

austur glugginn

A newsworthy weekly!

Austurland's only newspaper

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The Immigrant Experience

Eliza Reid, the First Lady of Iceland, talks to Austurglugginn about being a foreign-born Icelander, appreciating breakfast by candlelight and the importance of putting down your own roots.

See page 6

Photo by Guðmundur Þór Káráson.

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vök baths

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Skoska leiðin í gildi 1. september

Íbúum ákveðinna svæða á landsbyggðinni mun í haust bjóðast niðurgreiðsla á flugferðum til og frá Reykjavík. Stefnt er að því að útfærslan verði prufukeyrð í ár og komi til fullrar framkvæmdar á því næsta.

Niðurgreiðslan, sem kallast gjarnan skoska leiðin, þar sem fyrirmynd hennar er sótt til Skotlands, var staðfest í samgönguáætlun sem Alþingi samþykkti fyrir sumarleyfi. Hún hefur hins vegar legið fyrir í

nokkurn tíma og verið unnið að nánari útfærslu.

Markmiðið er að bæta aðstöðu íbúa sem búa úti á landi, þurfa að sækja þjónustu sem er staðsett á höfuðborgarsvæðinu og eru það fjarri að erfitt eða tímafrekt er að keyra þangað. Rétt á niðurgreiðslunni eiga íbúar með lögheimili á skilgreindum svæðum sem þurfa að greiða fyrir ferðir sem farnar eru í einkaerindum. Samkvæmt upplýsingum frá ráðuneytinu er verið að ganga frá nánari útfærslu, til dæmis hvar

mörkin verða dregin í fjarlægðum. Líklegt sé þó að miðað verði við mörk sem þegar eru til staðar, svo sem pósthúmer.

Miðað er við tiltekinn fjölda ferða á mann á ári og ákveðinn hámarkskostnað á ferð eða að ríkið greiði 40% miðaverðs. Stefnt er að því að skoska leiðin komi til framkvæmda þann 1. september fái hver og einn eina ferð, fram og til baka, í ár. Þær verði síðan þrjár á ári frá næstu áramótum.

GG

Gullrifið það stærsta við Ísland



Gullrifið. Stærsta kóralrif við Ísland. Mynd: Hafrannsóknastofnun/ICECTD Ifremer

Um þrettán kílómetra langt kóralrif, úti fyrir sunnanverðum Austfjörðum, er talið hið stærsta við Ísland og meðal þeirra stærri í Norður-Atlantshafi. Þetta kemur fram í nýrri skýrslu Hafrannsóknastofnunar um kóralrif við Ísland, en þar eru teknar saman niðurstöður rannsókna við landið frá árunum 2009-2012.

Rifið er úti fyrir Papagrundi, gróflega áætlað 70 km suðaustur af Hvalnes- og Þvottáskriðum. Það er talið vera

allt að 13 km á lengd og 1 km á breidd sem gerir það eitt það stærsta í norðanverðu Atlantshafi. Það gæti þó verið stærra því ekki hefur náðst að rannsaka svæðið til fulls.

Rifið er myndað af tegund sem kallast postulínskórall á íslensku en fleiri tegundir hafa tekið sér þar bólfestu. Þéttast er það á um 500 metra dýpi en gísar þar fyrir ofan og neðan. Vitað er að það nær niður á að minnsta kosti 600 metra dýpi en ekki hefur tekist að kanna dýpra. „Þetta er langþéttasta kóralrif sem við höfum

séð. Þarna eru stórir bólstrar af lifandi kóral,“ segir Steinunn Hilma Ólafsdóttir, sjávarvistfræðingur hjá Hafrannsóknastofnun.

Fögrum orðum er farið um það í skýrslunni, því lýst sem „stórkostlegu“ og það nefnt Gullrifið því það sé „gullfallett.“ En það á sér líka skírskotun til Gullvers á Seyðisfirði, en það var skipstjóri togarans sem benti vísindamönnum Hafrannsóknastofnunar á að skoða svæðið.

Kviknaði í út frá eldavél

Talsverðar reykskemmdir urðu á íbúðarhúsi á Djúpavogi eftir að eldur kom upp í því um klukkan tíu á laugardagskvöld. Íbúar í nágrenninu urðu varir við mikinn eld og náðu að vekja húsráðanda sem hafði sofnað í stofu hússins.

„Aðkoman var skuggaleg. Það var fullt af svörtum reyk sem lagði út um þá glugga sem voru opnir. Það var ekki ekki séns að reka andlitíð

inn. Við lömdum í húsið og hurðir af öllum lífs og sálarkröftum og orguðum inn um gluggana. Við náðum að berja á glugga í stofunni þar sem hann hafði sofnað,“ segir Brynjólfur Reynisson, sem kom fyrstur á vettvang ásamt konu sinni, Guðnýju Björgu Jónsdóttir og Guðmundi Má Karlssyni.

Húsráðandi kom sér út sjálfur og virðist á leið sinni út hafa náð að slökkva eldinn sjálfur með

slökkvitæki. Allar líkur eru taldar á að kviknað hafi í út frá eldavél. Snjólfur Gunnarsson, varðstjóri hjá Brunavörnum á Austurlandi, sem stýrði slökkvistarfinu, segir að eldurinn hafi verið staðbundinn við eldavélina. „Það eru töluverðar reykskemmdir á húsinu en ekki hefur brunnið að ráði nema í eldhúsinu. Það var mikill reykur og þetta hefði getað farið illa.“

GG

MOLAR

Austurglugginn á ensku

Austurglugginn þessa vikuna er skrifaður að hluta á ensku, með viðmælendum úr hópi innflytjenda á svæðinu. Útgáfan er samstarfsverkefni Útgáfufélags Austurlands, sem gefur út Austurgluggann, og Austurbrúar sem leiðir samstarfsverkefni sem ætlað er að vekja athygli á stöðu fólks af erlendum uppruna á Austurlandi. Íslenskar útgáfur viðtalanna verða birtar á vefnum Austurfrétt á næstu dögum.

107 milljónir í íbúðakjarna

Húsnæðis- og mannvirkjastofnun hefur samþykkt að veita Seyðisfjarðarkaupstað 107 milljónir í stofnframlag fyrir íbúðakjarna í bænum. Styrkurinn á að nýtast til að byggja upp átta íbúðir í íbúðakjarna sem ætlaður er 55 ára og eldri. Kaupstaðurinn leggur til lóð og ríflega 30 milljónir króna á móti. Markmið byggingarinnar er að örva fasteignamarkað í bænum en sveitarfélagið er meðal tilraunaverkefna ríkisins í þá veru á landsbyggðinni.

Ánægja með vörur úr heimabyggð

Sveitarstjórn Djúpavogshrepps fagnar því að staðbundin framleiðsla undir merkjum Cittaslow hafi fengið sinn stað í Kjörbúðinni, dagvöruverslun staðarins. Framleiðsla á matvörum hefur aukist töluvert í sveitarfélaginu á síðustu árum. Sveitarstjórnin notar þó tækifærið í bókun sinni frá síðasta fundi til að áminna stjórnendur Samkaupa, sem reka Kjörbúðina, um að gæta hófs í verðlagningu til að leggja sitt af mörkum til að viðhalda þeim velvilja sem verslunin hafi notið á staðnum.

Sund kennt á Eskifirði í haust

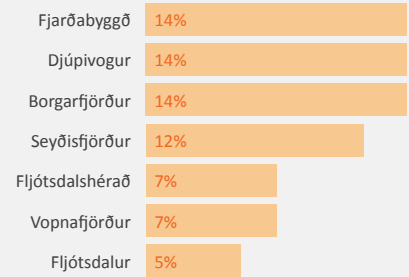
Bæjarráð Fjarðabyggðar hefur samþykkt að grunnskólabörnum á Reyðarfirði verði kennt sund í Eskifjarðarlag í haust. Ástand laugarinnar á Reyðarfirði hefur verið bágborið um hríð en stefnt er að því að dúkaleggja hana vorið 2021.

The foreign-born residents of Austurland

Origin

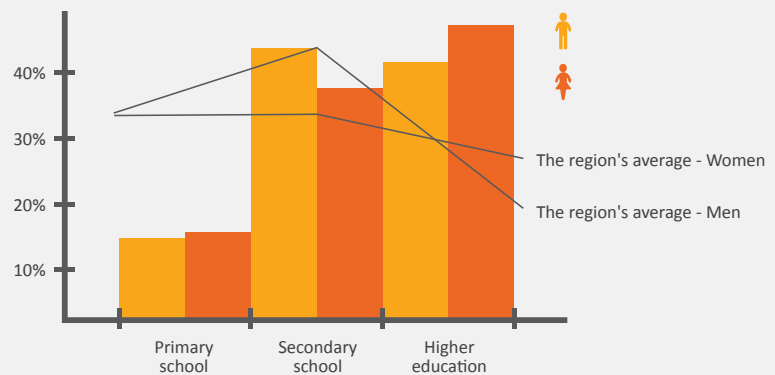


Inhabitants with a foreign background are increasing in numbers in Austurland just like everywhere else in Iceland. They now account for 11% (1.185) of the total number of inhabitants in the area, compared to 2% in 1998. They hail from nearly 60 countries, overwhelming majority comes from Poland, just over 600 people. Most live in Fjarðabyggð and their numbers are relatively highest in Eskifjörður and Reyðarfjörður.

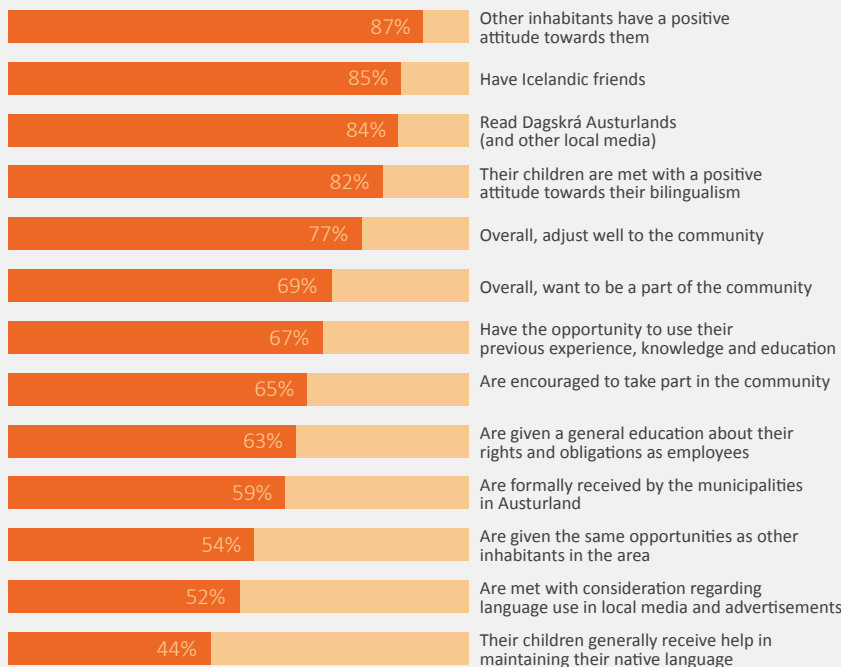


Education

The level of education is higher among immigrant inhabitants than the level of education among inhabitants in general in the area, which is in line with reports from Statistics Iceland.



Experience



Immigrants are generally satisfied with their new environment when they move to Austurland and feel that they are well-received, that information is for the most part sufficient and that the community supports them in their adjustment. Immigrants in Austurland for the most part want to increase the support their children receive regarding lessons in their native language and they feel information could more often be spread with them in mind, such as posting news and advertisements in English or Polish more often. A part of the group also feels they do not have the same opportunities as other inhabitants in Austurland. Everyone agreed that the language was the key to the community and that being able to speak Icelandic was the way to gain opportunities and more social participation.

Voices of foreign-born people in Austurland is a project within Austurbrú that aims to raise awareness of the experiences of the foreign-born population in the region. The information above is just a fraction of the data Austurbrú has collected in its research on immigrant-related topics. Our partners in this project are: AFL, Red Cross of Austurland, Austurland Publishing Company, Fjarðabyggð og Fljótshálsa.

This special edition of Austurglugginn received funding from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Children and East Iceland Structural Fund.

Editorial



This edition of Austurglugginn is a special cooperation between Austurbrú and Austurland's Publishing Company (Útgáfufélag Austurlands) and is dedicated to foreign-born people in Austurland. It is published mostly in English in an attempt to reach the part of our population whose native language isn't Icelandic.

Dear inhabitant!

My name is Jóna Árný Þórðardóttir and I work for Austurbrú. The organisation is focused on the interests of all who live in Austurland and provides services in the fields of employment, education and culture.

I am born and raised in Norðfjörður. I grew up on a farm, I am a total homebody and after spending a few years away in my twenties, I returned to Skorrastaður in Norðfjörður and have no intention of leaving any time soon.

But I did move away for a while. I lived in England for a year with my husband and one-year old daughter. Even though England was in many ways a familiar country, I experienced for myself what it's like to relocate to a different country and how I had to adjust to a different community, a different culture and different traditions. I felt rootless, disconnected from my usual network of people and my various skills and abilities were limited, such as communicating with public institutions and other people since I was unable to express myself or receive information in my native tongue. My English wasn't as good as I thought it was and my cultural understanding of England was far from perfect. This impacted my life significantly. Simple things, like applying for various public services, became complicated, time-consuming and frankly quite tedious.

But I certainly enjoyed some privilege. I didn't have to move to England permanently. I was not fleeing from any sort of destitution or distress. It was an adventure.

I realize not everyone has that privilege. People come searching for a better life, a job, safety and a secure future. I only share my experience because I believe that I have (a very limited) understanding of the circumstances of immigrants in Austurland. It is actually very challenging to be a foreigner in Iceland. Our language is precious to us, it is part of our self-image as a nation and Icelandic is one of our core values. We expect people to be able to express themselves in Icelandic and so this is obviously one of the biggest hurdles for people whose native language isn't Icelandic to become a part of the community. And let's just be frank: For most foreigners Icelandic is a difficult language. It is so difficult that even born and raised Icelanders find it hard to learn at times.

But I also believe that times have changed and will continue to change a great deal in the coming years. It is of course important for Iceland to maintain its traditions,

customs and etiquettes but the community and culture will change no matter how we feel about it. We live in a world that is constantly becoming more and more connected through increased communication. Icelanders work jobs where they use English as their working language. We are influenced by various forces from abroad and this will only increase in the coming years. We are becoming a multicultural society. Fast.

In my mind, rejecting this development or fighting it, like some do, is not an option. There is no valid reason to either, because the benefits of multiculturalism are a diverse community, open-mindedness and tolerance. People feel good in a community like that and when people feel good, they apply themselves and that is how multiculturalism can enhance development and progress in all areas of our lives.

For me, a multicultural community is a worthy goal for Austurland and it is the responsibility of all of us who live here to do it well.

*By Jóna Árný Þórðardóttir,
manager of Austurbrú.*

Domestic violence is not a private matter

Violence in the privacy of the home is a hidden problem in our community, a secret that victims often dare not talk about or seek help. With more open discussion and a focus on the seriousness of the effects of violence, Icelandic authorities have put an emphasis on reaching out to victims and perpetrators with therapy and assistance to flee from perpetrators.

In Iceland, domestic violence is not a private matter. If you are experiencing violence in the home or you know of someone who does, you can get help without financial cost. Living with violence has devastating effect on the people involved and children who live in a home with violence are traumatized, even if the violence is not directed against them and they only witness it. Children from violent homes are more likely than other children to form violent relationships later in life,

they are more likely to have conduct disorders, suffer from psychological disorders and develop tolerance towards violence in general. As a result, they are more likely to become victims of violence or perpetrators themselves.

It is a widespread misunderstanding of parents in a violent home, that the children are not aware of the violence – they always know and are affected by it. The trauma children in violent homes experience is compatible to trauma children experience in war zones. Violence affects children's development and puts them at risk for multiple problems in childhood and later in life. Violence in the home is dead serious and we should never turn a blind eye if we know of it occurring in our community.

Domestic violence is not a private matter. It concerns public interests and well being and safety of our fellow citizens. We should interfere

and report of incidences we know of or help victims to seek help.

Whom to contact?

In an emergency you can call 112. Police and social workers will respond immediately to emergency calls, day and night. First priority is to make sure everyone in the home or at the scene are secure and receive medical aid if necessary. The family will then receive aid and support to improve their situation, whether it is through counseling and therapy or for the victim and possibly children to get out of an abusive home and into a safe environment.

If you are living in an abusive home and want assistance you can call the Department of social affairs in your area and book an interview with a social worker. We would like to help and we prioritise cases of domestic violence. If you live in the municipality of Fljótshérað, Fljótshálshreppur, Vopnafjörður,



Borgarfjörður eystri, Seyðisfjörður or Djúpvogur you can call Félagsþjónusta Fljótshéraðs, tel: 470-0700. If you live in Fjarðabyggð you can call Félagsþjónusta Fjarðabyggðar, tel: 470-9000.

*By Júlía Sæmundsdóttir, director
of social affairs, Fljótshérað*



www.tomstundir.fljotsdalsherad.is



Fljótshérað leitast við að styðja við íþrótt- og tómstundaiðkun barna og ungmenna á aldrinum 4-18 ára, sem lögheimili eiga í sveitarfélaginu, með tómstundaframlagi að upphæð 30.000 krónur á árinu 2020. Miðað er við 18. afmælisdag barns.

KOSTIR HREYFINGAR

Dagleg hreyfing er börnum og ungmennum nauðsynleg fyrir eðlilegan vöxt, þroska og andlega- og félagslega líðan. Samkvæmt ráðleggingum Embættis landlæknis eiga börn og ungmenni að hreyfa sig í 60 mínútur að lágmarki á dag. Þau börn og ungmenni sem stunda reglulega hreyfingu í æsku eru líka mun líklegri til þess að halda því áfram á fullorðinsárum.

Rannsóknir sýna að þátttaka í skipulögðu íþróttastarfi hefur ýmis jákvæð áhrif á líðan og hegðun barna og ungmenna. Börn og ungmenni sem taka þátt í formlegu íþróttastarfi fá útrás fyrir hreyfipörf sína og nota síður tóbak, áfengi eða önnur vímuefni. Jafnframt eru þau líklegri til að vera heilsuhaustari og líða betur andlega, líkamlega og félagslega heldur en þau börn sem taka ekki þátt í starfinu. Þátttaka í skipulögðu íþróttastarfi hefur jákvæð áhrif á persónulega uppbyggingu og þroska einstaklinga.



Fljótshérað supports sports- and leisure activities for children between the ages of 4 to 18, with permanent residence in the municipality, with a contribution in the amount of 30.000 kr. in 2020.

THE BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

Daily exercise is necessary for the children's and youth's normal growth, development and mental and social well-being. According to the Directorate of Health, children and youth should exercise daily for at least 60 minutes. Those children and youth who exercise regularly during childhood are much more likely to continue exercising into adulthood.

Research has shown that participating in organized sport activities has various positive effects on the well-being and behaviour of children and youth. Children and youth who participate in formal sporting activities are provided with a release for their need to move and are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol or other narcotics. Also, they are more likely to be healthier and feel better mentally, physically and socially than those children who do not participate in such activities.



Fljótshérað stara się wspierać sport i rekreację dzieci i młodzieży w wieku 4-18 lat, które mają aktualny adres zamieszkania w gminie. Nie, zależnie od wybranego sportu lub rekreacji gmina dopłaca 30.000 tys. za rok 2020.

ZALETY RUCHU

Codzienny ruch jest niezbędny dla dzieci i młodzieży, dla ich prawidłowego wzrostu, rozwoju oraz społeczno-psychicznego samopoczucia. Zgodnie z zaleceniami Krajowego Urzędu Lekarskiego, dzieci i młodzież powinni zażywać czynnego ruchu codziennie, przez przynajmniej 60 minut. Istnieje wysokie prawdopodobieństwo, że dzieci i młodzież, która uprawia systematycznie sport będzie kontynuować to w dorosłym życiu.

Badania ukazują, że udział w zorganizowanych zajęciach sportowych ma pozytywny wpływ na samopoczucie i zachowanie dzieci i młodzieży. Dzieci i młodzież, którzy uczestniczą w takich zajęciach, zaspokajają swoją potrzebę ruchu i rzadziej sięgają po tytoń, alkohol i inne środki odurzające. Co więcej, najprawdopodobniej będzie też zdrowsza i będzie czuć się lepiej psychicznie, fizycznie i społecznie niż dzieci i młodzież, która nie bierze udziału w takich zajęciach.



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ILLEGAL DOWNLOADING
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KLÓSETTIÐ ER EKKI RUSLAFATA
THE TOILET IS NOT A TRASH BIN
TOALETA NIE JEST KOSZEM NA ŚMIECI





"It took conscious decisions and awareness to push for greater gender balance on boards and in companies. That philosophy, I would say, should apply to foreign-born people too. I think wearing our "inclusivity glasses" can be helpful." Photo: Ólafur Ásgeir Jónsson.

"I am Icelandic and I am Canadian as well"

I meet Eliza Reid, the First Lady of Iceland, on a bumpy Skype connection one morning in the beginning of July. She pops up wearing an Icelandic football t-shirt in her home office at Bessastaðir and just has to send off one of the kids on bike before our chat can begin.

Back in front of the computer, I tell Eliza about Austurglugginn and the aim to put more focus on foreigners living and settling in Iceland.

Hi Eliza.

Hi to the East of Iceland!

When you moved to Iceland in 2003, how was your experience being a foreigner settling in the country?

I had a very positive experience. Our plan was to move and be here at least 10 years. In other words to settle. I really wanted to have my own reason for being in the country so that I was not just tagging along.

My husband had his own network of friends from menntaskólinn and from growing up in the country. He is also eight years older than I am and the age gap felt more significant back then, so all his friends had kids and were in a different phase in their lives than I was.

I had to make my own friends and was lucky to find a job where I

met a lot of Icelanders. I also started learning Icelandic soon after we moved here. Not only did I learn the language, but I also acquired quite a big group of friends among international people living here.

You refer to yourself as a foreign-born Icelandic. What does this mean to you and when did you begin to feel this way?

Probably when I got Icelandic citizenship in 2007-8. I still feel Canadian too, so I do not think there is a rule whereby you are not allowed to call yourself an Icelandic if you do not have citizenship or you have to call yourself an Icelandic if you have citizenship. But to me that was probably the point where I felt: "Okay, I am Icelandic and I am Canadian as well."

If you were to give one piece of advice to a foreigner moving to Iceland today, what would it be?

I think it helps to try to learn Icelandic although I know how difficult it actually is to speak it. Also, getting out there and making local friends and putting down your own roots is important. If you want to live here, you need to do that by yourself. That said, I completely appreciate that it can be exhausting and frustrating, but that is the immigrant experience no matter where you move.

There are different challenges at different phases. I found the winter to be quite challenging when moving here. Canada is known to be a very northern country, but the whole continent is much further south, so my hometown Ottawa is at the same latitude as Nice in France. Even though it is much colder there in winter, the sky is bright. As a child I never had to wake up in the dark to go to school. The sun would always be up. So moving to Iceland, I really struggled with how dark and windy it was in winter time.

Have you gotten used to that by now?

No (laughing) but I do not complain about it as much. You just change your habits and attitude. You learn to appreciate breakfast by candlelight.

The demographics of Iceland are changing as more and more foreigners settle here. Do you have any good advice for the Icelanders in terms of welcoming new people to the country?

I think it is important to be aware of inclusivity and involvement, for instance when you are forming a team at your office, putting together people for your choir or the birthday committee at the local council. In Iceland, we are 13% foreign-born people and that does not count people like me who already have

citizenship. We do not necessarily see that reflected when people are being interviewed in the media, taking part in social activities and so on.

It took conscious decisions and awareness to push for greater gender balance on boards and in companies. That philosophy, I would say, should apply to foreign-born people too. I think wearing our "inclusivity glasses" can be helpful.

Secondly, a practical thing is to be patient and understanding with people who are learning the language. Icelanders speak great English. The first ten years I was living here, Icelanders' English was usually better than my Icelandic. I would have these stilted Icelandic conversations with people and both of us would think: "This is ridiculous. Why do we not switch to English?" But I would never have advanced in the language unless I had gone through that process.

My Icelandic is very good at this stage, but I still meet people who just keep switching to English and I keep switching back to Icelandic (laughing).

Thank you, Eliza. Pleasure talking to you!

You are welcome. Say hi to the East.

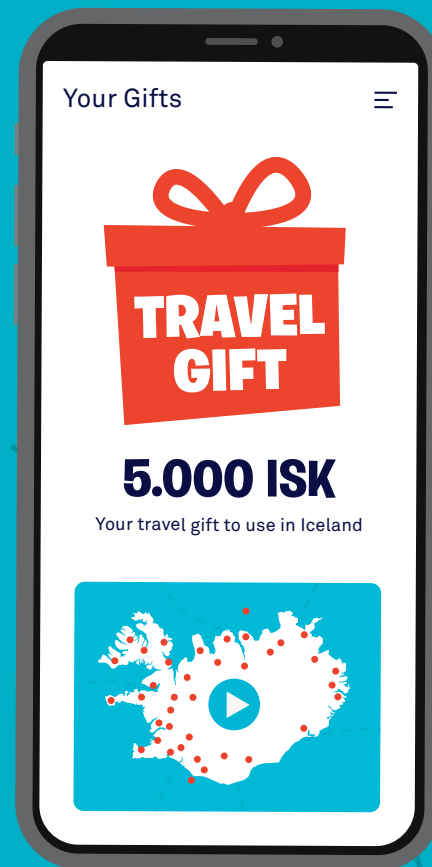
By Nanna Vibe S. Juelsbo

Travel gift

Let's make some memories while travelling domestically, supporting the Icelandic travel industry at the same time.

All people legally domiciled in Iceland, born in 2002 or earlier, will receive a travel gift equivalent to 5.000 ISK. The gift is valid through December 31, 2020.

- 1 Download the Ferðagjöf app in App Store or Play Store.
- 2 Activate the Travel gift using your personal electronic certificate (rafræn skilríki) or Íslykill.
- 3 Start using the Travel gift! All participating companies are listed in the app.



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- 2 Aktywuj Voucher używając elektronicznego dowodu tożsamości (rafræn skilríki) lub Íslykill.
- 3 Zacznij korzystać z Voucheru! W aplikacji znajduje się lista wszystkich firm biorących udział w projekcie.

We have to be allowed to speak Icelandic with an accent

On June 23rd Austurbrú held a symposium at Neskaupstaður about topics concerning immigrants in Austurland. Immigrants in Austurland are approx. 11% of all inhabitants in the area, a number that will likely increase in coming years. The purpose of the symposium was to increase public awareness in Austurland about the issues this growing minority in our community faces. One of the speakers at the event was Malgorzata Libera (Gosia). Born and raised in Poland, she moved to Eskifjörður in 1999, when she was 21 years old. She now lives there with her husband and two children. We got permission from Gosia to publish her talk where she shared her experience of being part of an Icelandic community.

When I was asked to speak at this symposium today about my experience of moving to Iceland and living here, I started thinking about what I should talk about. There are two things that seem most important to me: The language and being an active participant in the community. These two things go hand in hand because if you can't speak the language you can't be an active member in the community. This is a key issue to me after living here nearly half my life.

My entire family lives in Poland, except for my father who lives in the United States. He moved there due to the high unemployment rate in Poland, to seek new opportunities and decided to stay. I came to Iceland for the same reason, at a time when the unemployment rate in Poland was 20%. I decided to leave Poland, even after finishing my studies as a tailor. At the time, traveling to Iceland and getting a work permit wasn't easy. It took a year to get all the right permits. I came as part of a group of 13 people to work at Hraðfyrstihús Eskifjarðar, now Eskja. The plan was to come to Iceland and work for a year tops, and save up enough money to go to an art academy in Poland.

For the first six months I was only part of the Polish community in Fjarðabyggð, communicated only with other Poles and just spoke Polish. Since I only planned on staying in Iceland temporarily, I didn't try to learn Icelandic or get



Gosia Libera: "It is extremely important that immigrants maintain their own culture, as important as getting to know the new culture in the new country." Photo: Esther Ösp Gunnarsdóttir

to know the locals. All that changed when I met my now husband which opened up new doors. I realized that the only way to become a part of the community was to learn the language. I couldn't use English to fall back on since we didn't learn English at school in Poland at the time. I was lucky to be able to enter the community through my husband's family and friends. The same was not true for all of the people in the group who came to Iceland with me.

I received good support from my husband's family from the beginning but the culture shock was extreme. Don't take this the wrong way, but these two countries have very different traditions and customs. Religions, opinions and values are also different, not to mention the nature and the climate. At the time there was no education available, no information, no translations, no language classes, not even a Polish-Icelandic or Icelandic-Polish dictionary. The first dictionary between those two languages was published in 2002. To find your place in a new community I think it's necessary to go through this process but equally important to take care of your own origin and culture.

I soon decided to go to school and learn Icelandic. Then came the next shock, when I sat down in a school room in a secondary school with Icelandic teenagers. I was given Icelandic books and I didn't understand a single word. I knew all about the teacher's appearance, how he dressed, that he had blue eyes, I can tell you all about that. Anything else that happened in these classes I couldn't tell you about. But all jokes aside, enrolling in an Icelandic class in a public secondary school knowing absolutely nothing was a bit crazy and shocking, like a bucket of ice water.

Fortunately, all this has changed. Today, foreigners can access classes and courses in Icelandic specifically designed for them. With a great influx of immigrants to Iceland, the country and its school system has undergone vast changes. But after this experience, I have a real understanding of children who arrive in a new community without any background in the language, and how the difficulties they are faced with have a severe mental impact on them. I was an adult, yet this was a very challenging situation that greatly affected me and my self-confidence in a negative way.

My message to the people who create teaching materials for foreigners in Iceland and to the teachers in this field, is that they should include the culture shock as a topic in their classes. I feel it is important to educate immigrants about the culture shock process so that they are better informed about the fact that their feelings are normal during this adjustment and that with their ongoing enthusiasm to adjust to the community, they will begin to feel better. I have more self-confidence today and through my work at Afl Starfsgreinafélag I have my chance to assist people who are now in the same situation I once was in.

And finally, it is extremely important that immigrants maintain their own culture, as important as getting to know the new culture in the new country. In light of my topic, the importance of learning the Icelandic language to adjust to the country and its nation, I'd like to add that it is vital that the community accepts and allows Icelandic to be spoken with an accent. If we can agree on that, I have no doubt that more immigrants will dare to take that step.

AFL's Newsletter

Issue 4, 2020

Editor: Sverrir Albertsson



When we have no friends

- A message from the local Labor Union, AFL Starfsgreinafélag

In good times we usually have many friends. But when we have problems – friends are often few and far between. Unions don't literally replace friends but there are times you will need a union more than friends.

The Icelandic worker is basically unionized. Over 80% of all those active in the economy belong to a union. Those who aren't union members are mostly entrepreneurs and subcontractors – but we know that unions are not recognized as an integral part of society everywhere in the world. Therefore we'd like to use this issue of "Austurglugginn", the local weekly in Eastern Iceland, to shed some light on our operations and welcome our new members.

Fortunately, most employers are honest people who will safeguard the interests of their employees. They will help new employees apply for "kennitala" (social security number) and will automatically register them at the appropriate union and deduct their union fee and turn it in along with other "salary-based fees". But we also have crooks and dishonest people running businesses here as elsewhere.

Every year AFL handles tens and even hundreds of cases where foreign seasonal workers seek assistance. Sometimes these cases go all the way to be argued before the local court and even before the Supreme Court. But most often we manage to settle disputes with a satisfactory solution.

Although representing our members is our main objective – we do much more than that. We



try to advise our members, review their pay slips and inform them to the best of our ability of whatever they need to know to make sure that they are enjoying all the rights and benefits our struggle for more than a hundred years, guarantees them.

In this English language issue of Austurglugginn and AFL's newsletter we will try to cover the most important issues about our union and what you as a foreign worker need to be observant about during your time in Iceland.

AFL's inspectors

Two staff members from AFL go on inspection tours a few times a year. Each round takes about two weeks and the area they cover is about 600 km along the coast. During inspections

they will register your names and "kennitala". They will also listen to your concerns and pass them on to our offices. Look out for our inspectors and get their cards for future contact.

Documents

Please save all messages from your employer, pay slips and timesheets. Also take copies of all shift schedules.

Most common complaints

We handle hundreds of complaints a year – and many of them are from foreign seasonal workers. Among the most common complaints are regarding shift work, hourly rates and "orlof" (holiday pay). In this publication you can find further information about shift work.

Time-keeping app Klukk

In Play Store and App Store there is an app called "Klukk". It's in English and Icelandic. It's very helpful to keep track of hours worked and it saves your information in a spreadsheet. ASÍ

(Icelandic Federation of Labor) had the app programmed to make it easier for workers to keep their timesheets readily available should they be necessary.

The first and most important messages

A foreign worker coming to work in Iceland has usually been in contact with his/her future employer with email or with a social network messenger. It's very important to save these messages for future references. All the information you receive before you commit to work for a specific employer – can be considered as a binding promise. If you later have problems with your employer and you feel that you have been misinformed - we will need to see the messages that you based your commitment on. So if you talked about hourly salary, accommodation, shift schedule or other things that might be important - please save those conversations.

When do I become a member of AFL?

Usually about 10 - 20 days into the second month of your employment – your employer will deliver to AFL a list of all employees and their union fees. When we have processed the fees – your name will appear on our membership list and you'll have access to „my pages“ on www.asa.is.

To be able to log on, you need to have an electronic signature, an Icekey or send your contact information (email address and/or cell phone number to AFL (asa@asa.is)).

But we consider you a member of AFL from the day you start working in our area in a job covered by our General Contracts. We may need to see your employment contract to make sure that you “ticked” the union box – or your first pay slip to see that you are in fact paying a union fee. Thus – we regard all foreign seasonal workers in our area to be, by default, AFL's members, until we are convinced that you, by your own decision, are not a member of the union.

How to safeguard my rights?

Timesheets are the most important documents we need in salary disputes. Far too many people come to us because they feel that they are underpaid – but have little to show us apart from their pay slips. Some companies allow you access to their time manager programs – where you will be able to save your own timesheets.

But timesheets don't have to be complicated and we even issue a small notebook for keeping track of worked hours. You can also keep a spreadsheet and you basically just note the date and the time in and



time out. The rest we can work out later if needed.

The shift schedules are also very important as companies are not allowed to change the schedule without prior notice. When we compare your shift schedule with the actual timesheet – we will be able to determine when you should have been paid overtime.

So – please take good care of all documents. Photograph your shift schedules and save them in an organized manner. Take care of your hours and save them also in

contract are to be members of the appropriate union. Also – by trying to keep you out of an union – he/she is trying to save some money. As a union member you are a member of our sickness fund and will have access to our holiday homes and our educational funds. The monthly fees for those services are all paid by the employers.

In the last 20 years AFL has been involved in hundreds of cases where foreign seasonal workers are paid below minimal salary, have lived in unacceptable housing or have

Then you arrive and are greeted with a smile and welcomed. Perhaps the accommodation is not quite what you expected but – you are excited to start to work and earn some money, so you let that slide. Also, your boss is very friendly and you don't want to upset this happy occasion.

Then you start to work – and soon find out that the work is harder than you expected, the hours are longer, and breaks are few. Then payday arrives and you wait for your salary. The first day they blame the accountant. The day after – still no money – and now they blame the bank. Finally, some money appears in your account – but no pay slip.

Your trust in your employer begins to falter – but to whom do you turn? Who is your friend? Being alone in a foreign country – perhaps stuck somewhere in the middle of nowhere with the next town 100 km away and no means of transportation – is not an ideal situation. But your union is just one email or one phone call away.

In the most drastic situations, we have gone to a workplace and gathered the employees and taken them to our offices and in some cases assisted them in finding new employment or simply to go back home. Fortunately, this is usually not necessary.

If you have deliberately decided with your employer to stay outside of the union – then you are basically on your own. We may advise you and assist you depending on the situation – but we will not refer you to our lawyers or take on expenses on your behalf. That is reserved for our members.



an organized manner. Documents regarding your work, your contract, emails, and messages concerning your job – all communications with your employer. These documents will be the foundation of our argument in all disputes.

My employer says I don't have to be in a union

Well – he is wrong. The General Contract that stipulates all your rights and benefits also stipulates that everyone working under that

been denied most of the benefits that Icelandic workers enjoy. All the worst cases have one thing in common – the employers had convinced his/her employees that unions were bad – that talking to a union was dangerous and that he/she was their friend.

Your employment may begin in a bliss. You and your boss having communicated with messages for some weeks – the manager telling you how great his company is and how wonderful everything will be.

Icelandic trade unions / AFL Starfsgreinafélag

Trade union density, or the percentage of workers belonging to a trade union, is very high in the Nordic countries and by far highest in Iceland. Over 80% of working people in Iceland belong to a union, the rest are mostly entrepreneurs and self-employed. Unions in Iceland are “non-partisan” and the leadership of unions may belong to any of the political parties in Iceland or none.

Icelandic unions are organized either by sector or location. AFL is both. AFL was formed in steps, the last one in 2007, by unifying over 30 local unions all over Eastern Iceland. Members of AFL (around 6.000 full members) belong to different

sectors and AFL is affiliated with four different national federations. Thus, within AFL you will find unskilled workers, skilled workers and tradesmen, shop- and office workers and seamen.

Our geographical boundaries stretch from Langanes peninsula in the North to Skeiðará river in the South putting the national park Skaftafell within our boundaries in the South and the village Þórshöfn in the north.

AFL has offices in Höfn, Djúpvogur, Reyðarfjörður, Neskaupstaður, Egilsstaðir and Vopnafjörður. Our full-time staff is 13 persons and in addition to Icelandic we

speak English, Danish, Polish and Serbo-Croatian (please take into consideration that our multilingual personnel take holidays also). Also AFL has around 80 union representatives in workplaces around our area. Our union reps take part in courses organized by ASÍ (The National Federation of Trade Unions) every year and are a very important part of our union.

Our website is www.asa.is and our email is asa@asa.is.

Our board consists of 11 members – all of whom are working in their respective fields. Our president is Hjördís Þóra Sigurþórsdóttir, who before coming to work for AFL,



Hjördís Þóra Sigurþórsdóttir, president of AFL.

worked in Skinney's fish factory in Höfn. Our board is elected in our annual meetings.

Minimal salary

There is basically not one specific „minimal salary“ in Iceland – but a set minimal salary for each job. For example, a worker in the tourist industry, 18 years or older, working in shifts in a restaurant or a hotel should not be paid less than 1.799 kr. an hour for daytime work. But circumstances

can dictate that you should be paid more. Salary increases with seniority. For example, a worker 18 years and older after five years with the firm and more responsibility should have 1.843 kr. an hour for daytime work.

Housing and accommodation

Staff housing falls under the same legislation as general housing for rent. Therefore, the same law applies for staff housing as for “long term rent”. The condition of the accommodation is subject

to approval by the authorities. AFL and other unions have no direct authority regarding housing and we can't inspect staff accommodation unless we are invited in.



Þekkir þú þinn rétt?

Í efnahagsumróti eins og gengur yfir Ísland í dag er nauðsynlegt hverjum launamanni að eiga öflugt stéttarfélag að bakhjarli. Viða um land er verið að segja upp fólki, vinnutími er skertur, yfirborgarir teknar af. Fyrirtæki fara í þrot og geta ekki stadið við launaskuldbindingar.

Þegar fyrirtæki loka fyrirvaralaust eru oft mörg mál óuppgerð. Launafólk á inni uppsagnarfrest, ótekið orlof og jafnvel ógreidda veikindadaga. Oft eru vinnuslys enn óuppgerð og ófrágengin. Erlendir launamenn þurfa oft aðstoð við frágang sinna mála áður en þeir yfirgefa landið.

AFL Starfsgreinafélag annast alla hagsmunagæslu fyrir félagsmenn sína við slíkar aðstæður. Félagið innheimtir laun og önnur áunnin réttindi og tekur við slysamálum ef þau eru ófrágengin. Við tölum Íslensku, dönsku, ensku og pólsku.



Czy znasz swoje prawa?

W zmianach ekonomicznych, takich jakie obecnie panują na Islandii, każdemu pracownikowi potrzebne są silne związki zawodowe. W całym kraju wypowiedzia się pracownikom pracę, czas pracy jest skracany, zmniejszane są stawki. Firmy bankrutują i nie są w stanie dotrzymać obowiązku wypłat.

Kiedy firma bankrutuje z dnia na dzień jest wiele nierozwiązanych problemów. Pracownicy mają prawo do okresu wypowiedzenia pracy, świadczeń urlopowych i chorobowych, które nie zostały wyrównane. Często również żąda się, że nie zostały wyrównane odszkodowania w związku z wypadkami w czasie pracy.

Pracownicy zagraniczni często potrzebują pomocy w odzyskaniu świadczeń i zakończeniu wszystkich spraw związanych z pracą przed wyjazdem z Islandii. Związek Zawodowy Wschodniej Islandii AFL zajmuje się ochroną praw związkowców w takich przypadkach.

Związki ściągają niezapłacone wypłaty i inne świadczenia, pilnują zakończeń spraw związanych z odszkodowaniami. Mówimy po islandzku, duńsku, angielsku i po polsku.



Do you know your rights?

During times of economic trouble, such as Iceland is now experiencing, every wage earner needs to be able to look to a powerful trade union. All over the country, employees are being given notice, their working hours cut back, and their overpayments cancelled. The companies employing them are at risk of bankruptcy and may be incapable of paying wages owed.

When a company suddenly closes down, many matters may be left incomplete. The employees may have unused vacation and be owed for their notice period and even for sick days. Often, work accidents still need settling and finishing.

Foreign workers frequently need help so that they can finish all their affairs before leaving Iceland. In such situations, AFL - the East Iceland Federation of Trade Unions - takes care of any interests that affect its members. AFL collects their wages and other acquired rights, and takes on any unresolved accident issues. Note that we speak Icelandic, Danish, English and Polish.



What do I gain by being a member of AFL?

We are not even going to go through the history of unions and the need for solidarity. Let's just remind you that the salary you get and the rights you have – are the result of a long continuing struggle by common working people who have had the good sense of standing together. The struggle goes on and we can't afford to let down our guard for a moment. So please stand with us and other workers and don't undermine our work.

But apart from that – there are many advantages that come with AFL's membership. You get a discount on airfares with Ernir Airlines on the route Höfn - Reykjavík (handy for those working in South Eastern part of Iceland). After 10 weeks of work you can get your gym-membership subsidized. And if you want to end your stay in Iceland by chilling for a few days in Reykjavík or Akureyri you can rent one of our holiday apartments or one of our holiday cottages (Einarsstaðir, Illugastaðir, Ölfusborgir and in Lón).

If you plan to stay longer than just for the summer AFL can really come in to make your stay more beneficial. You can apply for educational grants for a variety of courses and education. Our sickness fund will help you with your new glasses or your gym subscription and a variety of other health-related expenses. You will have access to around 30 well equipped holiday apartments in Reykjavík and Akureyri and summerhouses in four different locations in Iceland.

And we are always just an email away – if you need reassurance about your job or your salary. Most important for all workers, and not least foreign workers – is that we have your back. We will help you in all “work related” disputes and even assist you and advice in matters that



Shift work?

For work outside regular daytime working hours you get paid either overtime pay or shift premiums. Shift premiums are significantly lower than overtime pay and therefore there are conditions set for when the payment of shift premiums is permitted.

The provisions for shift work may vary according to collective agreements -union contracts.

The following is shared:

- The shift schedule must be presented with specific advance notice. This differs depending on the collective agreement-union contract.
- Shifts have a fixed beginning and a fixed end – it is not permitted to send people home from a shift and in that way save on wage expenses. A shift must always be paid in full.
- All work that is performed in excess of a determined end of shift must be paid as overtime work.
- All those who do shift work are entitled to winter holiday.
- All work in excess of 173 hours per month must be paid as overtime.

The most common violations of the provisions of collective agreements-union contracts:

- Shift schedules made without adequate advance notice.
- The shift schedule is presented far too late.
- The shift schedule is changed arbitrarily – even daily.
- Shifts start and end at different times.

If the employer does not meet the requirements for shift work an overtime pay rate must be paid – this pay rate is 80% while shift premiums are 30% – 55%. (Differs according to collective agreement-union contract and the time within each 24 hour period).

Provisions regarding shift work are different according to which collective agreement-union contract is used. Therefore it is important to examine the relevant collective agreement-union contract in order to see which rules apply.

The principal collective agreements-union contracts of the members of AFL

- Collective agreement between SGS and SA
 - Collective agreement between SGS and SA for restaurants, places of accommodation, service providers, entertainment companies and corresponding activities
 - Collective agreement between SGS and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities
 - Collective agreement between SGS and the Minister of Finance on behalf of the Treasury
- (In addition there are several other agreements with smaller entities – see further details on the association website)

www.asa.is

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are not strictly “union business”. One of the reasons people started unions was to enable common people to confront their employers from a position of strength and without having to bow to authority. The ruling classes love the idea of “divide and rule” where they can dominate each and every one of us individually. But when we unite and stand together, we don't have to bow anymore. If you are being paid below minimal wage or in any other way cheated of your right salary – we will handle your case from start to finish. We may even be busy in court on your behalf – long after you have left.



How to contact us

Our email asa@asa.is is monitored 12 – 18 hours a day and we respond right away in emergencies.

However, most enquiries are answered the next day. You can also reach us by phone during office hours, the number is 4 700 300. We have staff members that speak English, Danish, Polish and Serbo-Croatian. Please note that those staff members are not always available.



A choice between Seyðisfjörður and Florida

Ljubisa Radovanovic: "I'm half Serb and half Icelander - I guess I'd like it to be a draw." Photo: GG

Many people in Austurland know the name Ljubisa Radovanovic, or Ljuba as he is often called. Ljuba has been a football coach with Höttur for the past few years, but played and coached for Huginn in Seyðisfjörður before. Ljuba was born in Serbia and first arrived in Iceland to play football in 2000. He says it was really different to play football in Iceland, which at the time was all about kick and run.

"I first played for Selfoss for a summer but went back to Serbia after that. I had a contract to return but it was a difficult time for me because my father was very sick and so I didn't return," says Ljuba.

He is raised in Niš, a city of about 350,000 in the southeast of Serbia. "I started playing football when I was 6 and played with the same team until I reached the championship league. The city has pretty good teams, 10 in total, and I played for 4 of them."

Ljuba finished basic training as an electrician but never worked in the field, focusing rather on his football career. But the 90s were a difficult time for Serbian athletes because of the Yugoslav Wars.

Hard to practice after work

Ljuba says many Serbian footballers came to Iceland around the year 2000 through a coach in Niš who worked in Iceland at the time. Ljuba was one of them. He says the Icelandic football scene was very different from what he was used to.

"I enjoyed playing here but it was quite different. The players in Europe were technically more advanced and played more with the ball on the ground. Over here, the ball was kicked forward, and the game was all about running and

fighting. But this has changed for the better. And playing in all this wind was also new to me.

It was also different for me to work alongside my football career. I worked from 8 to 4 or 9 to 5 and then had practice at 6. I was often very tired but I got used to it."

Icelandic coaches are eager to learn Ljuba credits advancements in Icelandic football with the foresight of the sport's leadership and the open-mindedness of Icelandic coaches. A lot of things also changed for the better during the years Swedish coach Lars Lagerbeck trained the national men's team.

"I felt the sport took a 180 degree turn during his time here. The Football Association (KSÍ) has a vision for the future and invited foreign coaches to come here. I have for example been to the ReyCup a few times and foreign teams attend that event. Icelandic coaches also aren't shy to ask what they might improve. Us Serbs are a bit different, some of our coaches think they know everything and can't learn anything more from anybody else. But the thing is, throughout your lifetime, you keep learning new things."

A warm welcome in Seyðisfjörður

Ljuba came back to Iceland in 2005 and signed a contract with Huginn in Seyðisfjörður. He played a total of 60 games with the team until 2010. It wasn't an obvious route back to Iceland though. He went to Russia and then had a choice between Iceland and the United States.

"My father died in 2002 and I struggled with his death for a while, and didn't play much during that time. Then my best friend called me. He was playing in Russia at the time

and said I was expected there in two weeks' time, the team had already bought my plane ticket. I used that time to get back into shape and spent about a month with the team. It was a nice time.

Then I got a phone call from a guy I had played with in Selfoss who said Huginn needed a player and they already had another guy I had played with in Selfoss and who was keen to have me. I had met a friend the previous summer who was playing college soccer in Jacksonville in the United States. He said it was really fun and asked if I'd like to come play there. I started gathering my school information and sent it to coaches in the USA and then I got a phone call from Seyðisfjörður.

I wasn't sure what to do. Should I go to the USA to go to school and play football or go back to Iceland to play football and work? Me and Aleksandra had started dating at the time and I knew that if I went to Iceland I could easily go back home or she could come to me but that would be harder in the States. And that is why I chose to come back to Iceland.

The guy who recruited me said I could play with Huginn for one summer and then sign with teams in Reykjavik but then I really loved it in Seyðisfjörður. I played with guys who understood football there. Brynjar Gestsson was a good coach and I enjoyed it. And the people in town were really helpful. I was working for Brimberg and the people there helped me move Aleksandra to Iceland. That is why I stayed in Seyðisfjörður."

Better for everyone that I learned Icelandic

Ljuba moved to Egilsstaðir in 2012.

"Höttur's head coach contacted me and asked me to come. There were less and less kids playing football in Seyðisfjörður so I had less and less work as a coach there. That's why I said yes," says Ljuba who works at the sports centre as well as coaching three of Höttur's youth teams.

He and Aleksandra have lived in Egilsstaðir ever since with their three daughters. Ljuba doesn't think the family will be moving away from Egilsstaðir anytime soon. "We're not thinking about going back to Serbia, maybe later. I feel good here with the family. Our girls are all born in Iceland and they have many friends here. They really love Serbia but are not ready to move there yet.

We usually go there every year, although it's difficult for me to go with them over the summer during their vacation because that's a busy time for a football coach."

It wasn't Ljuba's priority to learn the language when he first arrived in Iceland but today, he speaks it fluently. "If you want to live in another country you have to learn the language. I wasn't planning on settling down here during the first four years I lived here and so I didn't learn a lot of Icelandic. But a guy from my team said I simply had to learn the language if I wanted to stay. I thought about it for a while before I realized he was absolutely right. I had started a family here and it was better for everyone if I learned the language," says Ljuba.

But does Ljuba cheer for Serbia or Iceland in a match between the two teams? "That's a difficult question," he says laughing. "I'm half Serb and half Icelander. I guess I'd like it to be a draw."

I am part of the group

Wala Abu Libdeh is from Palestine but she has lived in Iceland for 25 years, since she was 10 years old. Iceland was very different in 1995, the year Wala moved to Iceland, there were no welcoming programs, no programs for foreign-born students and the only way in was to double down and do your best.

„I arrived with my siblings and mother in January 1995 and I couldn't start school right away because there was a teachers' strike,” says Wala. Her uncle had arrived in Iceland sometime before. The ground was covered in snow when they arrived, something they had never seen before with their own

address him without his permission. You weren't really allowed to do anything!”

There was no particular program for students coming from abroad and Wala had to cope with being effectively mute for the first few months. “I had no idea what was happening in class,” she says. “I heard my classmates speak and I just nodded but thankfully I was quick to learn the language. That wasn't necessarily a blessing because as soon as the school saw how well I was doing learning Icelandic, they expected more of me. I arrived at school in 5th grade not knowing a word in Icelandic and in 6th grade I was expected to learn Danish! And I

rather the naughty kid and couldn't be bothered with studying anymore. Or rather, I could be bothered to, but it was so demanding for me to learn what my Icelandic classmates had no trouble learning.”

2006 was a year of big changes for Wala. Her childhood friend moved to Neskaupstaður and spoke highly of it, it was a good place to live according to her. “It sounded so peaceful and cosy so I just decided to move to Austurland with her. The first three months were very quiet, to say the least, I felt like there was nobody here and I kind of wanted to go back home to Kópavogur!”

But she didn't. Instead, she enrolled in Verkmenntaskóli Austurlands

in VA, finished it and then enrolled in Educational Studies in the University of Akureyri.”

When Wala looks back, she says that on the whole, foreign-born students do well in elementary school but then they get “lost” in the secondary schools and it's difficult for them to keep up with the other students. “The study material needs to be simplified for the foreign students,” she says. “They should meet the same criteria but the material needs to be adjusted. It is so difficult when Icelandic is not your native language and it is so demanding for the students that they are at a greater risk of giving up.”

“I always felt like I was part of



Wala on her first day in school: “When the teacher arrived, I stood up, as I thought we were supposed to do, but nobody else stood up and I couldn't understand why!” Photo: Esther Ösp Gunnarsdóttir

eyes. They lived with her uncle for 3 months before moving to Kópavogur. In September, she was finally able to start school:

“I just showed up for school like everybody else in the fall,” she says. “I remember the classroom was open, you walked in and waited for the teacher. When the teacher arrived, I stood up, as I thought we were supposed to do, but nobody else stood up and I couldn't understand why! The teacher sat down and told me to sit down, that this wasn't customary in Iceland. This was very different for me. I attended an all-girls school in Palestine but in Iceland I was in a mixed class and I was also accustomed to a lot more discipline. I was not allowed to look at the teacher in Palestine and I wasn't allowed to

can't deny that it was quite difficult.”

Wala studied hard and was a self-described model student for the first two years. “The school expected me to be like the other students. I was rarely given special lessons, I just went home after school and studied. I always had a thick dictionary next to me. I translated from Icelandic to English and from English to Arabic and tried to fill in the blanks with guesswork if needed. But after two years, I couldn't be bothered to keep it up any longer,” she says in all honesty.

She says it was a time where she relaxed in school and tried to live a “normal” life. “I just wanted to be like everybody else,” she says. “I wanted to go outside, play football and do all the stuff the other kids were doing. I wasn't a model student anymore,

(VA) to study hairdressing. She finished the first three semesters and all was going well. “It was a great relief to see that I could study,” she says. “But I would have had to go back south to finish my studies so I quit school and another chapter in my life began. I met my husband and had a baby. I had a family and went back to work.”

In 2017 Wala was contacted regarding asylum seekers arriving in Reyðarfjörður and she was asked to manage a learning program for immigrants. “I was really nervous about it,” she says. “But I decided to give it a go. I got to know great teachers in Reyðarfjörður and thought to myself that this was who I wanted to be. I enrolled in the Learning Support Assistant program

the group,” says Wala. “I consider myself an Icelander, I am married to an Icelander and I have three children. And I'm not afraid to talk to people. I talk to everybody. I do however understand when kids – and adults – arrive here and have a hard time adjusting because it is difficult and it is challenging, exemplified by my own experience of the school system. We need to work harder than others to achieve the same results as the natives. Simpler study materials would be a gesture of the community adjusting to immigrants which is the key to good relations between people of different backgrounds. It isn't just immigrants that need to adjust to the Icelandic community. It is also a question of the community adjusting to us.”



QR for
wikiloc

East Iceland - Top Peaks

by Skúli Júlíusson

This book contains information, maps and directions on hiking 101 mountains in East Iceland, along with an introduction on how to hike safely in Iceland.

Each trail is mapped and a QR-code, that can be scanned by a smart device, leads to a tracked trail on Wikiloc. With each trail there is also a detailed description and descriptive photos. The author is mountain guide Skúli Júlíusson. Having worked in the area since 2009, he knows the trails first hand and has collected all information and taken and collected photos. The book is available in information centers and bookstores in the area. Also on www.bokstafur.is.



www.bokstafur.is

Bokstafur

sigurjon@bokstafur.is

Sumarlokun bæjarskrifstofu Fjarðabyggðar

Bæjarskrifstofa Fjarðabyggðar verður lokuð 24. júlí - 7. ágúst að báðum dögum meðtöldum.

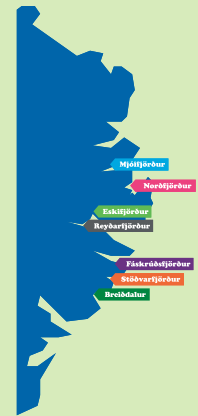
Skiptiborð bæjarins 470 9000 verður opið eins og venjulega á virkum dögum 10:00 – 12:00 og 12:30 – 16:00.

Eftir kl. 16:00 og um helgar er áfram hægt að hringja í 470 9000 og fá þar samband við bakvaktarsíma þjónustu- og framkvæmdamiðstöðvar og veitna Fjarðabyggðar (vatnsveita, fráveita, hitaveita) ef um neyðartilfelli er að ræða.

Summer vacation closing

The offices of the Fjarðabyggð municipality will be closed July 24 - August 7th due to staff summer vacation.

The service desk tel. 470 9000 will be open from 10-12 and 12:30 to 16 on weekdays. In case of emergency concerning water, heating or sewage the phone 470 9000 will be open after 4 pm every day.



FJARDABYGGÐ
fjardabyggd.is

The Women's Shelter - Telephone service

Unfortunately it is likely that domestic violence will increase during crisis such as Covid-19. It is important to know where to get help.

The Women's Shelter provides advice information about services available to those suffering because of domestic violence or other forms of violence or concerns. Their home page provides information in numerous languages. If you are in immediate danger or need to report child abuse or neglect please phone 112.

Their telephone service is open 24/7. Tel.: 561 1205. Women can call and discuss their thoughts and feelings and get support and advice.

The Women's Shelter
Telephone – 24/7: 561 1205
e-mail:
kvennaathvarf@kvennaathvarf.is
www.kvennaathvarf.is

Centrum dla kobiet - USŁUGA TELEFONICZNA

O ary przemocy oraz ich krewni proszeni są o kontakt z nami w schronisku pod numerem tel: 561 1205. Oferujemy wsparcie, pomoc techniczną i porady. Pomoc telefoniczna w przypadku zagrożenia (112).

Niestety, prawdopodobne jest, że przemoc domowa wzrośnie podczas kryzysu, czego doświadczamy teraz z powodu Covid-19. W związku z tym

Centrum dla kobiet
Numer telefonu – 24/7: 561 1205
e-mail:
kvennaathvarf@kvennaathvarf.is
www.kvennaathvarf.is

Fjölskyldusvið Fjarðabyggðar



FJARDABYGGÐ
fjardabyggd.is

From the Philippines to Djúpvogur

Michael Rizon comes from the Philippines and lives in Djúpvogur. We asked him to tell us a little bit about himself, where he is from, about his family, what it was like to grow up in the Philippines and why did he come all the way to Djúpvogur?

Michael Rizon is 29 years old and comes from a small village by the beach in the Philippines with a “beautiful view of the mountains,” as he puts it. He describes his life in his native country as primitive: “My family had a small business, making handicrafts, shipping and selling them internationally. That was our livelihood. I have four brothers and we helped our parents with everything, household chores, business and everything else.”

Michael considers himself lucky to have been the youngest sibling. “I had the freedom to do whatever I wanted as a child. I loved to play basketball, go swimming and spearfishing with my cousins and friends. We also had a little barn with chickens, fighting roosters, cows, goats and pigs.”

He went to university, finished his studies in marine transportation and graduated with honours. „I took part in all sorts of other

extracurricular activities in school, such as cheerleading, dancing and swimming. I was also part of our school’s team at the Cebu City Olympics, competing in swimming and cheerleading.”

Why did you decide to move to Iceland?

„I decided to move to Iceland because I wanted to give my children and family a better future. Although it is hard for me to be away from them, I am glad to be here in Djúpvogur. The nature is so different, the landscape is so beautiful and the people are very friendly. I would like to add that the company I work for (Búlandstindur) was an answer to our prayers, my co-workers are especially wonderful, it’s a real blessing.”

Michael says, as many people of foreign origin in Iceland do, that the language is a particular barrier but he is currently taking Icelandic classes. He says: “Icelandic words in general are so hard. I do try to speak Icelandic especially when I’m communicating with older people in town. Speaking the language is the only way to become active in the community. I have to use more of what I learn in class from my



Michael Rizon: “I had the freedom to do whatever I wanted as a child.”

teacher Berglind. I learned a lot from her. She is a wonderful teacher and would like to thank her specifically!”

This story is based on an interview with Michael in Bóndavardan, Djúpvogur’s local paper.

An Icelandic food coop is born

Things are boiling at the old gas station in Seyðisfjörður. Throughout the past year the gas station has been turned into a vegetable and fruit heaven as Austurlands Food Coop has taken over the operations. The mission of the local company is clear: bringing quality fruits and vegetables to people in Iceland.

The company was founded by Jonathan Moto Bisagni and Ida Feltendal. The entrepreneurial couple met in Seyðisfjörður a few years ago having come to town from New York and Denmark respectively. Jonathan came to work as a chef at the Norð Austur sushi restaurant and Ida as an artist at the HEIMA Art Residency. Today, they have settled in Seyðisfjörður with their sons, Oskar and Theodor.

Back in January 2019 Jonathan and Ida shipped the first fruits and vegetables for their mixed boxes on the Norröna ferry that runs between Hirtshals in Denmark and Seyðisfjörður. The local community in Seyðisfjörður supported the

initiative by buying the boxes and Austurlands Food Coop saw the light of day as the demand grew every week the following months.

Today, more than 4 tons of vegetables and fruits are shipped to Seyðisfjörður every week. The company emphasises on primarily organic and season-based crops and the greens are ordered from a supplier in Denmark, who works with European farmers predominantly.

Austurlands Food Coop has grown in size to keep up with the rising demand for fresh greens. The first focus was to supply the people in Austurland with fresh food. Today, the company delivers around 350 boxes all around Iceland every week and Jonathan and Ida have experienced an enormous support from both rural and urban communities. In Siglufjörður, in Reykjavík and even on Vestmannaeyjar, volunteers are helping out by packing and distributing the boxes in their local areas.



Ida, Johnny and their son Oskar Moto Feltendal-Bisagni. Photo: Daniel Örn Gíslason

In a few weeks’ time the newest project of the company will be revealed. The former gas station in Seyðisfjörður will re-open as a coffee shop and food market with fresh vegetables and dry goods such as rice, flour and beans in bulk. The idea is not only to create a hub for good foods and coffee, but also to establish a kitchen where people can

join workshops to learn how to bake sourdough bread, ferment foods and much more.

All eyes are on Austurlands Food Coop at the moment as they continue to spread around the island supplying the people in Iceland with fresh and healthy foods.

Verkefnis lýsing fyrir tillögu að breytingu á Aðalskipulagi Fljótshéraðs 2008–2028

Vegagerðin undirbýr jarðgangagerð undir Fjarðarheiði. Markmið framkvæmdarinnar er að bæta vegasamgöngur milli Seyðisfjarðar og annarra byggðarlaga, einkum að vetrarlagi, auka umferðaröryggi og bæta sambúð vegar og umferðar við íbúa og umhverfi. Í tengslum við framkvæmdir vegna Fjarðarheiðarganga hefur Vegagerðin jafnframt skoðað að færa Hringveginn út fyrir þéttbýlið á Egilsstöðum.

Vegagerðin kynnti framkvæmdir vegna Fjarðarheiðarganga og áætlað umhverfismat þeirra í drögum að tillögu að matsáætlun í lok júní 2020.

Sveitarstjórn Fljótshéraðs hefur ákveðið að hefja undirbúning aðalskipulagsbreytingar þar sem mörkuð verður stefna um staðsetningu ganganna, gangnamunna og vegtengingar. Jarðgöng frá Héraði yfir á Seyðisfjörð eru í aðalskipulagi Fljótshéraðs en lega þeirra, áætlaður jarðgangamunni og veglínur vegtengingar Héraðsmegin er ekki í samræmi við núverandi áform Vegagerðarinnar. Sveitarstjórn Fljótshéraðs er jákvæð fyrir breyttri legu ganganna, að gangnamunninn verði við Dalhús í stað Miðhúsa og að Hringvegur 1 verði færður nær Eyvindará vegna umferðaröryggis og hyggst breyta aðalskipulagi til samræmis við það.

Útbúin hefur verið verkefnis lýsing þar sem gerð er grein fyrir ofangreindri breytingu á aðalskipulaginu og umhverfismati hennar og er lýsingin aðgengileg á vef sveitarfélagsins www.fljotsdalsherad.is. Íbúar og aðrir hagsmunaaðilar eru hvattir til að kynna sér efni hennar og koma á framfæri ábendingum. Óskað er eftir því að ábendingar komi fram fyrir 10. ágúst 2020. Ábendingar má senda til skipulagsfulltrúa í tölvupósti á netfangið dandy@egilsstadir.is eða í bréfi til bæjarskrifstofu Fljótshéraðs.

Kynning lýsingarinnar og tillögu að breyttu skipulagi, þ.m.t. þessi auglýsing, er skv. 30. grein skipulagslaga nr. 123/2010 og skv. lögum um umhverfismat áætlana nr. 105/2006.

f.h. Bæjarstjórnar Fljótshéraðs
Gunnlaugur Rúnar Sigurðsson
Skipulags- og byggingarfulltrúi



FLJÓTSDALSHÉRAÐ

Lyngási 12, 700 Egilsstaðir, S: 4 700700
fljotsdalsherad@fljotsdalsherad.is, fljotsdalsherad.is

Lausaganga hunda bönnuð innan þéttbýlismarka

Vegna ítrekaðra ábendinga um lausa hunda innan íbúabyggðar í Fjarðabyggð vill dýraeftirlitið koma eftirfarandi á framfæri.

Hunda skal ávallt hafa í bandi á göngu innan þéttbýlismarka sveitarfélagsins. Þetta þýðir t.d. að ekki má ganga með hunda lausa á göngustígum inn bæjarmarka Fjarðabyggðar.

Þeir sem verða varir við slíkt athæfi er bent á ábendingakerfi Fjarðabyggðar, fylgja skal með mynd ásamt frekari upplýsingum er varða málið.

Biðjum við alla umsjónaraðila hunda að sýna ábyrgð og tillitssemi.

Umhverfis- og skipulagssvið
Fjarðabyggðar



Auglýsing Sláturhúsið Menningarmiðstöð

Fljótshérað óskar eftir tilboðum í þakklæðningar og burðarvirki

Helstu magntölur eru ca.
Endurnýjun á öllu þakjárn og pappa 725 m²
Endurnýjun á þaksperrum 450 m
Timburklæðningar 550m²
Stálstyrkingar og þakrammar 9500 kg
Steypa 39 m³

Gögn verða afhent rafrænt frá skrifstofu Eflu frá og með 21. júlí 2020.

Tilboð verða opnuð á skrifstofu Fljótshéraðs 18. ágúst 2020 kl. 14.

Upplýsingar veiti Óli Metúsalemsson sími 412 6530, netfang: oli.metusalemsson@efla.is.

Verkinu skal vera lokið 1. febrúar 2021.



FLJÓTSDALSHÉRAÐ

Lyngási 12, 700 Egilsstaðir, S: 4 700700
fljotsdalsherad@fljotsdalsherad.is
fljotsdalsherad.is

Meetings and gatherings

Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings in East-Iceland
Djúpivogur: Tryggvabúð
 Sun. 11:00
 Wed. 20:00
Egilsstaðir: Furuvellir 10
 Mon. 21:00 (book)
 Tue. 20:00 (steps)
 Fri. 20:00
 Sat. 22:00
 Sun. 20:00
Egilsstaðir: Hörgsás 4 (congregation hall)
 Sat. 20:00
Eskifjörður: Strandgata 49
 Sat. 20:30.
Fáskrúðsfjörður: Skruður, basement
 Fri. 20:30
Neskaupstaður: Mýrin, Mýrargata 8
 Tue. 21:00
Neskaupstaður: Church (congregation hall)
 Fri. 20:30
Seyðisfjörður: Church (congregation hall)
 Mon. 20:00 (open meet once a month)
 Fri. 19:00
Stöðvarfjörður: Skólabraut 11
 Tue. 20:30
Vopnafjörður: Sundabúð
 Thu. 20:00



EIÐAKIRKJA / CHURCH OF EIÐAR
 Messa laugardaginn 18. júlí kl. 14:00
 - Ferming. / Worship service saturday July 18th at 14:00 - Confirmation.
 Sr./Rev. Þorgeir Arason. Organisti/Music Jón Ólafur Sigurðsson. Kór Eiðakirkju syngur/Eiðar Church Choir lead in song.
 Allir velkomnir! / All are welcome!

KLYPPSTAÐARKIRKJA - LOÐMUNDARFIRÐI / KLYPPSTAÐUR CHURCH - LOÐMUNDARFJÖRÐUR
 Hin árlega messa á Klyppstað verður að þessu sinni sunnudaginn 19. júlí kl. 14:00.
 Annual worship service will be held sunday July 19th at 14:00.
 Sr./Rev. Solveig Lára Guðmundsdóttir, vígslubiskup á Hólum/vice-bishop at Hólar, predikar/preaches.
 Sr./Rev. Jóhanna Sigmarsdóttir og/and sr./rev. Þorgeir Arason þjóna fyrir altari/ lead the service.
 Organisti/Music Jón Ólafur Sigurðsson. Bakkasystur frá Borgarfirði syngja/ Bakkasystur choir lead in song.
 Meðhjálpari/Elder assisting Kristjana Björnsdóttir.
 Kirkjukaffi í skála Ferðafélags Fljótsdalshéraðs á staðnum að messu lokinni./Coffee and refreshments in the hiking lodge after the service.
 Allir velkomnir! / All are welcome!

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María Rós Steindórsdóttir

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Local Services




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MARIA RÓS S 2020

This summer Austurglugginn will publish examples from the work of young artists that are working on their art and creative projects, undir the name LAust, for the municipalities Fjarðabyggð and Fljótsdalshérað. This week's artist, María Rós, is 19 years old and lives in Eskifjörður.

Vopnafjörður feels like home

Gulmira Kanakova is 33 years old, comes from Crimea and has lived in Iceland since 2011. She lives in Vopnafjörður now and works at a nursery school. Although it was a big step for her to move to Iceland she decided to be open to all possibilities.

Gulmira first came to Iceland as an Au Pair and never planned to stay for more than a year. But she loved the country and made a decision to live in Iceland and become an Icelander. "I loved the country, the nature and the people. I found my hobbies (which I didn't do back home), like doing yoga, that became a big part of my life, dancing salsa, zumba, and I met my love at that time, so all of that became my reasons to stay here."

She stayed in Reykjavík for eight years but then moved to the East with her partner whose parents are from Vopnafjörður. Gulmira works at the nursery school but has also been doing zumba training for children and feels like she has become a part of the community, somewhat through the language:

„In Reykjavík I could switch to English when I thought it was necessary but not so much in Vopnafjörður," she remarks. „I never use English here unless I am talking to friends from abroad. Other than that I only speak Icelandic. Of course it's a difficult language, but after I decided to stay here it became my goal in order to become part of society and show my respect

for the people and for the country. The moment I started to speak the tongue I realized I didn't feel like a foreigner anymore."

She says that it feels a little bit like being back home in Vopnafjörður. „Yes, in some ways it is very similar," she says. „It's an open community, you can call your neighbour for a favour or invite him over for a coffee, people plan things together and are friendly. I never felt this in Reykjavík. There I didn't know my neighbour's names! And everything is very personal here: If you need information for instance from banks, hospitals or whatever I find it really easy just to ask people and ask them again if I don't understand. I never get the impression that people are annoyed with my questioning!"

Since coming to the east she has taken up new hobbies, busy becoming an active part of the community. "When I came here I was open to everything and I kept myself busy. I started to teach zumba, do hiking and play badminton. In Reykjavík I did yoga teacher training, so I've been teaching there for about 5 years, and it is in my plan to put it in use in Vopnafjörður as well. In a way adapting to a new society is a question of your own responsibility. If you are, as a person, open to people they will open themselves as well, because I believe that a relationship is like a mirror. Be nice to people and they will be nice to you!"



„When I came here I was open to everything and I kept myself busy. I started to teach zumba, do hiking and play badminton."

Nanna Vibe S Juelsbo

Last thoughts



It takes time to know a culture

One summer a few years ago I hitchhiked the south route between Reykjavík and Egilsstaðir. I had spent a short summer vacation with my family in Denmark and was heading back home to Seyðisfjörður where I live.

I hitched a ride with a couple from Dubai and we drove past Kálfafell on a clear, late summer's afternoon. The vast landscape opened to the stillness, the constant change of light, the birds, the black sand and the mountains in the distance. You get the picture.

Just as we reached Skaftafell, the gentleman who was driving the car turned in his seat and looked straight at me. He pointed out the window and frowned: "Where are all the hotels?!"

A little puzzled I had to ask him to repeat his question. He continued:

"Look at all this empty land. Why are there no hotels? You could build lots of hotels and banks here."

Quite quickly I gave up trying to describe the beauty and uniqueness of the untouched Icelandic nature. Instead, I fell back into the seat thinking about how it takes time to understand a

new culture. No matter whether you are from Denmark or Dubai.

Being an immigrant myself, I have had to learn and understand the Austurland culture - more specifically when it comes to the notion of time. When trying to get an appointment with a person from Austurland the answer: "Maybe in half an hour" can be translated to "Maybe a storm will pass, the mountain will close and snow will fall for five months straight. How can I say a particular time?" I have learned by now that planning is different here.

I have always seen the lifestyle here as closely connected to the Italian. It is almost like Austurland could be Italy's cold cousin. People here have strong family bonds and they treasure social gatherings and shared meals. Not to forget the importance of having several coffee breaks throughout the day! I often spend most of my days either looking for people (hence

the before mentioned notion of time) or rúnturinn around between coffee stops.

I guess it comes down to being a part of a rural community on a semi-deserted island in the North Atlantic Ocean. As a Dane, even I who come from a culture so seemingly close to the Icelandic have had to listen and learn when it comes to the premises of living in Austurland. I joke about my colleague's desperate need for coffee breaks, though I also remind myself that we live on a tiny spot in the world where it seems like the days are longer than the usual 24 hours. Where we do not have to spend hours commuting in heavy traffic or live by a tight schedule, but where we can push that appointment until tomorrow if now is for hunting, seeing a friend or hiking a mountain in good weather.

Jæja, it must be time for a coffee now!

The People of Austurland



Filly Wais Joensen

Nationality: **Danish**

Hometown: **Neskaupstaður**

Education: **Social work**

Filly has been living in Iceland for the past four years. She works for Hildibrand hotel.

Uppruni: **Dönsk**

Heimabær: **Neskaupstaður**

Menntun: **Félagsráðgjöf**

Filly hefur búið á Íslandi í fjögur ár og starfar hjá Hildibrand hótél.



Paulius Naucius

Nationality: **Lithuania**

Hometown: **Reyðarfjörður**

Education: **Police officer**

Paulius has been living in Iceland for the past eighteen years. He is the director of the Reyðarfjörður sports center.

Uppruni: **Litháenskur**

Heimabær: **Reyðarfjörður**

Menntun: **Lögreglumaður**

Paulius hefur búið á Íslandi í 18. ár og er forstöðumaður þróttahússins á Reyðarfirði.



Alona Perepelytsia

Nationality: **Ukraine**

Hometown: **Seyðisfjörður**

Education: **Dancer and physical trainer**

Alona has been living in Iceland for the past six years. She is a dancer and dance instructor and runs the Dance school Austurland.

Uppruni: **Úkraínsk**

Heimabær: **Seyðisfjörður**

Menntun: **Dansari og íþróttافرæðingur**

Alona hefur búið á Íslandi í sex ár. Hún er dansari og danskennari og á og rekur Dansskóla Austurlands.



Christoph Merschbrock

Nationality: **Germany**

Hometown: **Neskaupstaður**

Education: **Construction engineer and dr. in information technology.**

Christoph has been living in Iceland for the past seven years. He is a project manager at Austurbrú.

Uppruni: **Dýskur**

Heimabær: **Neskaupstaður**

Menntun: **Byggingaverkfræðingur og doktor í upplýsingatækni**

Christoph hefur búið á Íslandi í sjö ár og starfar hjá Austurbrú sem verkefnastjóri Háskólaseturs.



Bea Meijer

Nationality: **Netherlands**

Hometown: **Eskifjörður**

Education: **Education studies, remedial teacher, certified accountant and Bowen instructor.**

Bea has been living in Iceland for the past thirty six years. She is the chief accountant at Fjarðabyggð municipality.

Uppruni: **Hollensk**

Heimabær: **Eskifjörður**

Menntun: **Uppeldisfræðingur, sérkennari, leik- og grunnskólakennari, viðurkenndur bókarí og Bowenteknir.**

Bea hefur búið á Íslandi í þrjátíu og sex ár. Hún er aðal-bókarí Fjarðabyggðar.



Rúnar Gunnarsson

Nationality: **Icelandic**

Hometown: **Seyðisfjörður**

Education: **College degree from Keilir**

Rúnar has been living in Iceland for most of his life except for some years that he lived in England where he met his wife He is Seyðisfjörður's Harbour master.

Uppruni: **Íslenskur**

Heimabær: **Seyðisfjörður**

Menntun: **Stúdent frá Keili**

Rúnar hefur búið á Íslandi mestan hluta ævi sinnar en bjó þó um tíma í Englandi þar sem hann kynntist konunni sinni. Hann er yfirhafnarvörður Seyðis-fjarðarhafnar.