

The REYKJAVÍK GRAPEVINE

Christmas

SPECIAL SPECTACULAR



09

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The merry Christmas men that are plastered all over the Grapevine this issue just happen to be some of the city's top restaurateurs. Chef Úlfar Eysteinnsson runs Þrír Frakkar, Reykjavík's best loved fish restaurant (Baldursgata 14) and Tómas Tómasson operates the Iceland's all-time favourite hamburger dive, Hamborgarabúlla Tómasar (various locations).

Why do we love having them pose for photos and then putting those photos on our covers? Because they are very awesome people, and their food has given us a lot of pleasure, for instance. But also because they sport these cool, long beards. Why did they grow these beards?

Úlfar: I was being interviewed on the radio last May, and I happened to sport a beard. The journalist asked me why I was so hairy, and I replied that I was protesting the Central Bank's way-too-high interest rates, that I would not shave until it was down to a one-figure number...

Tómas: I heard Úlfar on the radio, talking about whale meat as usual, and he started talking about his protest. I decided this was something I wanted to get behind, so I called him up immediately afterwards – my friend of 40 years – and told him I would join him in his protest. I've been growing a beard since the end of May now, and Úlfar since the beginning of May. They're pretty hefty beards by now.

Did you envision having to grow your beards this long? Do you expect to cut them anytime soon?

Úlfar: I didn't suspect it would take this time, but we've still had some progress. A year ago, the interest rates were at 18%, they're down to 11% now. Once they go down by 1.5%, the beards are gone!

Tómas: They'll announce the new interest rates on December 10th. I am not convinced they will go below 10% then, but I imagine it will happen next year. I hope they do.

We hear you're planning to do some fun Christmas stuff with those beards...

Úlfar: Yes, we acquired 1.000 decks of playing cards from Icelandair, and a mysterious benefactor sponsored 1.000 candles from Sólheimar. We are in the clouds about this. We're in the process of gift-wrapping the mall and are planning to dress up in Santa gear and deliver those goods to children at the local children's hospital and kindergartens around town, spreading some Christmas spirit.

Photo by Baldur Kristján

Úlfar's Halibut w/Langoustine (serves two)

You'll need: flour, spices, two halibut fillets (around 200 grams each), two large langoustine (split at the middle), cream, white wine and some Icelandic butter.

"Coat the halibut in flour and then fry it in hot butter on one side for around two and a half minutes. Then you flip the fish and place the langoustine split-down in the butter. Spice with BBQ seasoning and add garlic and salt according to taste.

Splash some white wine over the pan before adding the cream (250+ mls.). The cream will come to a boil, making the gravy nice and thick. If it's too thick, add some more white wine. Serve with boiled potatoes and salad, if you will, squeeze a slice of lemon over your plate according to taste."

Tómas' grill-charred leg of lamb (serves many)

You'll need: a filleted leg of lamb (femur intact), BBQ sauce of choice ("Any brand, almost all BBQ sauce is good"), spices.

"Marinate the leg of lamb in the BBQ sauce for 24 hours, preferably at room temperature. Salt and pepper according to taste, then throw it on your barbecue for 45 minutes to an hour – the more burnt, the better. You'll have to keep turning it from the start – eventually it will start to burn, as I said, but that's good. Let it burn! The charred flesh is really good. Keep your BBQ sauce of choice on hand throughout the process, so you can douse the leg in it each time you turn.

Serve with mushroom cream sauce and potatoes. For the potatoes, you should boil them first and cool them down, then cut them into 4-5 pieces each (without peeling them!) and fry them in olive oil, salt, pepper and parsley."

Xmas | Icelandic Christmas



How to Conduct Your Icelandic Christmas

Even though most Western nations are by all accounts becoming more mind-numbingly culturally uniform by the minute, there are still some vast regional differences as to how we go about living our lives and the various customs and traditions that entails. Take Christmas. Most Christian countries (and some non-Christian ones as well) have their own special version of the festivities that December brings, even though themes of celebration, charity, love towards mankind and consumerism are widespread. Iceland is no different in this respect and has many unique Christmas customs and ceremonies. The following is an attempt to give outsiders some insight into how the average Icelander will experience and celebrate the holidays in light of traditional folklore and long standing customs, as well as some new ones.

The presents themselves and the various traditions surrounding them vary between households, although there are some constants. Books have for long ranked as the most popular gift-items; the publishing industry and book stores virtually revolve around the holiday season—the months leading up to it see the majority of the year's releases being published and bought.

The gift of music is also a popular one, especially in post-Kreppa times. Beside cultural products, other popular gift items include decorative objects, board games, electronic equipment and the like.

CALLING ALL SHOPPERS!

It should come as no surprise that each year the first signs of the impending holidays stem from Iceland's advertising agencies; as early as October one may witness Santa or one of his minions running amok in the media, reminding shoppers that the Christmas season has indeed arrived and it is time to stock up on gifts and pleasantries. Soon after, the larger stores will start decorating, giving nods to the festivities with the use of Christmas trees, blinking light sets and inflatable Santas.

However, most of the shopping occurs in the month of December itself, culminating on December 23—known here as Þorláksmessa—when the stores stay open 'til late and midtown Reykjavík along with the shopping malls experience their most crowded day of the year. The large mass of people that congregate downtown to do some last minute shopping and drink cups of cocoa is truly a sight to behold and is for some one of the season's high points.

DECK THE HALLS

Icelanders usually give their homes the holiday treatment in late November/

early December, with the start of Advent (which occurs the fourth Sunday before Christmas) usually marking the official 'OK time' for decorating. Decorations are similar to what may be found in the rest of the Christmas-celebrating world: pine branches, light sets, Santa-related effigies and various knick-knacks and doodads. A four-candle Advent wreath, with one candle to be lit on each Advent Sunday to mark its passing, may be found in most homes, as may so-called Christmas-calendars, boxes of chocolates to be dispensed every day leading up to December 24.

"In folk tales, Christmas Eve is a dangerous night that should be approached with extreme caution. It is the time when every supernatural creature in Iceland's collective consciousness comes out to play, often luring innocent peasants to their dens, killing them or trapping them eternally.."

A decorative object somewhat unique to Iceland, although the phenomenon may be found in some Nordic countries, is the Advent light, a seven-armed electric candlestick found in at least one window of almost every Icelandic house throughout the holiday season. It is reportedly quite common for those who visit Reykjavík in December to get in touch with the National Museum and inquire about the object, and whether Judaism is widespread in the country.

The story behind the Advent lights' popularity in Iceland is surprisingly mundane. It is generally thought of as any other decoration, even though the seven-armed candlestick is laden with symbolism elsewhere. The story goes that a certain Reykjavík businessman encountered the object on a standard shopping trip to Sweden sometime in the mid-sixties. He thought they'd make excellent gifts to his aunts back home and bought several for that purpose. Word of mouth popularity ensued, and soon the businessman was importing boatloads

of the decorative lights, as no respectable Icelandic home could bear to be without them.

A PRETTY HORRIBLE FAMILY

Iceland has some strange and violent folklore connected to the month of Advent, and Christmas in particular, although later years have seen some of its harsher tales considerably revised into being more "child-friendly". As with most Western nations, Christmas in Iceland involves several mythical creatures dating back to the middle ages, but what may set ours apart is their bleak nature and often-scary undertones.

In folk tales, Christmas Eve is a dangerous night that should be approached with extreme caution. It is the time when every supernatural creature in Iceland's collective consciousness comes out to play, often luring innocent peasants to their dens, killing them or trapping them eternally. For instance, elves will tempt with their riches and beauty, trapping whoever falls for their shtick into an eternity of living inside rocks, or worse. And those who dare play cards or games of any nature on Christmas Eve may expect horrible things—a famous folk tale speaks of a Church that was engulfed into the earth by Satan himself after its patrons partook in a midnight game of cards.

And then there are the gift-bringers: the Jólásveinar (or Yuletide Lads), a motley group of bogeymen descended from trolls. Originally used to scare children into submission, it is only in later years that they have warmed to the task of bringing them presents instead of harassing their families with pranks. Little is known of the Jólásveinars' origins, but they do get mentioned in writing as early as the 17th century. Their number and habits varied from region to region (the East Fjords even had some that lived at sea as opposed to on mountains), and there are as many as 80 recorded names for them. Jón Árnason, Iceland's answer to the Brothers Grimm, published their names in his widely read folklore collection in 1862 and thus contributed to a still remaining consensus that there are exactly thirteen active Jólásveinar.

The Jólásveinar have come a long way since their salad days of terrifying young kids. As the centuries passed, they have taken a shine to the little ones and sometime around 1960 they found a purpose in leaving small gifts in kids' shoes left on window sills (although there are reports of this behaviour as early as 1930). The first one, Stekkjarstaur (Gully Oaf) comes to town on the eve of December 12. They keep on coming leading up to December 24, when the infamous Kertasníkir (Candle Beggar – he usually

leaves the greatest presents) makes his arrival. Some interesting ones that show up in the interim include Þvörusleikir (Spoon-licker), Hurðaskellir (Door-slammer) and Gluggagægir (Peeping Tom). Their gifts range from small toys and Christmas decorations to books and CDs (that would be Kertasníkir), but if a child has behaved foully, it will most likely get a potato.

As mentioned earlier, the Jólásveinar are descended from common trolls. In fact, they come from a pretty horrid family. Their mother is the most infamous Icelandic troll of all—the deadly Gryla. She is mainly known for taking great pleasure in devouring naughty children, sometimes cooked, often raw, and it is believed that her sons' original purpose was to bring her fresh meat when the hunger struck. Not as devious but still pretty mean is Gryla's husband, Lepplúði, who partakes in all the nastiness but is a more passive figure.

The most vicious and weird family member is in all likelihood the deceptively named Jólaköttur (Christmas Cat). This feline is said to be of gargantuan proportions, and he has the sole purpose of eating disadvantaged children. Not necessarily naughty ones, which would, in a way, be understandable; rather, the Christmas Cat chooses to feast on kids who fail to score new articles of clothing for Christmas. Luckily, Iceland's trusty welfare system has ensured that he rarely finds motive to visit these days.

DEVOURING CHRISTMAS

Food plays a large part in Icelandic Christmas festivities and there are several local culinary traditions to be honoured. The fun starts in early December, when families congregate to bake several types of Christmas-cookies to be eaten over the course of the coming month. An average household will usually produce around three to ten different sorts of cookies, although later years have seen an increase in the circulation of store-bought ones. More productive households will also bake and freeze layer cakes and raisin-laced Christmas cakes.

From the northern parts of Iceland comes the December tradition of baking Laufabrauð (Leaf-bread), a very thin, deep-fried sort of bread that has decorations carved in it and goes well with butter. Another regional tradition that has in later years spread throughout Iceland is the annual devouring of kæst skata (rotted skate) on Þorláksmessa (December 23). Originating in the Westfjords, the skate-feast generally takes place at noon. The skate has at this point been rotting by itself at room temperature for about three weeks, giving it a harsh and cleansing taste. By most accounts, cook-

ing skate will really stink up a house, although many profess a great love for the dish and its accompanying tallow, cooked rye bread and whole milk. Certainly an acquired taste, but one that's worth exploring.

There aren't many specifically Icelandic Christmas-style drinks to speak of. The Scandinavian custom of gathering to drink Jólaglögg (Christmas-drops) in the weekends leading up to Christmas is often practiced, although its popularity has waned somewhat in recent years. Jólaglögg is a sickly sweet sort of drink that's usually made by heating red wine spiced with cinnamon, ginger, raisins and lemon peel—some will add spirits for added bite.

Alcohol consumption around Christmas itself is less popular than one would assume from Icelanders' usual drinking habits—folks would rather stay warm with a cup of hot chocolate or a combination of alcohol-free Malt ale (Maltöl) and Icelandic orange soda (Appelsín). Combined, the two drinks form what's commonly referred to as Jólaöl (Christmas ale). The blending of the two has been common practice in Iceland since around 1960 and most families have their own special ways of determining the correct proportions between them (some even add cola to the mix).

(NOTHING TO FEAR BUT) CHRISTMAS ITSELF

The first thing you should know about the actual celebrating of Christmas in Iceland is that it culminates on December 24 rather than the 25th, which is the common Western date to celebrate the birth of Christ. This is in keeping with the original Christian chronology, taken up from Judaism, which deems that a new day starts at sunset, or six PM outside of the original Jewish areas. Thus it is deemed that Christmas day starts at six PM in Iceland, signalled in by National Radio's broadcasting of church bells. This is followed by a traditionally extravagant Christmas meal, often comprised of smoked pork or wild game such as ptarmigan or reindeer. Large families like to gather for this occasion and there will often be as many as twenty people dining at the same table. Many families conclude the meal by eating a Christmas porridge in which an almond has been hidden—whoever gets the almond wins a fun prize.

Leading up to this is an always-unbearable wait (if you're a kid, anyway). While parents spend the day putting last-minute touches on decorations, preparing meals and wrapping up presents, children will watch some of the local TV stations' all-day broadcasts of Christmas-themed cartoons. Many will suffer uncontrollable sugar-induced temper tantrums throughout the day.

What they are looking forward to is of course the much-coveted opening of presents, an activity that reigns supreme over the rest of the evening. A family member will often take the task upon himself of fetching the presents from under the Christmas tree and distributing them according to their tags. This can go on for hours in large families, and it's usually not until well after midnight that people make their way to bed, often reading newly acquired books well into the small hours of Christmas Day. 🍷

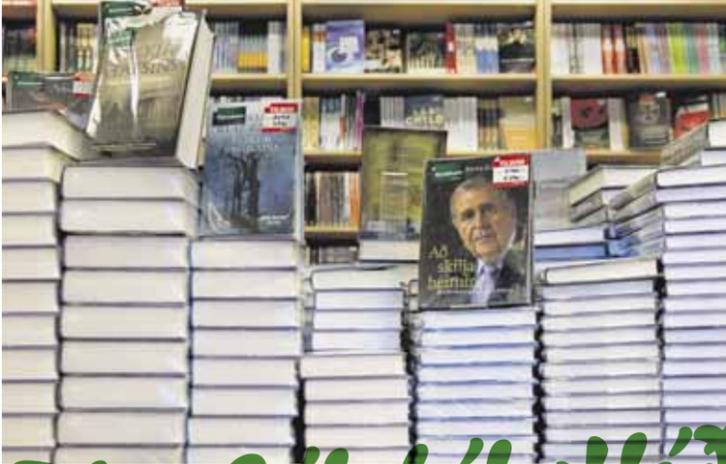
Sirius

Icelandic Family Tradition

Baking and confectionery before Christmas is an old tradition in Iceland. Certain assortments are ever so popular in Icelandic homes while others come and go. Families with baking and confectionary traditions know very well that Sirius chocolate is a top quality ingredient — and has been so since 1933.




NÓI SÍRÍUS
www.noi.is



The Jólábókafloóð

Iceland's yearly flood of books

You might not have heard of it, but Iceland has a yearly flood. It's not like the monsoon where the streets are overrun with water and mud. No, this is a different kind of flood, namely the so-called Christmas-Book Flood. Well. It doesn't necessarily translate well, but in Icelandic the term is "Jólábókafloóð," and it is a yearly sign that Christmas is coming in Iceland. Unlike in most countries, the bulk of the nation's literary output is published in the two or three months leading up to Christmas.

Iceland has just over 300,000 inhabitants. And in this year, there are around 700 titles published in Icelandic, which is among the most we have ever seen. The titles include poetry, children's books, novels, translations, non-fiction etc. I know this because of a nifty little catalogue called Bókatiðindi. It would roughly translate as The Journal of Books. It comes out every November and lists damn near every book "officially" published in Icelandic. It is delivered to each and every home in the country, and for many it is a sign that Christmas is officially upon us. And for Icelanders, Christmas is the time where you snuggle up and read your presents.

IT ALL DATES BACK TO WORLD WAR II

But why does every Icelandic publishing house deem it sensible to release its yearly output in the two or three months that every other publishing house releases theirs? The tradition dates back to World War II, where strict currency restrictions were imposed, so there wasn't a lot of imported giftware. And Icelanders had quite a lot of money to spend in those days due to the economic upheaval during the war. The restrictions on imported paper were more lenient than on other products, so the book emerged as the Christmas present of choice. And Icelanders have honoured the tradition ever since.

The Icelandic Christmas-book market is mainly a gift market. People tend to buy hardcover books for their friends and relatives, but purchase cheaper paperbacks for themselves. As a result most

books are published in hardcover before Christmas, and then the most popular ones come out in paperback, even as soon as January or February.

NEW POSSIBILITIES IN PUBLISHING ARE EMERGING

According to Guðrún Vilmundardóttir, publisher at Bjartur, the second largest publishing house in Iceland, the sales in December figure a staggering sixty percent of their yearly turnover. And most are sold in the few days before Christmas. But during the last few years there have been some signs of a change in the Icelandic publishing landscape. There have been experiments with publishing novels at other times of the year. And according to Guðrún, the market has been becoming more flexible lately. Bjartur has begun publishing paperbacks in the spring for summertime reading. "They are books to take on holiday, thrillers and lighter reads, and people have definitely started buying more paperbacks for themselves. And last spring we published a new Icelandic novel in paperback (Handbók um hugarfar kúa, by Bergsveinn Birgisson) and that sold well. So new possibilities in publishing are emerging."

Egill Örn Jóhannsson, manager at Forlagið, Iceland's single largest publishing house after JPV and Edda merged in 2007, tells a similar tale. "From the start, we have consciously tried to increase publication in what may be called 'other seasons', i.e. not the Christmas season. It has gone very well and now we probably publish more than half of our titles before the so-called Christmas season begins." And for them, sales in the spring have also been picking up. "Our bestselling summer paperbacks are sold in thousands of copies, which is very good considering market's smallness," says Egill.

And indeed, with so few people reading and speaking Icelandic, it is a very small market. So small, in fact, that according to Egill, many foreign publishing houses think it nothing short of miraculous that such a diverse literary scene can be found in such a small country.

Xmas | Books

THE INEVITABLE QUESTION OF THE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

But what of the meltdown? The Kreppa? The economic collapse or whatever you want to call it? Well, it has certainly had an impact on the publishing industry. As the Króna plummeted, prices on imported goods have risen again, and sadly, this time around it goes for paper as well. Says Guðrún: "Last year we didn't raise our prices, although everything had become more expensive—but this year we are forced to raise prices a little. But prices on books haven't been raised much those last few years compared to everything else. A book is a classic gift and very reasonably priced. And I think we have even sensed a kind of goodwill since last fall. People don't go abroad as much to buy presents. They would rather buy Icelandic products."

Egill answers along the same notes. "For a very long time we have heard of the cliché that books are an especially strong product during recession. Now it's been a year since the economic collapse and it's clear that the book can well stand its ground on the market. What's important is that publishers keep at it with confidence and believe in the literary market. If they do, I'm not worried at all. But consumer behaviour seems to have changed a bit, with fewer people buying the more expensive books. But we publishers have done a pretty good job at keeping prices down during the last few years."

THE CREEPING KREPPA

But the Kreppa has been creeping into the literary scene by other means as well, as a large amount of Icelandic novels and non-fiction books are in one way or another a spin on the situation Icelanders find themselves in. There are several non-fiction books that try to explain what exactly led to the economic collapse in Iceland, as well as books regarding the pros and cons of joining the E.U. in the wake of the meltdown, and even a book on corruption by our saviour Eva Joly. There are a number of poetry books struggling to grasp the reasons for and consequences of the Kreppa, and the Kreppa even figures strongly in more than a few children's books, albeit mostly in a metaphorical way. And the novels? Many of them seem to be on issues such as greed and vanity, though quite a few of them also read like nothing drastic has happened in the country. This may be due to the fact that it is now almost exactly a year since the collapse, and novels do take time to write. We likely have nowhere near exhausted the impact that the Kreppa will have on Icelandic society, including its literary scene. ♡

✍ HILDUR KNÚTSDÓTTIR
📖 JULIA STAPLES

Xmas | Party



Dirty Holidayz

Grapevine's guide to yr Ultimate Holiday Bender

It's no secret that December is the darkest and spookiest month. It is by far also the booziest. The overwhelming joy one often associates with the Christmas frenzy increases the longing for a nightcap, the fright that correlates with mass expenditures in gifts and other holiday nonsense calls for some alcohol, and when you intend to bid farewell to the passing year you'll want a bottle of liquor by your side. It seems there's no avoiding dipping your toes (or your entire foot) into the tantalizing Jacuzzi of holiday vice. You strangers: witness Grapevine's guide to your Icelandic holiday drinking!

BUY EARLY!

The Icelandic liquor infrastructure, those state-run liquor stores, have short opening hours. It gets worse over the holidays. So make a visit to Vínbúð early. And purchase in bulk. You'll thank us later.

AND SO IT BEGINS...

The first day of hardcore debauchery is Þorláksmessa. The rambling begins at noon, when families and friends gather to fulfil their appetite with brennivín and rotted skate, which smells so foul, you'll have to drown the maggoty taste with a whole lot of Brennivín to survive. The fun continues through the day, usually ending in an uncontrollable frenzy at the local bars. The funny part of all this is that Þorláksmessa is also the day when you finalize your Xmas shopping. This is no match made in heaven. The only reason bars are open on the 24th from noon 'til two is so unfortunates can pick up their left-behind presents. So my advice is: find a local and convince him to invite you in for rotted skate. If that doesn't work out, find a restaurant that serves the horrendous dish and report for duty at the bars in the evening.

DAY II OF DEPRAVITY

If you don't recognize the holiday "Second in Christmas," it's because we made it up. To get shitfaced. Christmas day is usually spent on family gatherings. This lasts 'til midnight on December 26th, when the bars remove the chains from their doors. Be aware that the bars are only open between midnight and 3 AM, so you'll have to try and imbibe as much alcohol as possible in those three hours. In light of this, it might not come as a surprise that the average bar sales are usually greater in these three hours than on a regular 8 PM-6 AM night. After a bunch of after partying, you'll probably end up with your holiday booze stash empty. But don't worry, Vínbúð opens up again, so you can re-stock.

THE MESSY FINALE

Now we're finally there, New Year's Eve. The craziest night of the year. Supposedly. The first thing you have to do is clear out all your expectation, 'cause grand ones might disappoint you. A lot of the locals tend to give the clubs the finger on this particular night, but they tend to be wrong. If you're visiting I'd recommend you'd score a ticket to one of those New Year's celebrations, but if you get invited to a local party – definitely go for it. It's a wise move to go up to Perlan or by Hallgrímskirkja to watch the ludicrous fireworks and fire up a few, you'll be able to mingle with crazy Icelanders that are probably planning a 24-hour party. Whatever you do though, don't go to sleep. Things won't heat up until around 8 AM, and if you play it right you won't remember anything the morning after, won't recognize where you are and don't recall what you did. And that's the reason why it will be, in your memory, the craziest night of the year. ♡

✍ SIGURÐUR KJARTAN KRISTINSSON
📖 JÓI KJARTANS

Save money, Shop Tax Free

All tourists with a permanent address outside Iceland are eligible for Tax Free shopping during their stay in Iceland. Remember to ask for a Tax Free form when shopping and receive up to 15% refund of your purchases.



10 ZASAD GŁÓWNYCH

1. Myśl pozytywnie, będzie ci lżej
2. Dbaj o to, co jest ci drogie
3. Ucz się jak najdłużej, nawet do końca swojego życia
4. Ucz się na własnych błędach
5. Ruszaj się jak najczęściej, to podnosi na duchu
6. Nie zaprzataj sobie głowy niepotrzebnymi sprawami
7. Staraj się rozumieć i wspierać innych
8. Nie poddawaj się, droga do sukcesu jest długa
9. Znajdź i rozwijaj swoje zdolności
10. Stawiaj sobie zadania i pozwól swoim marzeniom się spełnić



Gedraakt

10 KËSHILLA SHPIRTËRORE

1. Mendo pozitiv, është më e lehtë të mendosh pozitiv për gjithcka.
2. Ruaje atë që është më e shtrejtë për ju.
3. Vazhdo të mësosh për sa kohë që jeton.
4. Mëso nga gabimet e tua.
5. Lëvizja e përditshme, lehtëson gjendjen shpirtërore.
6. Mos e vështirso jetën tënde pa arsye.
7. Mundohu t' i kuptosh dhe t' i nxisësh të tjerët përreth teje.
8. Mos u dorëzo, mirëqenia në jetë është maraton.
9. Kërkoj dhe kultivoi aftësit e tua.
10. Vendos një kufi dhe lëre ëndrrën tënde të realizohet.



Gedraakt

10 SAVETA ZA DOBRO DUŠEVNO ZDRAVLJE

1. Razmišljajmo pozitivno, lakše je
2. Vodimo računa o onome što nam je drago
3. Učimo dok god živimo
4. Učimo na vlastitim greškama
5. Krećimo se svakodnevno, to popravlja raspoloženje
6. Ne komplikujmo život bez razloga
7. Trudimo se da razumemo i podržavamo ljude oko nas
8. Ne odustajmo, uspeh u životu je trka na duge daljine
9. Pronađimo i negujmo vlastite talente
10. Postavimo si cilj i ispunimo svoje snove



Gedraakt

10 COMMANDMENTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

1. Think positively; it's easier
2. Cherish the ones you love
3. Continue learning as long as you live
4. Learn from your mistakes
5. Exercise daily; it enhances your well-being
6. Do not complicate your life unnecessarily
7. Try to understand and encourage those around you
8. Do not give up; success in life is a marathon
9. Discover and nurture your talents
10. Set goals for yourself and pursue your dreams



Gedraakt

ДЕСЯТЬ ПОЛЕЗНЫХ ЖИЗНЕННЫХ СОВЕТОВ

1. Настраивайся всегда на положительные эмоции – это облегчает жизнь
2. Береги то, что тебе дорого
3. Век живи – век учишься
4. Извлекай уроки из своих ошибок
5. Ежедневно занимайся физическими упражнениями: это повышает настроение
6. Не усложняй свою жизнь без надобности
7. Старайся понять и поддержать тех, кто тебя окружает
8. Не сдавайся: успех в жизни – это бег на длинную дистанцию
9. Раскрой и развивай свои способности
10. Поставь себе цель и добивайся ее осуществления



Gedraakt

Mười điều tâm niệm

1. Hãy lạc quan, sẽ yêu đời hơn
2. Hãy góp phần vào việc bạn thích
3. Hãy tiếp tục học mãi
4. Hãy rút kinh nghiệm qua lỗi lầm của mình
5. Hãy vận động thường xuyên hằng ngày sẽ làm tinh thần thoải mái.
6. Đừng tham gia vào những việc vô ích
7. Hãy cố gắng hiểu và khuyến khích người khác
8. Đừng đầu hàng, chịu thua vì thành công trong cuộc đời là sự đúc kết của một chuỗi dài phấn đấu
9. Hãy nhận biết và trau dồi khả năng của mình
10. Hãy đặt cho mình mục đích và cố gắng thực hiện giấc mơ của mình



Gedraakt

GEÐORÐIN 10

1. Hugsaðu jákvætt, það er léttara
2. Hlúðu að því sem þér þykir vænt um
3. Haltu áfram að læra svo lengi sem þú lifir
4. Lærðu af mistökum þínum
5. Hreyfðu þig daglega, það léttir lundina
6. Flæktu ekki líf þitt að óþörfu
7. Reyndu að skilja og hvetja aðra í kringum þig
8. Gefstu ekki upp, velgengni í lífinu er langhlaup
9. Finndu og ræktaðu hæfileika þína
10. Settu þér markmið og láttu drauma þína rætast



Gedraakt

ข้อคิด 10 ประการ

1. คิดในแง่ดี จะทำการอันใดก็จะง่ายขึ้น
2. ถนอมหัวใจแก่บุคคลที่ท่านรัก
3. ไม่แก่เกินไปที่จะฝึกหาเรียนรู้
4. ผิดเป็นครู
5. เคลื่อนไหวร่างกายเป็นประจำ ทำให้อายุยืนขึ้น
6. ไม่ควรทำชีวิตของท่านใหญ่โตจนเกินไป
7. พยายามเข้าใจและให้การสนับสนุนแก่บุคคลรอบข้าง
8. ไม่คิดย่อท้อ, วิ่งเข้าสู่อุบัติความสำเร็จของชีวิต
9. ฝึกฝนและค้นหาทักษะให้กับตนเอง
10. ตั้งจุดมุ่งหมาย และสร้างฝันให้เป็นจริง



Gedraakt

Xmas | Christmas Buffets



Stuffing the Stuffing

The Icelandic Christmas Buffet tradition for beginners

Grapevine's Sari Peltonen tucks into the Icelandic Christmas tradition of Christmas Buffet.

Rule one: STUFF YOURSELF SILLY.

Around us, there are families, young couples and a table full of businessmen. The tradition—possibly derived from their Scandinavian ancestors and feasting in Valhalla—is so popular that I hear it is not uncommon for a person to attend three buffets—one with work, one with friends and yet another with the family. The few tourists are easy to pick out in their sweaters—the local dress code is all shirts, ties and small black dresses.

Rule two: DRESS UP.

Apart from the Christmas carols, the evening's background is provided by the city lights of Reykjavík. The UFO like pearl of Icelandic architecture, Perlan, was completed in 1991, overlooking the town from the Öskjuhlíð hill. It features six water tanks, which supply the town with geothermal water, a Viking museum, view deck, café and a man made geyser—the last blowing at regular intervals throughout our meal.

The top of the Pearl is the revolving restaurant. The outside ring turns slowly while the centre with the buffet provides the anchor. The movement has confused one older gentleman in a gray suit, who is stood by our table looking lost.

After a delicious bowl of wild goose soup, we hit the buffet. The starters feature various types of salmon, caviar and blinis, roast beef, duck liver pate, ox tongue, seafood salads and herring, apple salad, ham salad in mayonnaise... We fill our plates and notice that we are alone. Indeed, most of our co-diners have arrived a lot earlier than 8.

Rule three: COME EARLY, SO YOU HAVE TIME TO EAT MORE.

After emptying our plates with enviable speed, we hit the buffet again, this time for the main courses. On offer are the classic Icelandic dishes of sugared potatoes and manure-smoked lamb hangikjöt, stuffing, meatballs, red cabbage—a combination of local specialties alongside this and that adopted from other countries. Finally there is a mini-carvery of salted pork, venison and pork belly.

"Some people come to Iceland just for our buffet," says the chef proudly whilst cutting us thick slices of venison.

By the time of dessert, the restaurant has spun around enough to bring the cake tables right to us. And what a selection: English fruitcake, pineapple cheesecake, skyr cake, chocolate cake and mousse, meringue, crème Brule and

the dubiously named Pearl Bomber.

Around us, people are getting drowsier, the group of business men louder. The gray suited gentleman is escorted to his table by the waitress. He sits down and toasts with his companion, patting the waitress' back.

Skál for Christmas buffets!

Christmas buffet at Perlan 7.890 ISK per person. Thank you to the restaurant for kindly providing a buffet meal for two for research purposes. ♡

SELECTED CHRISTMAS OFFERINGS IN REYKJAVÍK

BRAUÐBÆR

A Danish inspired buffet. Mon to Wed, lunch and dinner. 3300 ISK/3900 ISK.

EINAR BEN

Traditional buffet dishes served separately to each table. Dinner 6490 ISK per person.

FISH COMPANY

A Christmas edition of their famed Around the world in 8400 ISK menu, served for the whole table.

FISHMARKET

Fusion Christmas menu, served for the whole table. Christmas Sushi and more. 8900 ISK per person.

TAPASBARINN

Tapas with a Christmas flavour. 4990 ISK.

FJÖRUKRÁIN

The Viking theme restaurant puts out their Christmas Buffet on Fri and Sat. For 6800 ISK, one gets the traditional food, mulled wine and live music.

GRAND HÓTEL

Traditional buffet and traditional live folk music. Lunch buffet 5100 ISK, dinner 7500 ISK for adults, cheaper for children. Available on weekends.

GRILLIÐ

Fine dining Christmas menu with 3/4 courses (7900 ISK/9900 ISK), 16 500 ISK with an accompanying wine menu.

HÓTEL HOLT'S GALLERY

3900 ISK for a 3-course Christmas lunch; the classy Jólabbal dinner menu for 7900 ISK; On Sun-Wed it comes for the bargain price of 5450 ISK.

HÓTEL LOFTLEIÐIR

The Loftleiðir buffet is overseen by Dane Ida Davidssen to ensure the ultimate in Scandinavian quality—including one of the widest selections of herring around. On Sun-Thu the dinner buffet costs 5950

ISK; On Fri-Sat 6500 ISK with live music. Lunch buffet 3950 ISK.

SILFUR

Dinner time Christmas buffet, 6900 ISK per person, 5900 ISK from Sun to Wed. The foods feature the traditional line up with a modern touch.

VOX

Vox does Christmas all the way: Brunch, menu and High tea all dress up in Santa's clothes. In addition there is a lunch buffet for 2850 ISK—reduced from last year to help out in hard times—and a weekend dinner buffet with live music.

RESTAURANT DILL

New Nordic food goes Christmas, with herring ice cream, langoustine wrapped in Christmas tree and "Kjartan's volcanic Christmas pudding with lava". An evening at Dill with coffee, champagne, full menu and wines comes with a price tag of 18.000 ISK, Standalone menu for 8400 ISK and wine menu for 7900 ISK.

BROADWAY

Broadway offers the unexpected collaboration of Christmas Buffet and Michael Jackson tribute concert until mid-December. For more information and bookings, call 533 1100.

HÓTEL SAGA

Hótel Saga's traditional buffet comes with first class entertainment by the Icelandic comedians Laddi, Steinn Ármann and Hjörtur Howser. 8900 ISK/10900 ISK with wine.

FJALAKÖTTURINN

Fjalakötturinn offers a traditional 3-course Christmas menu for 6900 ISK.

VEISLUTURNINN

Kópavogur's gift to the world of Christmas buffets has a New York theme. There's also Christmas Brunch every weekend for 3500 ISK, with Christmas dwarfs to entertain the children.

RESTAURANT REYKJAVÍK

Restaurant Reykjavik offers a traditional buffet for 4900 ISK per person every day up until Christmas.

LÆKJARBREKKA

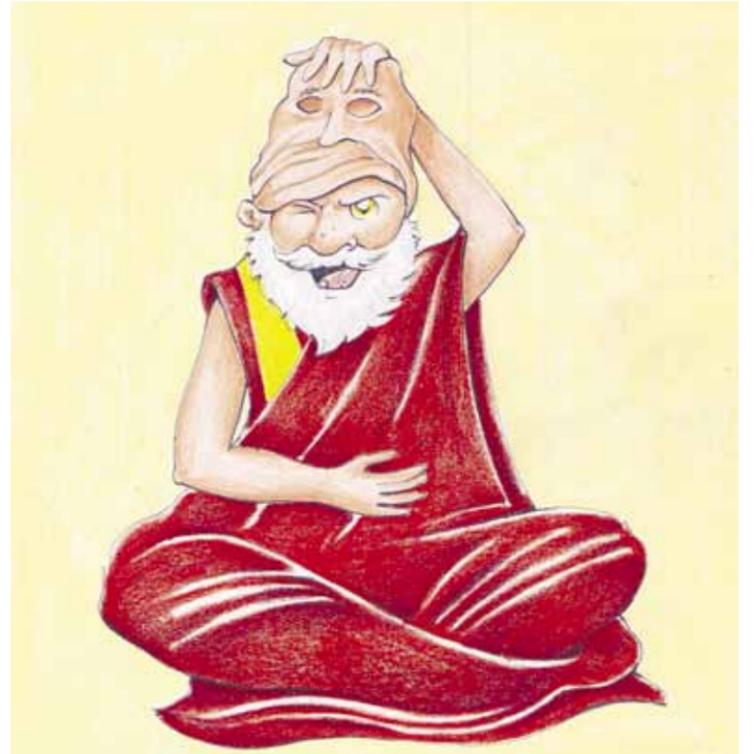
A traditional buffet is served in the evenings, Sun-Wed for 5900 ISK, and Thu-Sat for 6900 ISK. Lunch buffet is served in each table (3900 ISK).

PERLAN

A classy buffet on a revolving floor, breathtaking Reykjavik view. 7.890 ISK.

✍ SARI PELTONEN
📷 JULIA STAPLES

Xmas | Merry Transcendentalism



The Bewitching Hours Before Christmas

Are the Yule Lads, Santa, and the Dalai Lama all reincarnated?

Just the other day, Ingimundur the electrician told me he has regular contact with a vegetable vendor who lived in 1732 during the bubonic plague in London. Þorvaldur the mechanic explained that he has lived over two hundred lives, including: a Dutchman for the East India Company and an Italian monk-scribe during the fourteenth century. For those of you who have been reading this column, you will note that there is no shortage of Icelanders who believe in reincarnation, afterlife, a universal collective consciousness, communicate with ghosts, fairies, elves, flora—even the enigmatic huldufólk (hidden people); and yet, few will stare you straight in the eye and admit it. Those that do, quite often ask you for complete anonymity. "Yes," they say, "I've seen elves, but for heaven's sake don't tell a soul. People are very judgemental, and I still have to lead a regular life."

Sigrún is four years old. And I can tell you (she's the daughter of Guðmundur, a friend), she believes in elves and fairies, she has an invisible pal who she plays with all the time; she also believes in the thirteen Yule Lads. She would have no problem accepting that I was formerly a Mongolian warrior, a knight of the Great Ghengis Khan. I'm sure she would ask me if I could show her my yurt.

Although we 'sensible' adults no longer believe in Santa Claus nor the Easter Bunny, we do everything in our power to maintain the myth for the sake of our children. Is it that we consider this important for nourishing their creative impulses, their imagination; or perhaps for honouring age old traditions? I propose that we actually want to believe ourselves. There's nothing like winking at your wife while watching your five-year old unwrap his presents with utter abandon, is there?

In Iceland, the Yule Lads (thirteen of them in place of the one Coca Cola Santa Claus), who range from the rambunctious sheep-harassing Stekkjastaur, to the candle gobbling Kertasníkir (in the old days candles were made from pork dripping and thus edible) arrive in succession from the 12th of December all the way up to Christmas eve. Rather than rumbling down the chimney to place gifts under the Christmas tree, they scarper in and out of hedgerows, bound over hillocks, scramble up walls, all for a peek inside your child's old boot. Of course, it's a great way to get the kids to get to bed early, finish their

dinner, have their homework all in order: if you're good you'll get a gift every night; if, on the other hand, you're misbehaving, you'll end up with a potato in your shoe.

Recently, Guðmundur had a dilemma with Sigrún. Sigrún, like many Icelandic children, has been doing a good job of upping Icelandic milk sales: The milk company, MS, plasters the Yule Lads in all manner of hoologanism on the sides of their milk cartons in the weeks leading up to Christmas. One fine morning, Sigrún looks up from her Cheerios, and says: "Dad, in Iceland we have 13 Santas. But on TV there's only one. He drives a flying carriage led by a bunch of reindeer, and the elves help him make all the presents for Christmas. Who are the real Christmas men?"

Trying to get his folklore straight (and you gotta take your hat off to him), Guðmundur said: "Well, you know, 'cause we live in Iceland, we're much closer to the North Pole than American children. So here in Iceland, the thirteen Yule Lads do the gift-giving on Santa's behalf instead." And then, Guðmundur considered carefully what he was going to say next. He realised he'd opened a whole can of worms. How was he going to explain Grýla, the troll-mother of the Yule Lads and, heaven forbid, the Yule Cat (who is said to eat children if they don't don a new piece of clothing at Christmas)? Thankfully for him, Sigrún bought the whole caboodle and had to dash off for kindergarten shortly thereafter. Apparently she hasn't yet dug any further, but Guðmundur is inventing a complete new Saga in his head just in case.

In the words of the author Jonathan Black: "Time is nothing but a measure of the changing positions of objects in space, and, as many a scientist, mystic or mad man knows, in the beginning there were no objects in space." All we have to do is just fill in the blanks, and everything comes clearly into place.

As to whether Santa and the thirteen Yule Lads are really related, you'd have to ask Þorvaldur. He's lead so many lives, he's sure to have been one of them once. That is, right after he was reincarnated as the Dalai Lama. ♡

✍ MARK VINCENZ
ILLUSTRATION BY INGA MARÍA

*Pure Beef!
If U Dont Like It
U Dont Pay 4 It*

*"It's hard 2 beat
a good meal
at good price"
Washington Post*

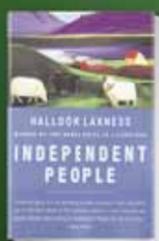
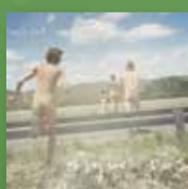
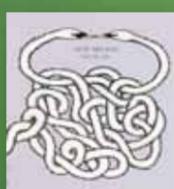


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The Encyclopaedia of Icelandic Holidays

The A-Ö of the Icelandic holiday season

By Haukur S Magnússon

With additional reporting from Paul F Nikolov, Sveinn Birgir Björnsson, Páll Hilmarsson and Valgerður Þóroddsdóttir

Illustrations by Inga María Brynjarsdóttir

AÐFANGADAGUR

(Ath-founga-dager)

December 24th, Aðfangadagur, is the day Icelanders celebrate Christmas (as opposed to December 25th in most countries). The first half of the day usually goes towards finishing off all of the last minute preparations, making food, wrapping presents, bathing and putting on nice clothes. Children are often occupied by the television set, as most stations broadcast a non-stop programme of cartoons through the day.

Six o' clock marks the official start of Christmas in Iceland (see our guide to conducting Icelandic Christmas on page 2 for more info on why that is), and this is when most households sit down to enjoy a pleasant holiday meal. After dinner, most people commence opening their presents. They then hang out and indulge until bedtime.



AÐVENTA

(Ath-venta)

Aðventan, or the Advent, is the month leading up to Christmas. Icelanders celebrate each Sunday of the Advent (starting on the fourth Sunday prior to Christmas) by lighting candles on an Advent Wreath ("Aðventukrans"), which is usually a four-candle (one for each Sunday of the Advent) evergreen wreath. The first Sunday of Advent marks the time most Icelanders start decorating for the holidays and preparing in general.

AÐVENTUKRANS

(Ath-ventou-kraans)

See: Aðventa.

AÐVENTULJÓS

(Ath-ventou-lyows)

Aðventuljós, or Advent light, is a decorative object somewhat unique to Iceland. This seven-armed electric candlestick is found in at least one window of almost every Icelandic home throughout the holiday season. See our Xmas guide for more info.

ANNAR Í JÓLUM

(Aann-arr ee yo!-luwm)

December 26th, the second day of Christmas, is the designated party day of the holiday season (New Year's notwithstanding). The day itself usually entails heavy lounging and attending a family Christmas party or two, but the evening has most of the action, with bars and clubs opening for business around midnight. Revellers like to go out at that time, decked in their fancy holiday attire and reconnecting with friends and acquaintances that they haven't seen for all of three days.

ÁRAMÓT

(our-a-mowt)

See: Gamlársdagur/Gamlárskvöld.

ÁRAMÓTAANNÁLL

(our-a-mowt-a-annoull)

Icelanders are fond of watching television on New Year's Eve, with most of the day's programming dedicated to detailing the fast fading year's events. Second to the Áramótaskaup in popularity is the Áramótaannáll on RÚV, a collage of the year's TV news stories with commentary from the news team. An international version and a local one run back to back. Check newspapers' TV listings for more info.



ÁRAMÓTASKAUPIÐ

(our-a-mowt-a-skoj-pith)

Gathering around the TV on New Year's Eve to watch the Áramótaskaup comedy special

on RÚV is an old and honoured Icelandic tradition—in fact the streets fall completely silent during its broadcast time of 22:30-23:30. The show itself is a comedy revue featuring many of Iceland's best-loved actors that parodies the year's events in sketches and song. The quality differs from year to year, but Icelanders love even the especially bad ones (because then they can complain to each other about how much it sucked). It is not subtitled, so the fun is likely lost on non-Icelandic speakers. It's worth checking out, though, you can always make fun of Icelandic TV's low production standards.



ATTIRE

Icelanders like to dress smart and snazzy over the holidays. Formal attire is usually expected in the parties of the 24th and 25th, on other days go for neat casual outfits.

CHRISTMAS MUSIC

Iceland doesn't have a lot of original Xmas songs, although there are a few to be found. Mostly the tunes meant to get you into the holiday spirit are translations of international Xmas ones (some of them don't have anything whatsoever to do with Xmas), so the stuff blaring from the radio in the knick-knack shop should sound familiar. There are some popular local songs, however, the most infamous one being Sniglabandið's Jólaljól ("Christmas bike"). For more on Icelandic Xmas music, read Dr. Gunni's column elsewhere in this pullout.

CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS

See also: Jólásveinar, Santa Claus

The Christmas stockings tradition is celebrated in Iceland, although it differs greatly from what you might be used to. As explained elsewhere, there are thirteen Yuletide lads in Iceland, and each one comes down from the mountains on a designated day before Christmas bearing gifts for children to be placed in their shoe or stocking left by an open window. It should be noted that well-behaved children receive something of value, whereas ill behaved children usually receive a rotten potato.

COMMERCE

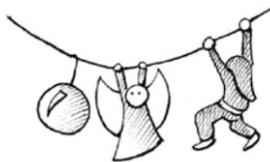
See also: Þorláksmessa

Like elsewhere, Christmas and commerce have very close ties in Iceland. Stores stay open until 11 PM on Þorláksmessa, the 23rd of December, and until noon on the day of Christmas Eve. This is done in a mutual agreement between late shoppers and greedy shop owners who want to make sure that no Króna is left behind.

DANCING

See also: Jólaboð, jólaball, jólatré

Dancing around the Christmas tree is still a widespread fad at Christmas dances in children's schools around the country, but the tradition is slowly dying out as a practice in homes. It involves holding hands around the tree and walking repeatedly in circles whilst singing Christmas carols. Hours of fun.



DECORATING

See also: Aðventa, Aðventuljós

Icelanders like to decorate their houses a lot in time for Christmas, with the start of Advent usually marking the official 'OK time' for decking the halls. Decorations are similar to what may be found in the rest of the Christmas-celebrating world: pine branches, light sets, Santa-related effigies and various knick-knacks and doodads. American style lighting monstrosities are uncommon, but not unheard of.



DRINKING

See also: Annar í jólum, Gamlársdagur/Gamlárskvöld

Heavy drinking is generally not condoned on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day—although indulging in a glass of wine or two isn't frowned upon—as the days' festivities are generally reserved for family activities. The 26th, 31st and New Year's Day are popular for binge drinking and partying, however, as are any weekend days that fall between the two days.

EATING OUT

See also: Christmas buffets, commerce

Icelanders generally don't like to eat out during the holiday season. If you are visiting, and you plan on dining at a restaurant during the holidays (see our special Xmas listings for details), chances are you'll be dining with some fellow tourists. However, attending special Xmas buffets is a popular activity over the advent.



FAMILY

Icelandic Christmas is all about one's family, extended and otherwise. Generally speaking, most Icelanders will be busy spending time with their families from December 24th until the eve of the 26th, so don't expect that hot boy (or girl) you hook up with on the 23rd to be available for any immediate follow-up sessions (you should still try, though).



FLUGELDAR

(flug-oeld-arrrrr)

See also: Gamlársdagur/Gamlárskvöld

Flugeldar ("fireworks") are an essential part of the Icelandic New Year's Eve experience, in fact, the sale and deployment of fireworks is only legal in Iceland between December 28—January 6. Like everything else Icelanders are fond of, they take their fireworks seriously—most of those who have witnessed the mass employment of fireworks at New Year's will agree that the act is far beyond over-the-top. But most will also attest that the display is striking and beautiful. An added bonus is that most of the places selling them are doing so for charity, or to fund rescue teams.

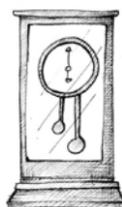
Expect small blasts here and there as of December 27th, culminating in an all-out orgy of explosions around midnight of New Year's Eve.

GAMLÁRSDAGUR/GAMLÁRSKVÖLD

(gaaml-ouwrs-daager / kvöeld)

See also: Fireworks, drinking, Áramótaskaup, Áramótaannáll, Áramótabrenna [Note: Gamlársdagur refers to New Year's Eve's Day, and Gamlárskvöld refers to New Year's Eve itself]

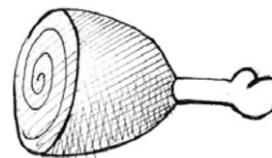
The coming of the New Year is celebrated pretty heavily in Iceland. Drinks are drunk, fireworks are lit and vomit is, eventually, spewed. Although there is no rule, most folks like to gather for a nice dinner feast with family and/or friends at the start of the evening (or



late in the afternoon). They hang out, drink drinks, play board games and watch the TV recap of the preceding year. Many head out to their local New Year's bonfire, a complete list of which is published in local newspapers on the days leading up to the 31st.

After watching the Áramótaskaup comedy revue and lighting some fireworks, most will head to a rowdier, less family oriented gathering and stay there 'til dawn.

A note about the word "áramót": like many Icelandic words, it is impressively and descriptively sensible, and it does not have a counterpart in the English language. Quite literally, "áramót" translates as "the meeting of years". Makes sense, doesn't it?



HANGIKJÖT

(Howng-e-kjoet)

See also: Jólamatúr

Hangikjöt—literally meaning "hung meat"—is smoked Icelandic lamb which takes its name from the old tradition of smoking food in order to preserve it by hanging it from the rafters of a smoking shed. Hangikjöt is traditional Christmas meat, often served with potatoes in a sweet white sauce and pickled red cabbage. It's pretty awesome.



HAMBORGARHRYGGUR

(Haam-bouwrger-hreggurrr)

See also: Dining

A traditional Christmas food eaten on the 24th at six o'clock. It is pork, usually with a honey glazing and pineapple, cooked in an oven for a few hours. This is a pretty heavy meal, resulting in the number of heart attacks increasing around Xmas when people who really shouldn't eat fatty meat gorge themselves almost to death.

HEITT SÚKKULAÐI

(hate sooqou-laethi)

Indulging in a cup of freshly made heitt súkkulaði ("hot chocolate") is an essential part of the Icelandic holiday experience. The classic recipe is thus: melt one plate of 'Suðusúkkulaði' (available everywhere one might buy chocolate) in a double boiler with 1-2 cups of water. In a separate container, heat one litre of milk to the boiling point. Slowly stir melted chocolate into boiling milk. Enjoy.

JÓLABALL

(yo!-la-boll)

See also: Jólaboð

The jólaball, or Christmas dance, is a longstanding tradition where children are herded by their parents or schools to hang out, eat cake and candy and dance around a decorated tree while singing some classic Christmas tunes. More often than not, one or more of the Yule lads will make an appearance and disburse small gifts of candies.

JÓLABOÐ

(yo!-la-boeth)

The Icelandic Xmas party—jólaboð—is traditionally a family gathering that involves copious amounts of eating Christmas fare such as hangikjöt and cookies, drinking coffee and chocolate, talking about the weather and engaging in the latest board games (although Trivial Pursuit is always a classic).

JÓLADAGATAL

(yo!-la-dae-ga-tael)

The jóladagatal ("Christmas calendar") is used to count down the days from December 1st until the 24th and is a must for children of all ages—some adults like to indulge as well. The most common variety has a differently shaped piece of chocolate for each day, although some of the crappier ones just have dumb, holiday related pictures. Some families like to craft their own, wrapping small gifts for each day.

JÓLADAGUR

(yo!-la-daguer)

See also: Jólaboð

Jóladaður—Christmas Day—is the big day for family gatherings and Christmas parties. Many like to sleep in and relax before putting on formal attire and heading out to a friend's house to indulge in some hangikjöt or hot chocolate. Everything is closed. A very relaxed day, for most.

JÓLAGLÖGG

(yo!-la-gludge)

See also: Jólahlæðborð, drinking

A hot beverage consisting of red wine, vodka, and spices. Often served with raisins. The word can also just mean a party of friends around Christmas time who get together under the pretext that they will drink jólaglugg, when all they really want to do is drink anything with alcohol in it. You know, because of the dark.

JÓLAHLÆÐBORÐ

(yo!-la-hlaeth-boerth)

See also: Christmas dining, eating out, Hamborgarhryggur

A fairly new tradition in Iceland, connected to the number of restaurants increasing in later years. A Jólahlæðborð is a Christmas buffet that people attend in groups, usually co-workers go together for a night of eating, but mostly drinking. Many a marriage has been put to a serious strain after a drunken night at a Jólahlæðborð. Something about Christmas brings out the adulterers in some people.



JÓLAKORT

(yo!-la-kowrt)

Many Icelanders choose to parlay greetings to their friends and loved ones over the holidays via the mailing of Christmas cards, or jólakort. They will most often feature a generic Christmassy motif and some standard well wishes, although some use the opportunities to send along pictures of the family.



JÓLAKÖTTURINN

(yo!-la-koett-ur-enn)

To avoid, as the saying goes, "going to the Christmas cat," children are required to receive at least one piece of new clothing in time for Christmas each year. Otherwise, the cat will eat them.

JÓLAMATUR

(yo!-la-maw-tuer)

See also: Christmas buffets, rjúpur, kæst skata, hangikjöt, jólaöl, jólasnákökur Like in most other places, nourishing oneself over the holidays is all about indulgence. When it comes to jólamatur ("Christmas food"): the richer, sweeter, fattier and saltier, the better.



JÓLAÖL

(yo!-la-öel)

See also: Christmas dining

The ultimate Christmas drink, Jólalög (or: "Christmas ale") is created by mixing an elusive ratio of Malt and Appelsin orange soda. Although you can now buy this drink premixed, but it's just as fun to mix it yourself, according to taste. Note that it contains no alcohol. Which is nice for a change).

JÓLASMÁKÖKUR

(yo!-la-smouw-koek-er)

See also: *Dining*

Jólasníköt ("Christmas cookies") are an essential part of the Icelandic holiday experience. Most households bake their own cookies in the weeks leading up to Christmas, making an average of 3-5 different types. They are then consumed at Christmas gatherings or while lounging about with ones new presents. Some classic types include: Piparkökur (ginger snaps"), Mömmukökur (ginger snap-type cookies sandwiched around white frosting), súkkulaðibitakökur (chocolate chip cookies) and hálfmánar (rhubarb preserves wrapped in dough), although the varieties are endless.

JÓLATRÉ

(yo!-la-tr-yeah!)

See also: *Þorláksmessa, Christmas presents*

Icelanders' Christmas trees are usually installed on December 23rd, with the actual decorating taking place on the 24th (although this does differ between households). Various organisations, such as the local rescue squads, sell live trees to fund their operations, although private companies also partake. Fake plastic trees aren't very popular, although some folks prefer them.



KÆST SKATA

(kjae-st skaaa-taaaa)

See also: *Þorláksmessa*

The consumption of kæst skata, or rotted skate, on the 23rd of December is a holiday tradition derived from the West Fjords of Iceland. The dish—which many swear by, and others find especially foul—is most often imbibed at special skate gatherings around noon on the 23rd, and is often served along with potatoes, butter, rye bread and shots of brennivín (most West Fjords experts recommend drinking milk with the skate, as the fish is "intoxicating in and of itself").

The skate is a chondrichyte, and therefore ferments when allowed to rot, as its urine is distributed through its flesh and goes through a chemical change over time. They are in fact poisonous if eaten before the fermentation process is complete. It is fermented by throwing it in a box and letting it lie for three weeks.



LAUFABRAUÐ

(loi-fa-brau-eth)

See also: *Adventan*

The making of laufabrauð, or "leaf-bread," is usually a family-affair taking place early in December. People gather together to cut intricate patterns into this deep-fried, thin flatbread, which is then enjoyed as a tasty snack to accompany any Christmas event or meal. It goes exceedingly well with butter.

NÝARSDAGUR

(knee-ouwrs-da-guer)

See also: *Drinking*

Icelanders like to spend most of New Year's Day feeling hung-over and sorry for themselves. As the evening approaches, many will start pulling themselves together and dressing up for New Year's Day banquets or parties that have grown popular lately. Others will stay in watching DVDs and complaining.

OPENING HOURS

See also: *Commerce, eating out*

If you are touring in Iceland for the holiday season, we can only hope someone told you of Iceland's antiquated opening hours for that time. You will not have much luck locating open restaurants—or open anything-else—during Christmas or on New Year's. Check out our holiday listings guide for info on places that are actually open and happy to serve you.



PRESENTS

See also: *Commerce, Aðfangadagur, jólatré*

Of course Xmas is all about the presents, and a lot of debt is incurred during the season, even though we've yet to discern completely how the act of spreading goodwill through gifts is affected by the full impact of the Kreppa. There are no specific guidelines for Xmas gift

giving in Iceland, but a good rule of thumb is to avoid being extravagant in your gift choices, unless maybe something extravagant is called for or expected on the other end.

Generally most folks tend to stick with bestowing presents upon their immediate family and loved ones, although some like to spread the joy to their entire group of friends. In any case, there's nothing wrong with asking. Xmas presents are stored under the Xmas tree until they're due to be opened.

RELIGION AND CHURCH

Even though around 80% of them are enrolled in the State Church, Icelanders have never been known to be particularly enthusiastic churchgoers or observers of religious customs. Indeed, Christmas isn't a particularly religious holiday in Iceland. However, many folks like to attend Church services and concerts during the holidays, particularly on the 24th and the 31st. Check with your tourist information centre for complete church listings.

The ringing of the church bells of Reykjavík's Lutheran Cathedral is broadcast on all major television and radio stations throughout the country promptly at 18:00 on Christmas Eve, at which point everyone wishes each other a Merry Christmas and sits down to eat.

RETURNING GIFTS

See also: *Commerce*

Exchanging one's Xmas gifts in lieu of something more desirable is a common practice in Iceland. Most stores will accept returns until the second week of January, although policies differ.



RJÚPUR

(ryooe-purr)

See also: *Jólamatur*

Wild fowl rjúpur, or ptarmigan, are a popular main course for many families Christmas meals. The small birds can be delicious if handled properly, and have a rich, gamey sort of taste. The Grapevine recommends trying some if you have the chance.

SANTA CLAUS

See also: *Jólasveinar*

We have no need for your international big, fat, jolly, capitalist greed-mongering Coca Cola Santa Claus in Iceland, as we have thirteen of our own that are much cooler. He still makes an appearance from time to time. Oh we like him fine enough, he's a jolly good fellow and all.

VACATIONS

Icelanders usually take pretty hefty Xmas vacations, with December 24, 25 and 26 all being legal holidays, as well as December 31st and January 1st. A lot of folks actually take Dec 23-Jan 2 off entirely—so don't expect a lot to get done during the Xmas season.

ÞORLÁKSMESSA

(thoe-rlouwks-mess-a)

See also: *Kæst skata, commerce*

In celebration of one of only two Icelandic saints, St. Þorlákur, Icelanders eat fermented skate, which preferably is swallowed with copious amounts of Icelandic Brennivín schnapps. Then, they will traditionally gather on the shopping street Laugavegur to do some last minute shopping (although some do the bulk of their shopping on that day), drink Christmas beer or hot chocolate and have a merry ol' time. Also, this is traditionally the day that children are allowed to decorate the Christmas tree.

ÞRETTÁNDINN

(thu-rhett-ouwn-din-n)

January 6 is Þrettándinn ("the thirteenth"), the thirteenth and final day of Christmas according to Icelandic tradition. The event is celebrated with torch processions, bonfires, fireworks, and the king and queen of the hidden people traditionally join the festivities. Back in olden times, it was a scary time to be out and about, as the hidden people can be surprisingly sinister. ☹

JÓLASVEINAR

(yo!-la-svain-er)

See also: *Christmas stockings, Santa Claus*

The Icelandic Jólasveinar (Yule Lads) have little to do with the international Santa Claus. They are descended from trolls, and were originally bogeymen used to scare children. During this century they have mellowed, and sometimes don red suits. Their number varied in old times from one region of Iceland to another. The number thirteen is first seen in a poem about Grýla (the Lads' mother) in the 18th century, and their names were published by Jón Árnason in his folklore collection in 1862. About 60 different names of Yuletide Lads are known. They visit the National Museum on each of the 13 days before Christmas.

On December 12 the Yuletide Lads begin to come to town. The first is **Stekkjastaur** (Sheepfold Stick), who would try to drink the milk from the farmers' ewes.

On December 13 **Giljagaur** (Gully Oaf) arrives. Before the days of milking machines, he would sneak into the cowshed and skim the froth off the pails of milk.

The Lad who arrives on December 14 is **Stúfur** (Shorty) who, as his name implies, is on the small side. He was also known as **Þönnuskefill** (pan-scraper), as he scraped scraps of food off the pans.



On December 15, **Þvörusleikir** (Spoon-licker) comes down from the mountains. He would steal the wooden spoon that had been used for stirring. When he visits the National Museum, he goes looking for wooden spoons.

On December 16, **Pottasleikir** (Pot-licker) comes visiting. He tried to snatch pots that had not been washed, and lick the scraps from them.

Askasleikir (Bowl-licker) arrives on December 17. He hid under beds and if someone put his wooden food-bowl in the floor, he grabbed it and licked it clean.

Hurðaskellir (Door-slammer) comes on December 18. He is an awfully noisy fellow, who is always slamming doors and keeping people awake.

The Lad who is expected on December 19 is called **Skyrgámur** (Curd Glutton), because he loves skyr (milk curd) so much that he sneaks into the pantry and gobbles up all the skyr from the tub there.



Bjúgnakrækir (Sausage Pilferer) comes on December 20. He loves sausages of all kinds, and steals them whenever he can.

On December 21, **Gluggagægir** (Peepster) arrives. He is not as greedy as some of his brothers, but awfully nosy, peeping through windows and even stealing toys he likes the look of.

On December 22 **Gáttaþefur** (Sniffer) comes calling. He has a big nose, and he loves the smell of cakes being baked for Christmas. He often tries to snatch a cake or two for himself. December 22 was sometimes called **hlakkandi** (looking forward), because the children had started looking forward to Christmas.

On 23 December, St. Þorlákur's Day, **Ketkrókur** (Meat Hook) arrives. He adores all meat. In olden days he would lower a hook down the kitchen chimney and pull up a leg of lamb hanging from a rafter, or a bit of smoked lamb from a pan, as smoked lamb was traditionally cooked on St. Þorlákur's Day.

Kertasnikir (Candle Beggar) comes on Christmas Eve, December 24. In olden times, candlelight was the brightest light available. Candles were so rare and precious that it was a treat for children to be given a candle at Christmas. And poor Candle Beggar wanted one too.

During the thirteen days before Christmas, the National Museum presents actors dressed as the old-school Jólasveinar. They show up around 11 AM each day. National Museum, Suðurgata 41, 101 Reykjavík. Tel. 530 2200. ☺ (By Paul F Nikolov. Originally appeared in issue 16/2005. Santa Claus drawings are also from the same issue)

Xmas | Opening Hours

Holiday Opening Hours

Your Grapevine Guide

Compiled by Michael Zelenko and Louise Petersson

Since there is a small chance that some of you reading this are tourists stranded in Iceland over the Holidays, and since pretty much all of Iceland shuts down during said Holidays, we decided to compile a little list for you, detailing what's actually open during the season, and when. We tried to make it as comprehensive as we could, but of course we might have missed something. We are not perfect robots after all.

A good rule of thumb to go by when planning any of your Holiday activities is you're your research. Go by the assumption that any place of service or commerce is closed, then call up the ones you're interested in checking out to make sure – this will help you avoid disappointment.

The Official Tourist Information Centre should have the most up-to-date information out there, so be sure to pay them a visit.

Buses

Call 354.540.2700

Reykjavík Excursions:

24: Tours operating:
Golden Circle Tour and Blue Lagoon Tour
Other days are operated according to program and schedule.

Iceland Excursions:

24: Tours operating:
Golden Circle Classic, Greater Area Reykjavík Sightseeing, The Blue Lagoon and Keflavík airport and The Blue Lagoon.
25: Tours operating:
Gullfoss & Geysir Express, The Blue Lagoon and Northern Lights Mystery.
31: All tours operating except: Blue Lagoon/Viking Horse at 14:00, Blue Lagoon at 16:15 and 16:30 and Northern Lights at 20:00. There is a special New Years Eve tour entitled Bonfire and Fireworks at 20:00. Other days are operated according to program and schedule.

The Official Tourist Information Centre (The Centre)

23: 9-18
24: 9-12
25: Closed
26: 10-14
31: 10-14
1: 9-18

The Blue Lagoon

23: 10-17
24: 10-13 (restaurant closed)
25: 10-15 (restaurant closed)
26: 10-20
31: 10-16
1: 10-20

Pools

Árbæjarlaug:

24: 8-12:30
25: Closed
26: 12-18
31: 8-12
1: Closed

Breiðholtslaug:

24: 6:30-12:30
25: Closed
26: Closed
31: 06:30-12:30
1: Closed

Grafarvogslaug:

24: 06:30-13
25: Closed
26: Closed
31: 06:30-13
1: Closed

Laugardalslaug:

TBA in December

Sundhöll Reykjavíkur:

24: 06:30-12:30
25: Closed
26: 10-18

31: 06:30-12:30
1: Closed

Vesturbæjarlaug:

23: 06:30-18:00
24: 8-12:30
25: Closed
26: Closed
31: 8-12:30
1: Closed

Museums /Galleries

The Culture House

24: Exhibitions and shop are open from 11 to 15. The café is closed.
25: Closed.
26 to 30: Exhibitions and shop are open from 11 to 17. The café is closed.
31: Exhibitions and shop are open from 11 to 15. The café is closed.
1: Exhibitions and shop are open from 11 to 15. The café is closed.

The Reykjavík Art Museum: Hafnarhúsið, Kjarvalsstaðir and Ásmundarsafn

24, 25, 31, 1: Closed

Gerðuberg Cultural Center
23: 13-16
24, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31, 1: Closed

Kling & Bang

24, 25, 26, 31, 1: Closed

Gallery Ágúst

24, 31: Closed

Stores:

Lyf & Heilsa Drugstore, Egilsgata 3, 101 Reykjavík

24: 9-12
25, 26, 27: Closed
31: 9-12
1, 2, 3: Closed

Lyf & Heilsa Drugstore, Hringbraut 121, 107 Reykjavík

24: 10-12
25, 26: Closed
31: 10-12
1: Closed

Kringlan Shopping Mall:

23: 10-23
24: 10-13
25, 26: Closed
31: 10-13
1: Closed

10-11 grocery stores: ALWAYS OPEN! - select locations.

Bars that got back to us

Prikið:
24: Closed
25: Open until midnight.

The English Pub:

24: 12-02:00
25: 12-06:00
26: 12-06:00

31: 12-06:00
1: 12-05:00

Cafe Paris:

24: 9-14.00
25: Closed
26-30: 9-01:00
31: 9-18:00
1: 12-01:00

Restaurants Frequently Open During the Holidays

Babalú

Open until 21:00
Christmas Day and Eve. Closed after 18:00 New Year's Eve.

Bistró Vox-Hotel Nordica

Open every day.

Café Paris

Open until 20:00, New Year's Eve.

Fiskfélagið/The Fish Company

31, 1: Open as usual

Geysir Bistro Bar

24, 25: Closed
26: 12-22:30
31: Closed
1: 17-22:30

Grillhúsið

24, 25: Closed
26: Opens at 14
31: Closed
1: Opens at 16

Fjalakötturinn-Hotel Reykjavík Centrum

Open for Dinner
Christmas day and eve with reservations.

Icelandic Fish & Chips:

Open New Year's Eve and Day.

Íslenski Barinn

24: 11:30-16:00
25: Closed
26: 15:00-03:00
31: New Years Eve Menu from 18:00
1: 15:00-03:00

Kaffi Sólon

Open New Year's eve and day.

Tabasco's

Open 24th, 25th and 26th.

Lounge 1919

Open 24th, 25th and 26th of December. Open New Year's eve until 21:00 and New Year's day.

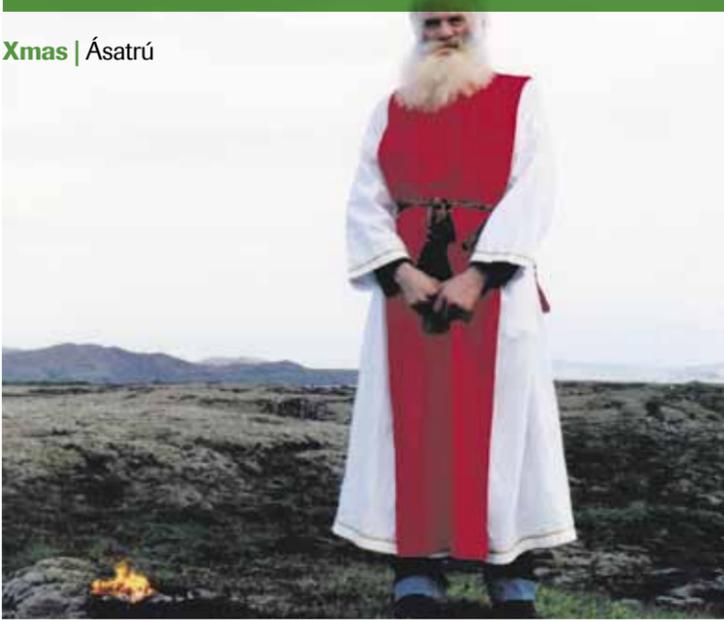
Restaurant & Bar Hotel 101

Open New Year's Eve and Day.

Tapas Bar

Closed 24-26 December
Closed 1 January
Open all other days (Including December 31)

Xmas | Ásatrú



The Original Christmas

The heathens were first!

Most of the Western world is about to celebrate a festival that's usually referred to as Christmas (or "jól" in Icelandic). "Christmas" was originally known as the winter solstice festival. It always been an important heathen celebration and is indeed much older than Christianity. In Iceland, heathendom is still very much alive. Case in point: the Ásatrú Association was granted recognition as a registered religious organization in 1973 and currently has 1.382 members (and counting).

Ásatrú is a heathen religion that has been practiced in Iceland since its settlement and throughout its periods of Christianisation and Christendom. The purpose of the Ásatrú Association today is to keep alive the old traditions and beliefs of the Nordic folklore. The priests, or goðar, conduct name-giving ceremonies, weddings and funerals and the most important ritual, the communal blót. "During a blót we gather around a fire and call for the gods and wights ["vættir" – supernatural beings] to join us. We call to the north, south, east and west. A horn filled with any kind of drink goes around the circle and you lift the horn and hail to what ever is in your heart." Alda Vala Ásdísardóttir from the Ásatrú Association tells me as I pay her a visit.

Followers of Ásatrú believe in spirits, gods and other beings from the Nordic pantheism. "Believing in your own might and power is also accepted," she says. The Eddas, the poems and tales of Norse Mythology written down in Iceland during the 13th century, are used as a source of wisdom. The poem Hávamál is used as a moral guide and the poem Völuspá tells of the creation of the Earth. An important part of ásatrú is being in contact with earth and nature according to Alda Vala. "We are a part of nature and nature is a part of us. We interact. Many religions don't have that point of view; in other religions the higher power only comes from above. In heathendom, we work together with nature."

THE HEATHENS WERE FIRST!

"The winter solstice festival is the original Christmas," says Alda Vala. The heathen festival was celebrated because the days were getting brighter. It was later absorbed into and equated with the Christian festival of Christmas. During Christianisation, church leaders hoped to replace the heathen customs with Christian traditions by making the winter solstice festival coincide with the Christian celebrations held at the time. The effort was never completely successful, however, and eventually many winter solstice customs were simply incorporated into Christmas observances.

In ásatrú, jól is recognized as lasting for 12 days. It begins on the date of the winter solstice, which usually takes place around December 21 to 22. At the time of the solstice the members of the Ásatrú Association get together and have a blót. Afterwards they share a meal that is preceded by welcoming the sun back. "The children have a vital part of the ceremony. They are given candles to spiral more light."

Alda Vala explains that even the modern Christmas tree is derived from heathendom. "During jól you decorated the tree of life. Decorating, or making offerings to a tree during this time was a prayer for fruitful times ahead."

The ásatrú flock celebrate Christmas just like anyone else after the winter solstice ceremony has taken place. They gather with friends and family and exchange gifts. "All the days around jól have always been a big festival for heathens. It is the darkest time of year, so why not fest when you need it the most? ☺"

LOUISE PETERSSON

The History of Icelandic Rock music | Part 13



The least obnoxious Xmas music – ever

Christmas music is painful at best. Except it is actually Christmas—plus/minus a week. Hearing absolutely horrible songs like the Icelandic version of Wizard's I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday sung by heavy metal Eurovision contest dude Eiríkur Hauksson—say, in a crowded mall with red eyed people looking for gifts, gifts, gifts all around you—is pure hell. It makes you want to take out all the fuckers in the mall with a machine gun.

OK, I'm slightly exaggerating, but you get my drift. That said, this is the least obnoxious Xmas music—ever: Alli Rúts – Kátir voru krakkar – 4 barnalög (Kids were merry - 4 children's songs), a 7" EP from 1972. For starters this masterpiece only has four songs.

The record cover sets the tone. It shows Alli in crude Santa costume with two girls in early seventies surroundings. Alli's vocal stylings are weird and sound similar, I think, to the Finnish legend M.A. Numminen: shrill and rough, like the sounds you might expect coming from a strange recluse at a remote farm. Or an old insane witch. The backing music was recorded by few steady musicians in a session at the old radio building. The session took one day and Alli later said of it: "We were all going nearly insane!"

The four tracks are the jolly Grýlugæla, Ég er jólasveinn ("I'm a Santa Claus"), and a sung version of the Hot Butter's 1972 instrumental hit Popcorn—"Grýlupopp". Alli's lyrics revolve around the mystical figure of Grýla, the Icelandic Yuletide lads' mom who, according to Icelandic legend, eats naughty kids after

boiling them in her cauldron. In Alli's version she eats popcorn though.

The EP starts with Alli's version of the Pippi Longstockings theme song. This caused some controversy, as the main record mogul in 1972, Svavar Gestas with his SG label, had gotten children's star Hanna Valdís to sing the same song for an imminent EP (with different lyrics). With help from the Swedish rights company SG got Alli's version banned from the radio.

Alli Rúts (Albert Rútsson) had a long history in the entertainment biz when he did this EP, his sole vinyl output. Son of a famous accordion player, Alli was young when he started to entertain with comedy, mimicry and singing. His idol was Ómar Ragnarsson and Alli took his admiration way too far on few occasions by simply copying routines from Ómar's program. Like Ómar (spoiler alert), Alli worked as Santa during Christmas, often doing up to 12 gigs a day. It's been a long time since Alli entertained but he kept his name afloat by opening up a car dealership: Alli Rúts' Car Dealership.

I don't know about you: But nothing rings in Christmas for me like hearing Alli's EP. ☺ - DR. GUNNI

By Dr. Gunni, based on his 2000 book Eru ekki allir í stuði? (Rock in Iceland). A revised update of the book is forthcoming in 2010.

Four other non-obnoxious Xmas records:



HAUKUR MORTHENS – HÁTIÐ Í BÆ
A solid Xmas and children's songs LP from 1964 by Haukur Morthens, the gentle crooner all rightful Icelanders admire.



ÓMAR RAGNARSSON – THE GÁTTAÐEFUR TRILOGY
Three LPs done in 1966, 1968 and 1971. Genius Ómar Ragnarsson stars as one of the Icelandic Santas, Gáttaþefur ("Doorway Smelly"), having jolly Xmas fun with a group of singing kids.



SVANHILDUR JAKOBSDÓTTIR – JÓLIN JÓLIN
A very well made Xmas LP from 1972. Nothing brings in Xmas like Svanhildur's clear and merry voice. She sings Xmas standards as well as songs specially whittled into the Xmas song tradition for this occasion.



KK & ELLEN – JÓLIN ERU AÐ KOMA
Lovely siblings KK and Ellen Kristjánsdóttir sing Xmas standards like they really mean it. Came out in 2005 but sounds about thirty years older. Which is good when it comes to Christmas songs. Nothing ruins the Xmas spirit faster than modern technology.

Are you interested in something spectacular? If so – book a New Years evening at Idno



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with mustard sauce
and potatoes au gratin
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www.idno.is
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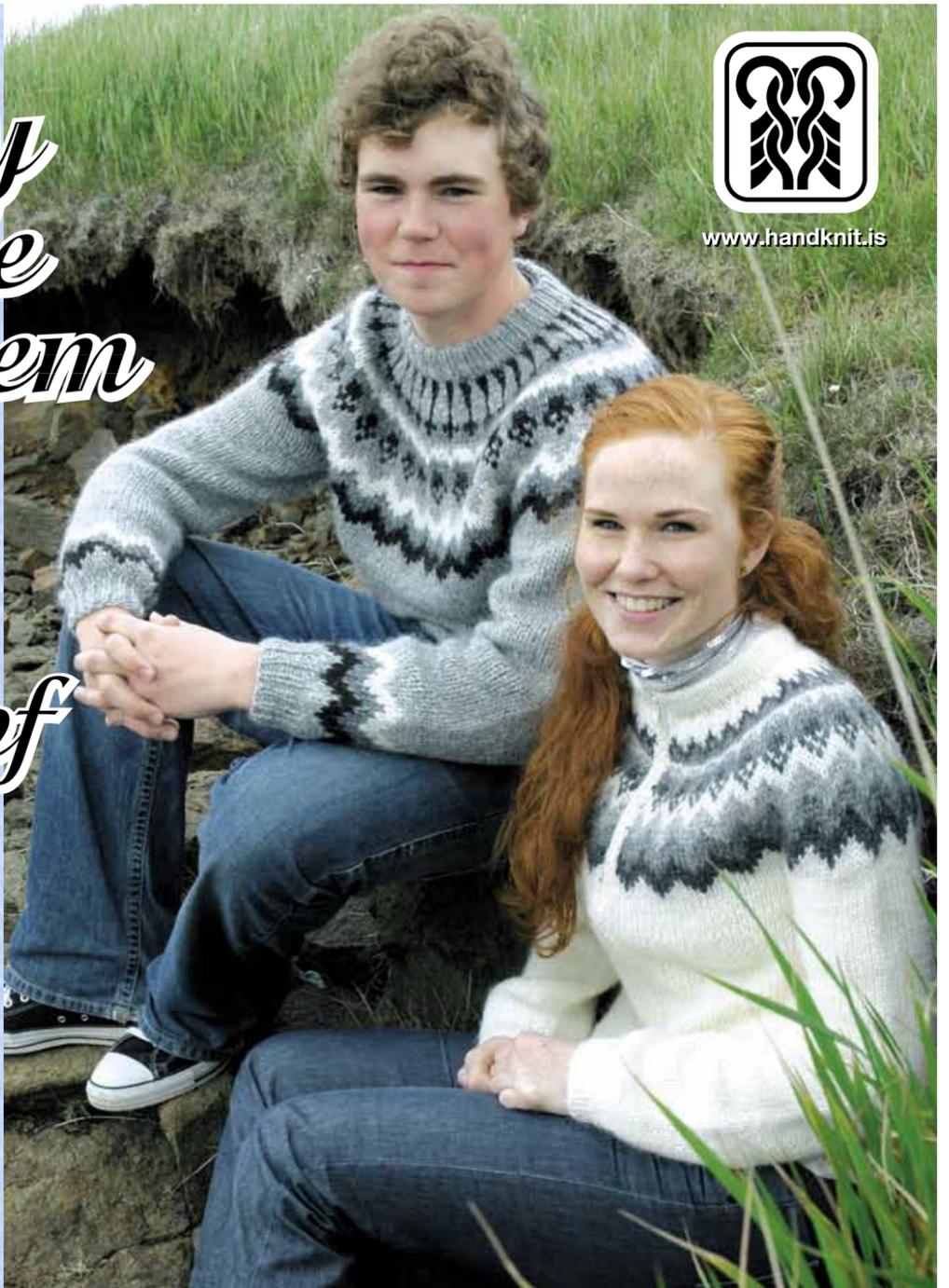
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www.handknit.is



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 SPECIAL HOTELS
OF THE WORLD



Xmas | Shopping

Merry Taxmas

Protecting The Monopolies



The lights went up this week in Reykjavík. This holiday season is nigh... and the darkness is here. For the next three months green energy will illuminate tired trees, sea-bitten windows and what is left of our optimism. Being my fourth Christmas here, these lights now symbolise something else entirely. They are the silent warning that the biggest annual greed swindle is about to kick off. It's taxing time.

These lights cast an acidic glow onto a group of counteractive regulations at the offices of Tollstjóri, the Directorate of Customs. Among other things, they collect your VAT, taxes on property, national and municipal income, and automobiles and roads.

In the "among other things" bracket is the perplexing tax on posted gifts and personal items, product samples, and the tax on shipping costs. And let's not forget the charge for customs to open our parcels to see what's inside. Or the extra 10% VAT that is charged on top of those charges.

Example: Let's say you order an umbrella online from France because you can't get the one you want here. The umbrella costs 20€, and shipping is 8€. So that's a cost of 28€.

Now add import tax. Today 28€ is 5,153.43 ISK. Multiply this by 24.5% and you get 6416.02 ISK. Add another 10% VAT and you have 7057.62. Grand total so far: 38.35 €. That's right. Almost double the cost of the umbrella. And finally, for the privilege of receiving this parcel and bill, you will be charged by Iceland Post an additional 450 ISK. If you are importing things you intend to sell, no matter how small the quantities, there are further mind-boggling regulations and charges that I won't go into here.

Now let's suppose the doe-eyed customs agent handling your package fails to locate the invoice clearly displayed on the outside of the box. Your parcel will arrive a minimum three days later, complete with a request for proof of purchase or ironclad evidence that it is a gift (because even gifts are taxed if they are valued at over 2000 ISK... 10€).

Let me be clear. I have no gripe with protectionism. Local industry in a country as small as this should be protected. But here where not much is being produced, and you can't really get anything you need... why tax me on a replacement piece for my phone? Why is there high tax on items you cannot buy here? When individuals and small business owners are charged disproportionate fees to import something that is otherwise unavailable here, the only logical outcome is circumvention of the law. Which makes outlaws of the wrong people. Make no mistake about it. The import duties here are unfair and outrageous. All you are

protecting is the monopolies.

"Any information, how little as it might seem, can be valuable to the customs office in the fight against illegal import. If you have any information about smuggling please call us at (354) 552 8030 or send us an email at smygl@tollur.is"

How does "no" sound?

When I was a kid my family was involved with a charity that would hide religious articles in the lining of coats before sending them to Jews in communist Russia. Living here puts me, and you, on the other side of that curtain. The incompetent Stasi vultures that sift and pick through each and every package, delaying and damaging goods and invading people's personal and business life, and who then having the gall to charge us for it... it's a blatant infringement of human rights.

I complain every time I am charged. Frustrated and furious, I asked the Tollstjóri agents how often they received complaint calls like mine. "All the time actually. But we can't do anything about it."

Finally, I lodged a formal complaint and was put through to one Svanhvít Reith, Tollstjóri's lawyer. While sympathetic, she claimed she was powerless to act.

"It is like this in every country," she explained. Vínir, Íslendingar, landsmenn, ... it is not. No other country in the world will do this to you. Australia, for example, has 10% import duty tax, but in twenty years of living there I paid tax only once on the import of a personal item. For years I have been exporting products on a weekly basis and again, no complaints or charges in any country but Iceland.

Icelanders are being heavily taxed for something that is necessary for survival. The powers that be are kicking you when you're struggling to get back on your feet. It's unclear who is being protected with this tax on umbrellas and birthday presents. Over the course of the many arguments I have had with Tollstjóri, the majority of customs agents admit outright how destructive and absurd these "laws" are. But they still charge me anyway. Post office attendants apologise to me in embarrassment of this setup, advising me to boycott the tax by refusing to buy things from overseas, drink alcohol or buy petrol. Perhaps they are right.

So this month, when the gifts start trickling in from abroad, and you meander down to the post office to pay tax on them... go and do something else too. Go call Svanhvít. Stand in front of parliament. And bring your pots and pans. ♡

✍ SRULI RECHT

Xmas | Shopping



Santa's Best Helper

Going home from Iceland for Christmas? Visiting Iceland over the holidays and looking for presents to bring home? Worry no longer, Grapevine is here to help.

1. FOR THE MUSIC FAN

The Icelandic music scene is bubbling, and a record is always a good gift. If you are looking for something special—not to mention cheap and environmentally friendly—the recycling centre shop Góði Hirðirinn (Fellsmúli 28) sells second hand vinyl for 200–400 ISK (also try Kolaportið and Lucky Vinyl on Hverfisgata for more "select" LPs). How about Icelandic Christmas carols or nostalgic folk songs? Perhaps a bit of Vilhjámur Vilhjámsson for that special someone?

2. FOR A FRIEND—WHEN YOUR LUGGAGE IS FULL AND YOUR BANK ACCOUNT EMPTY

The Icelandic Opal candy boxes are small, cheap (209 ISK in Bonus, even cheaper at the airport) and come in Christmas colours of green and red. They are stylish enough for the fancypants young and creative, and you can pump up their street cred with stories of your adventures in the 101 bars pouring the alcoholic shot variety with hot blondes of all genders.

3. FOR THE FURRY PAL

Perhaps an insult towards Icelanders' taste buds, but the family cat back home will be in ecstasy munching down on the locals' favourite snack, harðfiskur. Several sizes, shapes and prices, available at grocery stores, flea market and on the airport on your way outta here.

4. FOR THE SINGLE FRIEND

Iceland is currently a budget destination, but there is one item that is a bargain beyond the rest: The pregnancy test. In my native Finland, doubts regarding your menstrual cycle can cost you dearly—at least 5 euro, easily up to 20. Here, the budget test is yours for 500 ISK or so (2,5 euro). You share a bit of local social-culture with this present too—accidental pregnancies are a popular pastime in the country, and the number of young mothers is particularly high. Probably works best for female friends.

5. FOR MOTHER OR GRANDMOTHER

Icelandic wool is great—and, at 300 ISK or so per ball—a bargain buy. With luck, the present may end up coming back to you in the shape of a pair of socks, mittens, hat or a scarf.

6. FOR THE ONE IN TRUE CHRISTMAS SPIRITS

Are you or one of your friends ready to turn the other cheek? Why not open an account at the brand new Arion Bank,

previously New Kaupthing, previously Kaupthing. Arion "offers you the key to business on the Iceland Stock Exchange (ICEX), as well as all major international markets." And the custody account is available to those without the Icelandic kennitala. As a bonus, the new visual identity even has a nice Christmassy star-what better to lift the holiday spirits? This present, though, may not be the kind that keeps on giving.

7. FOR THE HEALTH FREAK FAMILY MEMBER WHEN YOU WANT REVENGE

Now is your chance to have your revenge for all those mornings as a child when you had to swallow the disgusting cod liver oil. Lýsi is an Icelandic product that will have the receiver think of you every morning. It comes in various shapes and forms, and is available in most grocery stores and pharmacies. It's also pretty healthy, we hear.

8. FOR A CHILD OR SOMEONE LEARNING ICELANDIC

The Skrímli-series by Áslaug Jónsdóttir, Kalle Güettler and Rake! Heimsdal features five excellent books about the adventures and daily quarrels of the big monster and the little monster. Cool visuals, good lessons and plenty of humour—suits both children and those that wish to but don't yet speak the glorious language of Iceland. ♡

✍ SARI PELTONEN

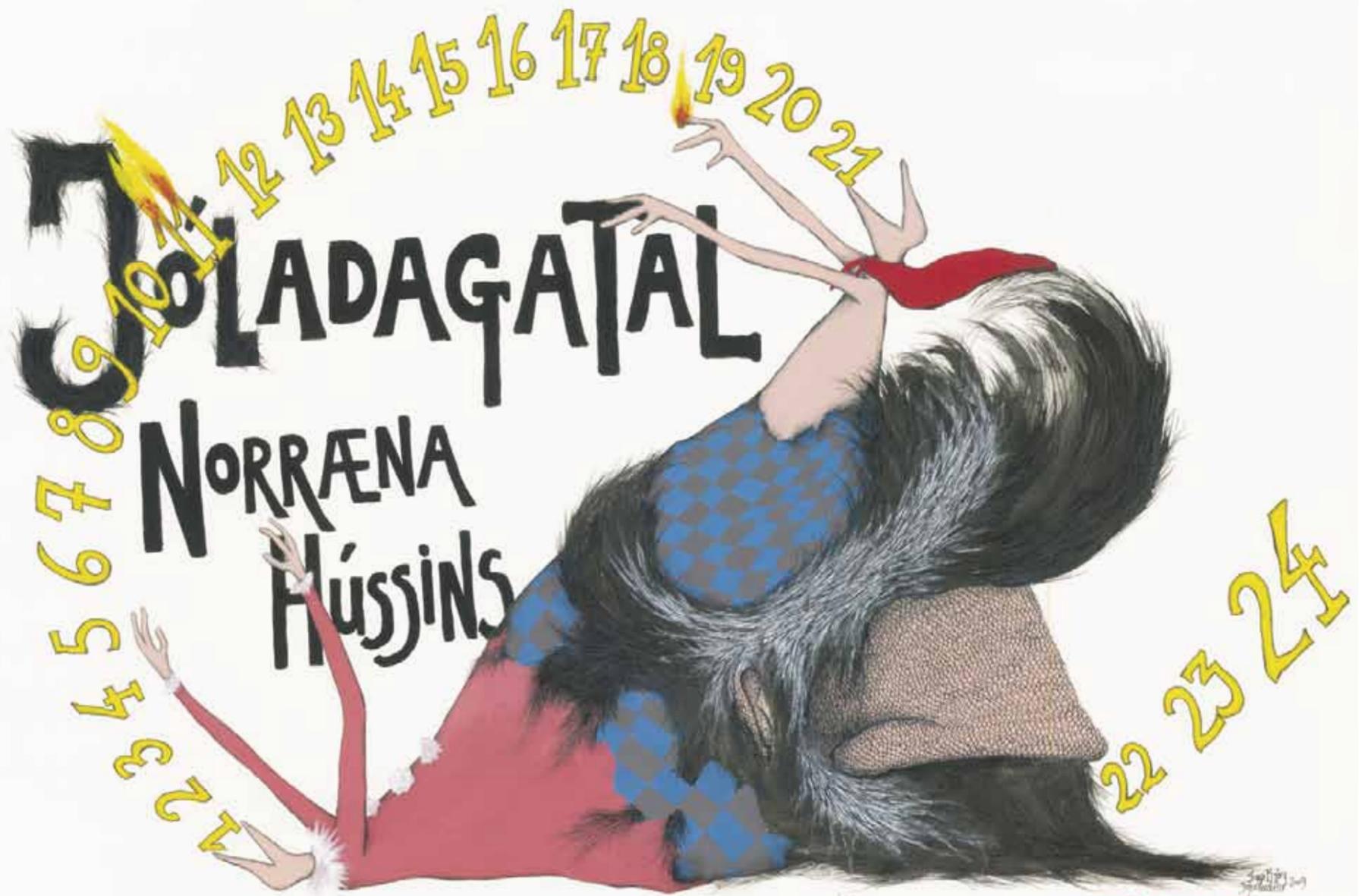
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Xmas | Knitting



Knitting for Christmas

The Horror! The Horror!

December is pretty much universally recognised as the most difficult month of the year, what with the cold, the dark and the inescapable, mind-numbing ever-present Christmas music. However, what few realise is that this bleak month is especially harrowing for those who knit.

The process of knitterly Christmastime misery usually begins in early November, when the knitter realises that friends and family members have begun their annual mumbling about how cold their various body parts are. The knitter feels uniquely equipped to remedy this sorry state of affairs and so self-imposes a mission to whip up a hand-knit extravaganza of warmth-producing garments by Christmas.

However, instead of at this point getting to work on the present-making, thereby taking the only course of action that will allow them to avoid a massive boulder of failure and general bad feeling being deposited upon their souls on December 24, most knitters choose to take a look at the calendar and exclaim: "Christmas is seven weeks away! That's a long time, and then some. Have you seen how fast I knit? I'll have twelve presents knit up in one weekend easy! Now, back to those seven intricate projects all intended for myself."

The fallacy of this mindset tends to become clear to the knitter in the first week of December, when the cold-related mumbling of loved ones has reached a certain momentum and the seven intricate projects intended for the knitter's own personal consumption have each progressed by about a centimetre. Suddenly the pressure

to knit gifts becomes almost tangible, as if the atmosphere has turned into an all-enveloping knit-slowing jelly.

The knitter quickly and desperately abandons grandiose plans of sweaters for all and moves on to the more manageable field of knitted accessories. This is an especially painful transition for Icelandic knitters, since nowhere in the world is the sweater as prized an object, to the detriment of all other knitwear, as on this cold rock. But all knitters, even Icelandic ones, must bow to the following logic that resounds in the brains of knitters everywhere when Christmas is a mere three weeks away: "A hat knits up in no time at all, especially if I use bulky yarn. And I am a speedy knitter; I've just been kind of lazy lately. If I sit down and put my mind to it I'll churn out twelve bulky hats in one weekend, no problem. Now, back to that sweater I want to wear to all the Christmas parties. Wooo!" Clearly, this poor procrastinating soul is doomed.

Fittingly, the next step in the Christmas-knitting process is nearly apocalyptic: darkness of the soul descends as the knitter unravels and loses it completely, sweatily tossing and turning during sleepless nights spent worrying about the disappointment about to be inflicted on loved ones. This stage is reached about a week before that sacred holiday itself, as the knitter gazes upon the sad pile of four bulky hats completed (or just about, if we disregard the need for the weaving in of ends and blocking) and realises with horror that not only will most friends and family get

store-bought hats for Christmas, they will also have to endure the humiliation of witnessing a chosen few receiving handknit treasures. The mere thought of this unfair scenario causes the knitter to experience vivid hallucinations of crying relatives, angry friends and, worst of all, bragging knitters claiming to have finished all of their gifts on time.

Witnessing the knitter's dissolution of resolve and sanity can in many cases be great fun for his or her loved ones. In fact, deranged knitterly antics and their intrinsic entertainment value may very well be a better Christmas present than any hat could ever be. However, be aware that most knitters would disagree with this statement.

When Christmas itself rolls around, some knitters will still be keeping to a punishing schedule, pushing themselves to finish as many handknits as humanly possible. Other knitters will have taken the less crazy route of resigning themselves to their fate as failed craftsmen and have taken their humiliation to its logical extreme by purchasing presents made of fleece at the mall. But it matters not one jot which of these paths the knitter chooses, for both types will encounter the same inevitable truth once the presents have been opened: most handknit gifts are received with only lukewarm admiration and, following the obligatory wearing of the item at one social event, are forever relegated to the murkiest depths of the deepest closet. For this very reason the smartest and most seasoned knitters choose to knit items mostly intended for their own enjoyment and disregard

gift knitting almost completely.

When Christmas is over and done with, knitters, as well as others, can relax a little. The thought that keeps them going is that no matter how little the gifted handknits may have been appreciated, at least it is a full twelve months until the next full-on session of dread and disillusionment. The more neurotic knitters may well expend energy in January and February seething over the infrequent appearances of handknits on the limbs of loved ones, but as spring and summer bring new and fascinating patterns and yarns, the pain of misunderstood artistry is slowly but surely minimised and forgotten.

The following November, the world again seems new and full of promise, and that beautiful, fully-patterned sweater would look so good on Mom.

Such is the natural cycle of life among knitters, and while it is easy enough to recognise, it is harder to avoid. It is unavoidable, much like the process of ageing, and is therefore best accepted and embraced to avoid unnecessary anguish. For those knitters currently in the grips of Christmas-knitting madness, mired in the cautious optimism of the second stage, believing that they can still pull off accessories for all: considers yourselves fairly warned! But since reason cannot reach you now, here is a pattern for quickly-executed ladies mittens that look more time-consuming than they are. Merry Christmas! ☺

✍ VIGDÍS ÞORMÓÐSDÓTTIR

FRASIER MITTENS

NEEDLES:

Set of 5 5mm double pointed needles

MATERIALS:

Two contrasting colours of unspun Icelandic wool (Plötulopi), held double, approximately 50 g. of each. Colours are referred to as MC (main colour) and CC (contrast colour).

NOTE:

If you do not understand knitting instructions such as k 2tog or ssk, please look them up on the internet. Or ask someone what they mean. Work it out.

Instructions (same for both mittens): Cast on 32 sts with MC. Divide stitches evenly between four needles, taking care not to twist the work. Knit in the round four rounds in garters stitch, creating two ridges. Now begin 1x1 ribbing, adding CC: knit one with CC, purl one with MC, repeat around. Work rib for approx. 4.5 cm, then knit one round with CC only, increasing 8 stitches evenly around. 40 stitches. Now begin colour pattern: First round: knit 3 with CC, knit 1 with MC, repeat around. Second round: knit 1 with MC, *knit1 with CC, knit 3 with MC, repeat from * around, end knit 2 with MC. Third round: knit around with MC. Fourth round: same as second round. Fifth round: same as first round. Sixth round: knit around with CC. Repeat these six rounds to make pattern. Place thumb when hand is approx. 6 cm long. Note: It is easiest to place thumb in either rounds three or six, as these are solid coloured rounds. Place thumb so: Right mitten: knit first 8 stitches of round on to scrap yarn, slide the stitches back on to left needle and knit again, following pattern. Left mitten: as for right mitten, only knit stitches 9-16 of round on to scrap yarn. Knit colour pattern until hand of mitten is approx. 14.5 cm long, or as needed. Begin decreasing for top of mitten (still following six round colour pattern): Round 1: Needle 1: knit 2tog, knit to end of needle. Needle 2: knit to last 2 stitches, ssk. Needle 3: knit 2tog, knit to end of needle. Needle 4: knit to last 2 stitches, ssk. Round 2: knit all stitches. Repeat these 2 rounds until 8 stitches remain. Break yarn, thread through stitches and pull tight. Note: To create a solid-coloured border for the top of the mitten, use the same colour every time for the decrease stitches, on both the decrease rounds and the knit rounds. Thumb: Same for both mittens. Unravel scrap yarn, pick up 18 stitches (scrap yarn stitches + 2 sts to avoid holes at the sides of thumb) around the hole with either MC or CC as your taste dictates, divide stitches between 4 needles, knit 1 round decreasing 2 stitches evenly. 16 stitches. Knit until thumb is approx. 5.5 cm long, or as needed. Decrease for top of thumb: Needle 1: knit 2tog, knit to end. Needle 2: knit to last 2 stitches, ssk. Needle 3: knit 2 tog, knit to end. Needle 4: knit to last 2 stitches, ssk. Repeat decrease round, with no plain knit round in between, until 8 stitches remain. Break yarn and pull through remaining loops. Finishing: Weave in ends and block mittens. ☺

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