf, there's something strangely appealing about playing 'midnight golf' – and there are only a handful of 18-hole courses in the world where you can do it. At a few degrees south of the Arctic Circle, Akureyri's **Jaðarsvöllur** (Map p211; ☎ 462 2974; gagolf@nett.is) basks in perpetual daylight from June to early August. In summer you can play golf here around the clock; just book ahead for a midnight tee-off. Green fees are lkr3000 on weekdays, lkr3800 on weekends. Club hire is lkr2000.

The par-71 course, which boasts Jack Nicklaus as an honorary member, is home to the annual 36-hole Arctic Open, a golf tournament played overnight in late June. The most famous sportsman rumoured to come for a round here was basketballer Michael Jordan, who flew in just for the midnight-golf experience.

☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6.30pm Sat & Sun), near the camp site, is one of Iceland's finest. It has three heated pools, hot pots, water slides, saunas, pummelling water jets and a solarium – perfect for a relaxing afternoon.

Hiking & Skiing

A pleasant but demanding day hike leads up the Glerádalur valley to the summit of Mt Sútur (1144m). The trail begins on Súluvegur, a left turn off Þingvallastræti just before the Glerá bridge. Give yourself at least seven hours to complete the return journey.

With two days, you can continue up the valley to the beautifully situated Lambi mountain hut (at N 65°34.880', W 18°17.770'), which accommodates up to six people. Alternatively, from the Hlíðarfjall ski resort there's a challenging but beautiful day hike up to the small glacier Vindheimajökull and the 1456m peak Strýta.

For more information on hiking in the area, contact **Ferðafélag Akureyrar** (Map p213; ☎ 462 2720; www.ffa.is; Strandgata 23).

The **Hlíðarfjall ski centre** (☎ 462 2280; www.hlidarfjall.is; 1-day pass lkr1200), west of town 7km up Glerárdalur, is probably Iceland's premier downhill ski slope, with green and blue pistes suitable for beginner to upper-intermediate skiers. The longest run is 2.5km, with a vertical drop of about 500m. There's also 20km of cross-country ski routes and a terrain park for snowboarders.

The ski season usually runs between mid-December and the end of April, with the best conditions in February and March. In the long hours of winter darkness, the downhill runs are floodlit. The ski lodge has a restaurant, and a ski school offers individual and group instruction and equipment hire. In season, buses connect the site with Akureyri three times daily.

TOURS

From June to September BSÍ runs sightseeing tours to Mývatn (lkr7700, nine hours), departing at 8.15am daily from the airport and 8.30am from the bus terminal (Map p213). There's a 5% discount for bus-pass holders.

Akureyri's main tour agency, **Nonni Travel** (Map p213; ☎ 461 1841; www.nonnitravel.is; Brekkugata 5), runs a host of summer tours, including daily trips to Mývatn (lkr7700) and whale watching at Húsavík (lkr8000). On Monday, Wednesday and Friday self-guided trips by ferry can be arranged to Hrisey (lkr2700) and Grimsey (lkr5100). The Grimsey tour can also be done by combining a ferry and flight (lkr9500). The agency also organises rafting in Varmalið (lkr8900), horse riding (lkr9000, four to five hours), Arctic Circle flights (lkr14,200, 10 June to 20 August) and day trips to Greenland (lkr39,590 to lkr49,210).

Horse tours and hire are available from a range of outlying farms; ask at the tourist office for a full list. The best-known operator is **Pólar Hestar** (☎ 463 3179; www.polarhestar.is; one-week trips €900-1500), which offers week-long wilderness trips in the surrounding mountains and valleys – see p223. Other operators include **Hestaleigan Kátur** (☎ 862 2600), **Engimyri** (☎ 462 6838), in Öxnadalur, and **Sportours** (Map p213; ☎ 466 1982; www.sportours.is). Expect to pay about lkr2500/4000/5000 for one-/two-/three-hour tours.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Akureyri's annual **arts festival** runs from late June to late August and attracts artists and musicians from around Iceland. There are special exhibitions, concerts, free jazz at 9.30pm on Thursday, theatre performances and everything from clay-pigeon shooting to historical walks. It all culminates in a weekend

REVEREND JÓN SVEINSSON

The Jesuit priest Jón Sveinsson (Nonni) is one of Iceland's most famous and best-loved children's authors. His stories of derring-do were originally written in German but have a strong Icelandic flavour and have since been translated into 40 languages. Despite his great esteem in Iceland, Nonni spent only his early childhood years here. Born in 1857 at Möðruvellir, he moved south to Akureyri at the age of eight and four years later was sent to study in France.

At the age of 21 he joined the Jesuit order and eventually accepted a teaching post in Ordrup, Denmark, in 1883. He taught there for 20 years until ill health forced him to retire. It was during his retirement that Nonni began to write about his early adventures in Iceland with his brother Manni (who had died at the age of only 23). The 12 *Nonni & Manni* books are his best-known writing, and their success gave him the opportunity to travel the world lecturing on his works and his homeland, which made him something of a hero in Iceland. Many of the original copies of his books as well as numerous illustrations are now displayed in the Nonnahús museum. Nonni died in Germany in 1944.

street party and parade. For details on events and exhibitions, contact the tourist office on ☎ 462 7733.

SLEEPING Budget

Camp site (Map p213; ☎ 462 3379; hamrar@skatar.is; Þórunnarstræti; sites per person 1kr800; ☹ mid-Jun–Aug) Handy for travellers but destined to be shut down, this well-managed site across from the swimming pool has a kitchen, a toilet and shower block, and a washer and dryer. This site will close once building and roadworks are complete on the road up to the Hamrar camp site (see following). Email or ask at the tourist office for up-to-date information.

Hamrar camp site (☎ 461 2264; hamrar@hamrar.is; sites per person 1kr800; ☹ Jun–Aug; ☑) This huge camp site, 1.5km south of town in a leafy setting, has newer facilities than the other site, and mountain views. There's a good kitchen and laundry room, ample shower rooms and internet access (1kr200/350 for 30 minutes/one hour).

Akureyri HI Hostel (Map p211; ☎ 462 3657; www.hostel.is; Stórholt 1; sb 1kr1800–3000, s/d/tr 1kr3900/6600/8250) This friendly, well-equipped and immaculately kept hostel is a 15-minute walk north of the city centre. There's a TV lounge, three kitchens, a barbecue deck and a laundry as well as two attractive summerhouses (1kr14,280/49,500 for one/seven days) sleeping up to seven people. Substantial discounts are available for local restaurants, whale-watching trips (up to 35% off) and local tours, so it's a good idea to book here when you check in. Advance bookings are essential in summer.

Midrange

Akureyri has a good selection of guesthouses, but the best places get booked up fast, especially in summer. Most are open all year and offer substantial discounts in the off season.

our pick Akurlinn (Map p213; ☎ 461 2500; www.akurlinn.is; Brekkugata 27a; s/d without bathroom 1kr3500/5000, with bathroom 1kr5200/6800) A cut above most of Akureyri's guesthouses, this heritage home has a variety of rooms with high ceilings, wood floors and period charm. Crisp white linens, pale neutral colours and simple style give the rooms a very calm atmosphere, and the large lounge and formal dining room add a touch of 1930s class.

Sólgarðar (Map p213; ☎ 461 1133; solgardar@simnet.is; Brekkugata 6; sb/s/d 1kr2900/4300/6000) Clean and

well kept but quite dated, this small, friendly guesthouse has three nicely furnished rooms and an ancient kitchen. Each room has a TV, but with paper-thin walls between rooms you may need earplugs for a good night's sleep.

Hoepfner Guesthouse (Map p211; ☎ 463 3360; hoepfner@simnet.is; Hafnarstræti 20; sb/s/d/tr 1kr3600/4500/6500/8500; ☹ Jun–Aug; ☑) This sparkling new guesthouse has a selection of bright, cheery rooms with plain white walls, functional but modern furniture and colourful quilt covers. There's a good kitchen and lounge for guest use and free wi-fi access.

Gula Villan (Map p213; ☎ 896 8464; www.gulavillan.is; Brekkugata 8; sb/s/d 1kr3500/5000/6600) Spotless rooms with simple but comfortable furnishings and friendly owners are available at this centrally located guesthouse. A second building (at Þingvallastræti 14, open June to August) run by the same couple offers extra space in summer. Both guesthouses have guest kitchens and breakfast served on request (1kr950).

Brekksusel (Map p213; ☎ 462 3961, 895 1260; www.brekksusel.is; Byggðavegur 97; sb/s/d 1kr3000/4900/6800) Bright, airy and spotlessly clean, the guest rooms here have simple, modern styling, white linens and shared bathrooms. There's a large, cosy lounge and two kitchens for guest use.

Akureyri Guesthouse (Map p213; ☎ 462 5588; www.gistiheimilid.net; Hafnarstræti 104; s/d without bathroom 1kr5300/7300, with bathroom 1kr7300/9900) A cross between a budget hotel and a guesthouse, this place has plenty of rooms but none of the personal character of other accommodation options in town. Rooms are compact and simple and all have TV and sink. There's a guest kitchen and a bright top-floor dining room with a balcony overlooking the pedestrian shopping street.

Hotel Íbúðir (Map p213; ☎ 462 3727; www.hotelibudir.is; Geislagata 10; apt 1kr13,000–21,900) The good-value Íbúðir is spread over two locations, with a charming guesthouse at Brekkugata 4 (Map p213) offering spacious, contemporary rooms (1kr8300/10,400 for singles/doubles May to September, 1kr5900/7900 for singles/doubles October to April) with decent furniture and subtle styling, and a choice of apartments sleeping two to eight in the main building on Geislagata.

Edda Hotel (Map p213; ☎ 444 4000; www.hoteledda.is; Hrafnagilstræti; s/d without bathroom 1kr5800/7200, with bathroom 1kr10,300/12,900; ☹ mid-Jun–late Aug) Bland but comfortable rooms are available at this vast summer hotel in the local school. Most are

modern and spacious and have TVs and private bathrooms, but rooms in the older wing are more dated and have shared bathrooms. There's a café and large restaurant on site.

Pétursborg (☎ 461 1811; www.petursborg.com; s/d without bathroom 1kr5300/8100, with bathroom 1kr7300/10,100) A great retreat from the city, this pleasant farmhouse on the edge of the fjord has cosy, well-furnished rooms and a wooden summerhouse (1kr8000) sleeping six. There's an outdoor hot pot and a barbecue, a guest kitchen, and a large lounge and dining room. Pétursborg is 4km west of Akureyri, 1.5km off Rte 1.

Öngulstaðir (☎ 463 1380; www.ongulstadir.is; s/d/tr without bathroom 1kr5300/7000/8300, with bathroom 1kr6400/8800/10,500) This friendly farm, gallery and souvenir shop offers comfy accommodation in a range of rooms as well as an on-site restaurant if you don't want to head back into town to eat. Öngulstaðir is on Rte 829, 7km south of Akureyri (cross to the eastern side of the fjord before heading south).

Other options:

Gistiheimilið Súlar (Map p213; ☎ 461 1160; sulur@islandia.is; Þórunnarstræti 93; sb/s/d/tr 1kr3600/5000/6800/8400; ☹ Jun–Aug) Bright, modern guesthouse with simple rooms and guest kitchen.

Gléra 2 (Map p211; ☎ 462 523; www.glera2.is; Gléra 2; sb/s/d 1kr2500/4000/5000) Simple, good-value rooms with TV and guest kitchen on the road to the ski resort.

Top End

Hótel Norðurland (Map p213; ☎ 462 2600; www.kea.hotels.is; Geislagata 7; s/d/tr Jun–Aug 1kr11,900/15,100/19,600, Sep–May 1kr8900/11,300/14,700) A business hotel from the KEA chain, this place is less appealing than its sister hotels; its big, bright rooms have tired furnishings and little atmosphere. All have private bathrooms and are comfortable enough, but it's worth paying a little extra and heading to the Harpa instead.

Hotel Akureyri (Map p213; ☎ 462 5600; www.hotelakureyri.is; Hafnarstræti 67; s/d 1kr13,500/16,500) Compact rooms with simple décor, satellite TV, phone and minibar are on offer at this new hotel near the tourist office. All rooms have private bathrooms and, although comfortable, are lacking in any personal touch.

Hotel Harpa (Map p213; ☎ 460 2000; www.kehoteles.is; Hafnarstræti 83–85; s/d/tr Jun–Aug 1kr12,700/16,100/20,900, Sep–May 1kr10,100/12,700/16,600) A sister property of Hótel KEA, it has smaller rooms but, thanks to a recent renovation, they're brighter, smarter and altogether better value. Contemporary styling, parquet flooring and sparkling new

bathrooms are on offer, but the reception and restaurant are shared with the KEA.

Hótel KEA (Map p213; ☎ 460 2000; www.kehoteles.is; Hafnarstræti 87–89; s/d/tr Jun–Aug 1kr14,700/18,900/24,500, Sep–May 1kr11,900/14,900/19,500; ☹) The top spot in town, the KEA has spacious business-style rooms with dated design and large bathrooms. There's little local character about it, but some rooms have balconies and good views over the fjord. There's a bar, a café and a swanky but soulless restaurant.

EATING

You'll be spoilt for choice when it comes to eating out in Akureyri, with a large selection of cafés and restaurants serving everything from spicy noodles to authentic Icelandic cuisine.

Restaurants

Götu Grillið (Map p213; ☎ 462 1800; Strandgata 11; mains 1kr665–1795; ☹ noon–10pm) Simple, fresh and contemporary, this bright and airy place offers a decent range of food from seafood soup to chicken and lamb kebabs, pizza, fish, and Indian dishes. It's good value and an excellent choice for lunch.

Pengs (Map p213; ☎ 466 3800; Strandgata 13; mains 1kr1200–2000; ☹ 11.30am–2pm & 5–10pm Mon–Sat, 3–10pm Sun) Friendly service and a wide choice of dishes make Akureyri's only Chinese restaurant a good option. There's plenty of choice for vegetarians and a bumper 15-course lunch buffet available for a bargain 1kr990.

Bautinn (Map p213; ☎ 462 1818; Hafnarstræti 92; mains 1kr1300–3400) A local favourite, this friendly, relaxed place in the centre of town has an all-you-can-eat soup and salad bar (1kr1290) and an extensive menu featuring everything from pizza, fish and lamb to such Icelandic favourites as puffin, whale and horsemeat. [Whale meat served.]

La Vita é Bella (Map p213; ☎ 462 5858; Hafnarstræti 92; mains 1kr1330–3000; ☹ lunch & dinner Jun–Aug, from 6pm Sep–May) This Italian restaurant features a good-value selection of salads, risottos and pasta, including lasagne and ravioli, a good range of pizzas and excellent Mediterranean-inspired fish and meat dishes.

Strikið (Map p213; ☎ 462 7100; www.strikid.is; Skipagata 14; mains lunch 1kr890–2790, dinner 1kr1590–3150) This slick, minimalist top-floor restaurant has great views over the harbour and an eclectic menu featuring everything from soup and burgers to Thai noodles, pasta, and meat and seafood dishes.

Greifinn (Map p213; ☎ 460 1600; www.greifinn.is; Glerárgata 20; mains Ikr1700-3000; ☎ 11.30am-11.30pm) Family-friendly and always buzzing, Greifinn is one of the most popular spots in town. The menu features plenty of comfort food, from juicy burgers and nachos dripping with cheese to good pizzas, salads and devilish deserts.

Fríðrik V Brasserie (Map p213; ☎ 461 5775; Strandgata 7; mains Ikr2500-4000; ☎ 6-10pm Tue-Sun) Akureyri's gourmet hub, the Fríðrik V is a formal kind of place with a hushed respect for the master chefs at work. The menu features Icelandic delicacies such as lobster tails, fresh seafood and lamb, all done in an impeccable Mediterranean style. Ideal for special night out.

Our pick **Karolina Restaurant** (Map p213; ☎ 461 2755; www.karolina.is; Kaupvangsstræti 23; 2-/3-/5-course dinner Ikr4200/5400/6800; ☎ from 6pm Tue-Sat) Hip, trendy and very slick, the upmarket Karolina is run by Iceland's Chef of the Year 2003. The menu is appropriately daring, mixing traditional Icelandic flavours with international culinary ideas (think octopus tempura and tandoori arctic char) with the emphasis on fresh and flavoursome seafood (including dolphin).

Cafés

Kristján's Bakari (Map p213; Hafnarstræti; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) For a quick pit stop this small bakery and café on the main drag sells a bumper selection of fresh bread, cakes and pastries.

Café Paris (Blaá Kannan; Map p213; ☎ 461 4600; Hafnarstræti 96; lunches Ikr950; ☎ 9am-10.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10.30pm Sun; ☎) This old-style café with wooden interior and chilled atmosphere is a great spot for breakfast or lunch. The huge windows and outdoor tables provide prime locations to watch the world go by and the good-value lunches (often veggie) draw the crowds.

Karolina Café (Map p213; ☎ 461 2755; Kaupvangsstræti 23; ☎ 11.30am-1am Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat, 2pm-1am Sun) Self-consciously cool and a favoured hangout with the young and trendy, this art-strewn café is a relaxed place serving great coffee and cakes. The deep leather sofas, tasty sandwiches (Ikr700) and mellow music make it easy to while away a few hours here.

Quick Eats

Nætorsalan (Map p213; Strandgata) Near the Nyja-Bíó cinema, this is the most popular fast-food place with the late-night crowd. It's open until at least 3am on Friday and Saturday night.

Brynja (Map p211; Aðalstræti 3; ☎ 9am-11.30pm) Slightly out of the centre but well worth the effort to get to, this legendary sweet shop is known across Iceland for the best ice cream in the country.

Café Brauðbúð Konditori (Map p211; Undirhlöð) This excellent-value canteen at the Bónus supermarket, serves the usual sandwiches, cakes and soup as well as hearty pasta, pizza and meat dishes from Ikr500 to Ikr600.

On the pedestrian shopping mall are several small kiosks selling hot dogs, chips, burgers, sandwiches and soft drinks.

Self-Catering

Akureyri has a great choice of supermarkets. The biggest is the huge **Netto** (Map p211; Glerárgata) in the new Glerártorg shopping mall. **Strax** (Map p213; Byggðavegur) and **10-11** (Map p211; Þingvallastræti) are both near the camp site west of the centre, and there's a cut-price **Bónus** (Map p211; Undirhlöð) right behind the youth hostel.

Vín Búð (Map p213; ☎ 462 1655; Hólabraut 16; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Thu, to 7pm Fri, to 4pm Sat), the government alcohol shop, is near the Borgabíó cinema.

DRINKING

Akureyri has some lively nightlife, but compared with Reykjavík it's all pretty tame. Along with Karolina Café (left) and Café Paris (left), the hang-outs below make up the best drinking dens in town.

Café Amour (Map p213; ☎ 461 3030; Ráðhústorg 9; ☎ 11am-1am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat) All minimalist style and trendy sophistication, Café Amour tries hard to lure in Akureyri's bright young things with its lengthy cocktail list and New World wines. The small club upstairs is pretty garish but draws the crowds at weekends.

Kaffi Akureyri (Map p213; ☎ 461 3999; Strandgata 7; ☎ 3pm-1am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat) This stylish, modern café-bar is one of Akureyri's best live-music venues and gets packed on Friday and Saturday nights when bands play.

Sjallinn (Map p213; ☎ 461 2700; Geislagata 14; ☎ to 3am Fri & Sat) Perennially popular and always jammed, this bar, club and live-music venue has DJs playing everything from chart tunes to indie rock and live bands at weekends.

Græni Hatturinn (Green Hat; Map p213; ☎ 461 4646; Hafnarstræti 96) More traditional and usually less boisterous than Sjallinn, this popular British-style pub is down a lane behind Café Paris. There's music and dancing at weekends.

Oddvitinn (Map p211; ☎ 462 6020; Strandgata 53) Down by the harbour, Oddvitinn is the sort of pub you don't often see in Iceland. It's in a historic building (with reputedly the longest bar in Iceland), is popular with a mature drinking crowd and has regular karaoke.

ENTERTAINMENT

Leikfélag Akureyrar (Map p213; ☎ 462 0200; www.leikfelag.is; Hafnarstræti 57) Akureyri's main theatre venue hosts drama, musicals, dance and opera with its main season running from September to June rather than during the summer. For information on upcoming performances, check the website or ask at the tourist office.

There are two cinemas in the town centre: **Borgabíó** (Map p213; ☎ 462 3599; Hólabraut 12), and **Nyja-Bíó** (Map p213; ☎ 461 4666; Strandgata 2), just around the corner from the town square. Both show original-version mainstream films with subtitles.

SHOPPING

Several shops on Hafnarstræti sell traditional woollen jumpers, books, knick-knacks and souvenirs under the tax-free scheme (see p317), and there are a clutch of newer, trendier boutiques along Skipagata.

Penninn Bókval (Map p213; ☎ 461 5050; Hafnarstræti 91-93; ☎ 9am-10pm) Penninn sells coffee-table books, calendars and small souvenirs.

Viking Shop (Map p213; ☎ 461 5551; Hafnarstræti 104) This place has a good selection of Icelandic knitted jumpers.

THE AKUREYRI RUNTUR

Bored, restless and keen to be seen, Akureyri's teenagers have developed their own form of *runtur* (literally 'round tour'). While the world-famous Reykjavík equivalent demands a hard stomach and good feet for the weekly pub crawl around the capital, in Akureyri you just need to be old enough to borrow a car. From about 8pm on Friday and Saturday nights you'll see a procession of cars, bumper to bumper, driving round and round in circles along Skipagata, Strandgata and Glerárgata. The speed rarely rises above 5km/h, but horns blare and teenagers scream out to each other until the small hours. Bring earplugs if you're staying in town and fancy an early night.

Fold-Anna (Map p213; ☎ 461 4120; Hafnarstræti 85; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Marginally cheaper woollen goods can be found at this factory outlet, selling woollen jumpers, blankets, hats and gloves. Staff can generally be seen knitting behind the counter as you browse.

Christmas Garden (Jólagarðurinn; ☎ 463 1433; ☎ 10am-10pm) If you can handle the Christmas cheer out of season then the Christmas Garden, 10km south of Akureyri, has a lovely selection of locally made decorations, cards, sweets and traditional Icelandic Christmas foods.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Iceland Express (☎ in UK 0870 8500737; www.icelandexpress.com) flies twice a week from London Stansted (around £200, three hours).

Air Iceland (☎ 460 7000) flies up to seven times daily between Akureyri and Reykjavík (from Ikr5060, 45 minutes), and from Akureyri to Grimsey (from Ikr4865, 25 minutes), Vopnafjörður (from Ikr6125, 45 minutes) and Þórshöfn (from Ikr6125, 45 minutes). All other domestic (and international) flights are via Reykjavík. The airport (Map p211) is 2km south of town.

Bus

Akureyri is the hub for bus travel in the north. SBA is based at the tourist office and bus terminal on Hafnarstræti (Map p213), but **TREX** (Map p211; ☎ 899 4660; Kaldbaksgata) has moved to an inconvenient location in the middle of an industrial estate by the harbour. Few are happy about the move and the company is under pressure to return to the bus terminal. Check locally for up-to-date information.

Buses run between Akureyri and Reykjavík twice daily from May to September, departing at 8.30am and 5pm (Ikr6600, 5½ hours). There is at least one service daily during the rest of the year. From mid-June to the end of August an additional service runs to Reykjavík along the interior's Kjölur route (Ikr8200, 10 hours), leaving at 8am.

Heading east, there are daily summer buses from Akureyri to Egilstaðir (Ikr5400, four hours), calling at Reykjavíhlöð and Skútustaðir, at Mývatn (Ikr2200, 1½ hours). In peak season up to three additional buses run to Mývatn. From June to August there are three daily services to Húsavík (Ikr2300, one hour), from where you can connect to Ásbyrgi and Þórshöfn on weekdays. Buses to Árskógssandur

and Dalvík (for the Grimsey and Hrísey ferries) and Ólafsfjörður leave up to four times a day on weekdays.

Car

Akureyri has several rental agencies, and rates here are slightly cheaper than in Reykjavík, from about Ikr6500 per day for a small car with unlimited kilometres and insurance to Ikr12,500 per day for a small 4WD. For an extra fee of around Ikr4000, most companies will let you pick up a car in Akureyri and drop it off in Reykjavík or vice versa.

Avis (Map p211; ☎ 461 2428, national reservations line 591 4000; Akureyri airport)

Budget (Map p211; ☎ 660 0629; Akureyri airport)

Hertz (Map p211; ☎ 461 1005; Akureyri airport)

National (Map p211; ☎ 461 6000; Tryggvabraut 12)

GETTING AROUND

Bicycle

Skíðþjónustan (☎ 462 1713; Fjölinsgata 4b), located northwest of the town centre, hires out bicycles for about Ikr1500 per day. You can negotiate cheaper rates for weekends and week-long rentals.

Bus

Akureyri is easy to get around on foot, but there's a regular town bus service (fares Ikr200, running from 6.20am to 11.30pm daily). Unfortunately, it doesn't go to the airport.

Car

Akureyri introduced new parking restrictions in 2006. In the central area you must now put a parking disk (available free from all shops, guesthouses and banks) on display in your car. Spaces are marked with maximum stay allowed (from 15 minutes to two hours). Although you do not need to pay for parking, you will be slapped with a fine (Ikr500 to Ikr2000) if you exceed your allotted time.

Taxi

The BSO **taxi stand** (Map p213; ☎ 461 1010) is on the corner of Strandgata and Hofsbót. Taxis may be booked 24 hours a day.

AROUND AKUREYRI

If you have some time it's worth getting off the Ring Rd and exploring the region around Akureyri. To the north, Iceland's longest fjord,

Eyja fjörður, stretches out past the island of Hrísey to the Arctic Ocean. On the west coast you'll get fantastic views of glacial mountains and lush farms, while inland there are some excellent hiking opportunities in Tröllaskagi. On the east coast is the historic farm at Laufás, while south of Akureyri are more key historical sites and farms.

ÁRSKÓGSSTRÖND

pop 560

The rich agricultural region known as Árskógsströnd runs north along the western shore of Eyja fjörður, from where there are dramatic views across the water to the mountains opposite. The main reason to come this way, though, is to catch the ferry to Hrísey island or join whale-watching trips from Hauganes.

Once the largest port in northern Iceland, the protected ruins of the former medieval trading post of **Gásir** (www.gasir.is; admission Ikr400; ☎ tours 1pm, 2pm & 3.30pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am, 1pm, 2pm & 3.30pm Sat Jul & Aug) make an interesting stop along this route. Jewellery, coins and implements have been unearthed, and recent evidence suggests that commercial trading here continued until the 16th century. The ruins are scant, though, so it's well worth taking the guided tour to bring the site to life. Guides explain the significance of the finds, how the trading post might have looked and what life was like while taking you around the foundations of a medieval church, a graveyard and some grass-covered outlines where port trading offices once stood. To get here, head about 7km north from Akureyri along the Ring Rd, turn east on Rte 816 (signposted), then continue another 7km along a gravel road to the site.

North of the Hörgá river is the large farm **Möðruvellir**. It was the site of a monastery founded in 1296 and the birthplace of the author Jón Sveinsson (Nonni, see p214). The present church at Möðruvellir was built in 1868 and has an attractive interior with a blue ceiling covered with stars.

Further north it's worth detouring to the village of **Hauganes** to join a whale-watching tour in the fjord. Trips aboard the former fishing boat **Niels Jonsson** (☎ 867 0000; www.niels.is; 3hr trips Ikr3700; ☎ Jun-Aug) boast a high record spotting cetaceans and include a stop at Hrísey island. Hauganes is 2km off Rte 82 about 14km south of Dalvík.

HRISEY

pop 210

Iceland's second-largest offshore island (after Heimaey) is the peaceful, low-lying Hrísey, a thriving community easily reached from the mainland. Thrust out into the middle of Eyja fjörður, the island is especially noted as a breeding ground and protected area for ptarmigan, as well as being home to a flourishing population of eider duck and an enormous colony of arctic terns.

Traditionally the island was a centre for fish processing and salting, but today most of its inhabitants are employed at a quarantine station for pets and livestock being imported to Iceland.

There's a small **information office** (☎ 695 0077; ☎ 1-6pm mid-Jun-Aug) in the Pearl Gallery by the harbour. You can pick up the handy Hrísey brochure here or in Akureyri. The island also has a bank and a post office on the main street of the village.

Sights & Activities

Hrísey's bucolic charm lies in its dramatic location and its virtually traffic-free tranquillity. A leisurely half-day is enough to explore its shores, but for a more authentic glimpse of island life it's worth staying overnight.

At the island's southern end is the picturesque **village** – a cluster of houses around the harbour linked by cobbled streets frequented by incredibly tame ptarmigan. From here three marked **nature trails** loop around the southeastern part of the island and lead to some good cliff-top viewpoints.

Most of the northern part of Hrísey is a private ptarmigan and eider-duck sanctuary, and visitors must obtain permission to pass through the area. The cliffs along the northeastern coast are indented by **sea caves** and the bush areas have reverted to a natural state, having been free of sheep for many years.

Guided **tractor trips** (☎ 695 0077; per person Ikr500, minimum Ikr1500) run around the island passing all the important sights. Hrísey's tiny outdoor **swimming pool** (☎ 466 3012) also has a sauna.

Sleeping & Eating

Camp site (☎ 466 1769; Skálavegur; ☎ Jun–mid-Sep; sites per person Ikr800) Camping is only permitted at this municipal site near the community centre.

Gistiheimilið Brekka (☎ 466 1751; brekkahriseyelli@sjallinn.is; Hólabraut; s/d Ikr4900/7800) Hrísey's one-stop shop for food and accommodation, this

bright yellow restaurant and guesthouse has lovely harbour views and comfortable rooms. The restaurant (mains Ikr1100 to Ikr5000) has an extensive menu featuring everything from the usual burgers, pizza, pasta and salads to beef steaks, lamb, seafood, and even snails. Book ahead in summer.

Summer chalets (☎ 466 1079) Long-stay and overflow accommodation is available in a series of summerhouses on the island.

Eyjabud, the village store, sells organic foods and a selection of gifts and souvenirs.

Getting There & Away

The ferry **Sævar** (☎ 695 5544) runs between Árskógsstrandur and Hrísey (Ikr750 return, 15 minutes) every two hours from 7am to 11pm from June to August. A reduced service runs during the rest of the year. Buses from Akureyri (Ikr600) connect with the ferries three times daily from Monday to Friday.

On Tuesday and Thursday in high season the ferry **Sæfari** (☎ 458 8900) runs from Dalvík to Hrísey at 1.15pm, returning at 1.45pm.

Nonni Travel (p215) in Akureyri has six-hour tours to Hrísey by bus and ferry (Ikr2700) from Monday to Friday.

DALVÍK

pop 1800

The sleepy village of Dalvík nestles in a spectacular spot between Eyja fjörður and the hills of Svarfaðardalur. Most tourists come here to catch the ferry to Grimsey island (see p223), but if you've got some time there's good hiking, an interesting museum and a lovely swimming pool in and around town.

Much of Dalvík was destroyed by a strong earthquake in 1934, but a new harbour was built just five years later and the local fishing industry has supported the town ever since.

There's a **tourist information point** (☎ 466 3233; www.dalvik.is) at the swimming pool on Svarfaðarbraut, with 15 minutes' free internet access for visitors.

Sights & Activities

Byggðasafnið Hvoll (☎ 466 1497; www.dalvik.is/byggdasafni; Karlsbraut; adult/6-16yr Ikr400/100; ☎ 11am-6pm daily Jun-Aug, 2-5pm Sat Sep-May) This quirky local museum has an array of art and natural exhibits, including a stuffed polar bear, but there's also a room dedicated to local giant Jóhan Pétursson who, at 2.34m (almost 7ft 7in), was Iceland's tallest man. There are photos

and personal effects, many from his days as a circus act. Another room is dedicated to another local, Kristján Eldjárn, who became president of Iceland.

Local whale-watching tours are operated by **Sjóferðir Dalvík** (☎ 466 3355; www.hvalaskodun.is; Ásvegur 6; 3hr tours 1kr3800; ☹ mid-Jun–mid-Aug). The company offers a 100% guarantee – if you don't spot any whales you'll get a second free trip instead.

The area around Dalvík is perfect for wilderness hiking or horse riding. A popular hike or riding tour from Dalvík is over **Heljardalsheiði**. This unmarked route passes through some of Iceland's best mountain scenery; you should allow at least two days for the walk. The trail begins at the end of Rte 805, 20km up Svarfaðardalur, and traverses the Tröllaskagi peninsula to Hólar. However, there's no public transport from Hólar. For hut and map information, contact Ferðafélag Akureyrar (p212) in Akureyri.

Horse riding and hire can be organised through **Tvistur** (☎ 466 1679; ebu@ismennt.is; 1-2-3-hr trips 1kr2000/3000/4500) a farm about 3km from town in the Svarfaðardalur valley. It's also possible to do a half-day ride along the valley, then canoe back along the Svarfaðardalsá river (around 1kr6500 per person). Canoes and bikes are available from Árgerði Guesthouse (see below).

Dalvík has a good **swimming pool** (☎ 466 3233; adult/6-16yr 1kr250/160; ☹ 6.45am–8pm Mon–Fri, 10am–7pm Sat & Sun Jun–Aug, 8am–8pm Mon–Fri, 4-7pm Sat & Sun Sep–May) with hot pots, steam bath, solarium and water slide. In winter there's a **ski tow** (☎ 878 1606; www.skidalvik.is; day pass 1kr800) on Böggvísstaðafjall, the prominent ridge above Dalvík.

Sleeping & Eating

Camp site (☎ 466 3233; ☹ Jun–Aug) There's a free camp site with only basic facilities behind the hotel.

Árgerði Guesthouse (☎ 555 4212; www.argerdi.com; s/d 1kr5000/7000) This welcoming family-run guesthouse has cosy rooms and a lovely location on the Svarfaðardalsá river. There's a summer deck with barbecue, and guests can use bicycles and canoes for a paddle on the river. Árgerði is about 1km south of town on the Akureyri road.

Hotel Sóley (☎ 466 3395; www.hotel.soley.com; Skíðabraut 18; sb 1kr2000, s 1kr4900–6900, d 1kr9800–13,800) Dalvík's only hotel was recently renovated and updated and now offers comfy accommodation in simple but tasteful rooms with private

bathroom. There's a small café and TV lounge but no restaurant for evening meals.

Bakari Axis (Hafnarbraut 5) This local bakery is a good breakfast stop, with plenty of coffee, pastries, filled rolls and fresh bread.

Kaffihúsið Sogn (☎ 466 3330; Goðabraut 3; mains 1kr700–2200; ☹ 11am–9pm Mon–Thu, to 11pm Fri, 3–11pm Sat, 3–9pm Sun) This café-bar opposite the town hall serves coffee and cakes, as well as Icelandic pancakes, tacos, tortillas, and fish and lamb dishes.

There's a supermarket in the small shopping complex opposite the harbour.

Getting There & Away

In summer **Sæfari** (☎ 458 8900; www.samskip.is) runs ferries to Grímsey at 9am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, with bus connections from Akureyri. The return fare is 1kr4340 (1kr5100 including a bus to/from Akureyri that leaves at 7.30am), and the one-way journey takes 3½ hours.

Buses run from Akureyri to Dalvík three times on weekdays from May to August.

ÓLAFSFJÖRÐUR

pop 1020

Beautifully situated beneath snowcapped peaks, the fishing town of Ólafsfjörður makes an ideal day trip from Akureyri. Locked in between the sheer mountain slopes and the dark waters of the fjord, the place has a real sense of rural isolation. You have to pass through a 3km tunnel just to make your way into town.

There's some excellent hiking and riding in the hills around town, lake and sea fishing, and good winter skiing and other off-season activities.

Sights & Activities

Nátúrgrupsafnið (☎ 466 2651; Aðalgata; admission 1kr400; ☹ 2-5pm Tue–Sun Jun–Aug) is Ólafsfjörður's only formal sight; a small natural-history museum above the post office. There's the usual collection of stuffed seals and a polar bear and an extensive range of birds covering every species found in the region.

One of the highlights of Ólafsfjörður is **hiking** in the hills that enclose and dwarf this little fishing village. For several weeks around the end of June, the beautiful 400m-high headland **Ólafsfjarðarmúli** will allow you to see beyond the Arctic Circle and experience the real midnight sun. Unfortunately, there's no easy route up; the scree slopes are steep and rather hazardous to climb, so most people do

their viewing from the high point along the rough coast road.

Ólafsfjörður receives good snow coverage in winter, when the downhill **ski slopes** (day pass 1kr500) above town lurch into action. It's also possible to arrange **snowmobile excursions** (2-3hr from 1kr6000) and **ice fishing** in winter.

Ólafsfjörður competes with Siglufjörður for the title of Iceland's northernmost **golf course**. The nine-hole course is in a lush geothermal area just north of the town.

Sleeping & Eating

Camp site (☎ 466 2363) There's a basic, free camp site with toilets beside the swimming pool.

Brimnes Hotel & Cabins (☎ 466 2400; www.brimnes.is; Bylgjubýggð 2; s/d 1kr8500/10,500, cabins 1kr12,000–14,000) All of Ólafsfjörður's accommodation options are run by the local hotel, whose bedrooms are bland but adequate. The real draw here are the cosy Scandinavian-style log cabins on the lake shore, with hot tubs built into the veranda and views over the water. The hotel restaurant (mains 1kr1520 to 1kr3000) is a bright, cheery place with good service and a decent menu of fish and lamb dishes as well as pizza and some superb homemade Icelandic desserts. The hotel can help organise such activities as horse rental, lake and sea fishing, rowing boats, and winter snowmobile excursions.

Hólinn (☎ 466 4000; Hafnargötu 16; pizzas 1kr900–2200) Your only other option for food is this pizza place down towards the harbour. It does the usual range of pizzas to eat in or take away.

Getting There & Away

Buses run from Akureyri to Dalvík and Ólafsfjörður three times on weekdays from May to August.

GRENVÍK

pop 270

Tucked away at the end of the road on the eastern shore of Eyjafjörður is the tiny village of Grenivík. This sleepy place relies on fishing and fish-freezing to survive, and most visitors come here for the excellent horse tours and to visit the Laufás museum. There is no public transport to Grenivík.

Laufás

Well worth the trip from Akureyri, this 19th-century **manor farm and vicarage** (☎ 463 3196; adult/under 16yr 1kr400/free; ☹ 10am–6pm 15 May–15 Sep) gives a wonderful insight into rural living

in times past. The gabled, turf-roofed farmhouse dates from the 1850s and is set on the edge of Eyjafjörður, a particularly beautiful spot, with numerous eider-duck nesting sites nearby. The buildings were home to up to 30 people (including a team of farm hands) at any one time, and inside, the household and agricultural implements of that time are on display. The adjacent church, with a typical barrel-shaped ceiling, was built in 1865 and is dedicated to St Peter.

Attached to the farmhouse is a lovely country-style café where you can get coffee, cakes and traditional Icelandic dishes. Laufás is 11km south of Grenivík.

Tours

Pólar Hestar (☎ 463 3179; www.polarhestar.is) runs seven- to nine-day horse-riding tours from the farm Grýtubakki II, about 4km south of Grenivík. Destinations include Goðafoss, Mývatn, Gullfoss, Langjökull and the valleys and mountains of northeast Iceland. Prices range from €900 to €1500 and include accommodation and meals. Full-day rides are available on request.

Sleeping & Eating

Gistiheimilið Miðgarðar (☎ 463 3223; www.midgardar.com; Miðgarður 4; sb/s/d without bathroom 1kr2000/3900/7000, with bathroom 1kr5900/10600) The only guesthouse in town is this comfortable place with cosy rooms. There's a café-bar next door serving Icelandic dishes, coffee and cakes.

GRÍMSEY

pop 100

Best known as Iceland's only true piece of Arctic territory, the remote island of Grímsey is worth a visit for its dramatic sea cliffs and wonderful bird life as well as the chance to cross that all-important imaginary line – the Arctic Circle. Flung out into the Arctic Ocean, 41km from the mainland, Grímsey is roughly dissected by the Arctic Circle and basks in the midnight sun throughout the summer months.

Around the island's coast 100m-high cliffs and dramatic basalt formations plunge into the sea and make a popular home for 36 different species of sea birds, and a playground for many others. Kittiwakes, puffins, razor-bills, fulmars, guillemots and arctic terns screech and circle above the cliffs and don't always appreciate the presence of humans. On some trails you'll need to hold a stick

GRÍMSEY'S CHECKMATE

Although chess is no longer the sacred pastime it once was on Grímsey, the island is still known for its avid players. Historically, failure at chess was equated with failure in life on Grímsey, and the game was taken so seriously that a poor performance was often followed by a messy dive from the cliffs. This enthusiasm and dedication to the game attracted the attention of millionaire journalist and chess champion Daniel Willard Fiske in the 1870s.

Although he never visited the island, he set himself up as its protector, sending badly needed firewood, financing the island library and bequeathing part of his estate to the community. Grímsey still celebrates Fiske's birthday on 11 November, and his portrait is on display in the library at the community centre. For more on Grímsey's unconventional benefactor, read Lawrence Millman's account of a visit to the island in his book *Last Places: A Journey in the North*.

overhead when out walking to prevent being dive-bombed.

Historically, Grímsey provided an abundant supply of birds and fresh eggs, and its waters were some of Iceland's richest in fish. Today, fishery is still the most important income generator and the island's one settlement, Sandvík, supports a church, a swimming pool, a guesthouse and a community centre.

Tours

Nonni Travel in Akureyri (p215) runs Grímsey tours on Monday, Wednesday and Friday in summer. You can choose to fly in both directions (Ikr14,200), take a flight and ferry (Ikr9500) or travel by ferry both ways (Ikr5100). Evening Arctic Circle flights (Ikr14,200) are also available from 10 June to 20 August, giving an hour's walk on the island and a certificate to say you've crossed that all-important line. For longer stays, you can leave the tour on the island and return to Akureyri later.

Sleeping & Eating

You can camp nearly anywhere away from the village.

Gistiheimilið Gullsó (☎ 467 3190; grimsey@ismennt.is; sb/s/d Ikr1900/2400/4800) This family-run guesthouse attached to the handicrafts shop has basic rooms and a guest kitchen.

Gistiheimilið Básar (☎ 467 3103; sigrun@konica.is; sb/s/d Ikr1800/3300/5100) Squashed between the airport and the sea, this is the island's original guesthouse, and it's still the only place to get a proper meal. Breakfast/dinner costs Ikr800/2000; snacks are available during the day.

Getting There & Away

From mid-June to late-August **Air Iceland** (☎ 467 3148; www.airiceland.is) flies every day except Saturday to/from Akureyri. From late March to

mid-June and late August to October, flights operate on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday only. The bumpy journey takes in the full length of Eyjafjörður and is an experience in itself. The cheapest one-way fare is Ikr4865.

In summer the **Sæfari ferry** (☎ 458 8900; www.samskip.is) departs Dalvík for Grímsey at 9am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, returning from Grímsey at 4pm. If coming from Akureyri, a bus leaves at 7.30am to connect with the ferry. The return trip costs Ikr4340 (Ikr5100 including bus to/from Akureyri), and the one-way journey takes 3½ hours. Book in advance.

UPPER EYJAFJÖRÐUR

Heading south from Akureyri, Rte 821 follows Eyjafjörður to its head, passing several sites of historical importance. If you have a vehicle and some spare time, it's worth an afternoon's excursion from Akureyri – if only to leave behind the Ring Rd traffic and get out into countryside.

About 10km south of Akureyri, **Kristnes** was the site of Helgi the Lean's original settlement. His high-seat temple pillars washed up at Polurinn, near the head of the fjord, and Helgi decided to settle here.

A further 2km south is **Hrafnagil**, which was the historic home of Bishop Jón Arason of Hólar. Today there's accommodation at **Hótel Vin** (☎ 463 1333; www.vin.nett.is; sb Ikr1600-2900, s/d without bathroom Ikr5200/6600, with bathroom Ikr8200/10,200; ☎), with a café, a greenhouse, a summer camp site and a heated pool.

The odd little onion-domed church at **Grund**, about 5km past Hrafnagil, was built by the farmer Magnús Sigurðsson in 1905. Its neo-Romanesque style seems anomalous in Iceland, but early in the 20th century it was one of the country's most impressive churches. Ask for a key at the farmhouse.

The farm **Saurbær**, 28km south of Akureyri on Rte 821, has an interesting turf-and-stone church that dates from 1838 and is now under national protection. It was constructed on the site of a church that had existed there since the 11th century.

The eccentric **Museum of Small Exhibits** (☎ 463 1261; www.smamunasafrnid.is; admission Ikr400; ☎ 1-6pm mid-May–mid-Sep) is at Sólgarður near Saurbær. It's a mind-boggling collection of watches, door knockers, bridle bits, electrical sockets and switches, kitchen equipment, tools, fishing gear and anything else you could possibly think of all meticulously mounted and displayed.

Torufell, at the end of Rte 821, offers good hiking, including a climb up Torufell mountain (1241m) and a walk up the Torufellsá canyon.

GOÐAFOSS

Despite being smaller and less powerful than some of Iceland's other major waterfalls, Goðafoss (Waterfall of the Gods) is one of its most beautiful. The waterfall is formed by the cascading glacial waters of the river Skjál-fandafljót, which has cut a horseshoe canyon through the 8000-year-old Bárðardalur lava field (from the Trölladyngja crater near Vatnajökull).

The falls also play an important part in Icelandic history. At the Alþing in the year 1000, the *lögsgumaður* (law-speaker), Þorgeir, was

forced to make a decision on Iceland's religion. After 24 hours' meditation he declared the country a Christian nation. On his way home to Ljósavtn he passed the waterfall near his farm, Djúpá, and tossed in his pagan carvings of the Norse gods, thus bestowing the falls' present name.

Goðafoss is just off Rte 1. Although you can drive right to the falls you'll get better views and a sense of anticipation by parking at the nearby petrol station and taking the short walk (1km) up the canyon to the falls.

Right beside the falls, **Fosshóll** (☎ 464 3108; fossholl@nett.is; sites per person Ikr500, sb May-Sep only Ikr2300, s/d without bathroom Ikr6600/11,400, with bathroom Ikr7600/13,400) offers cosy rooms in its small hotel. There's also a nice café and restaurant (mains Ikr850 to Ikr2750) serving everything from soups and sandwiches to traditional meat and fish dishes.

Handknitted jumpers, jewellery, and souvenirs made from horn, bone, stone and wood are available at **Goðafossmarkaður** (☎ 464 3323; ☎ 8.30am-10pm Jun-Aug, 9.30am-6pm Sep-May), a small outlet by the petrol station. The shop is run by a women's cooperative, founded in 1992 to increase job opportunities for local people when farming was being cut back. About 90 women now produce work for the cooperative.

The adjacent petrol station has a café and information office, and sells basic groceries.

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