



**HRÍFUNES**

NATURE PARK

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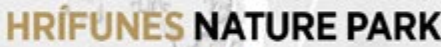




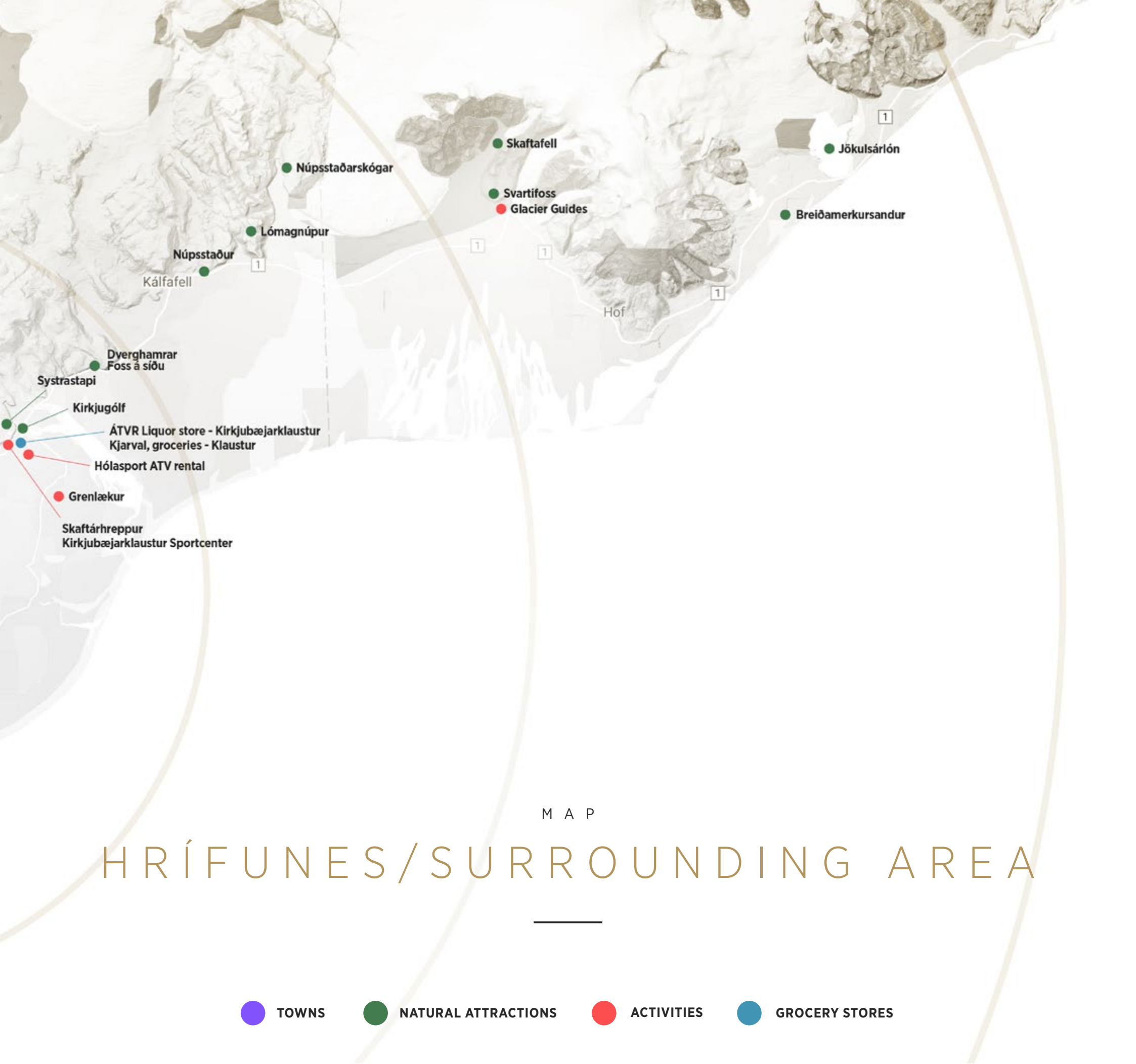
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# HRÍFUNES NATURE PARK

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## INTRODUCTION

Hrífunes Nature Park is an attractive new leisure resort in southern Iceland, half-way between the villages of Vík í Mýrdal and Kirkjubæjarklaustur. The south of Iceland is famed for the range of contrasts found there: ice, active volcanoes, woods, sandy beaches, lava fields, thriving villages, dramatic history and a peaceful atmosphere. The park lies in Skaftártunga, a lush and attractive area with views of two of the country's most imposing glaciers: Mýrdalsjökull to the west and the great Vatnajökull further away to the north-east. This is the largest ice-cap in Iceland and among the most impressive on the planet outside the polar regions.

The land around Hrífunes Nature Park is ideal for recreation, with many rewarding hiking trails leading to popular destinations such as Landmannalaugar, Fjallabak, Eldgjá and Langisjór. The last two of these lie within a day's hike from the park. Close by are the Meðalandsfjara beach, the woods of Núpsstaðarskógar and the magnificent Fjaðrárgljúfur gorge, while services and other attractions can be found in the nearby villages of Kirkjubæjarklaustur and Vík í Mýrdal.

Special attractions and experiences greet the hiker on trails through the countryside. Showering under a waterfall, examining artificial craters both inside and out, walking on a beach with the mighty Atlantic at your feet and angling for freshwater fish in the clear streams that bubble out from under the lava – there is something for all age groups in the vicinity of Hrífunes Nature Park, with walking paths which meet all levels of ability.

The area was formed by valley glaciers in the last Ice Age and the evidence of this can be seen in the valleys and ridges in the landscape; the resultant soil and sheltered patches have been colonised by Icelandic birch which thrives here. The streams in the valleys lend the woodlands a particularly attractive charm in mild weather. Blueberries and crowberries can be found in the heather in the autumn months; berry-picking is an exciting holiday activity for children and add a special something to a stay at Hrífunes.

As the area is far from large towns with their light pollution, winter offers a good chance to enjoy the stars (with or without a telescope) and, occasionally, the Northern Lights. These can be especially impressive when the land is under snow and they perform their dance above the glaciers. Many of Iceland's birds nest in the area, and occasionally the visitor will come across wild foxes.



## APPROACH

The vistas seem endless, yet it is only a short drive from National Route No. 1 to the properties in Hrífunes Nature Park.





## VALLEYS

Deep, green valleys with streams and flowers are a feature of the location.





## LUSH VEGETATION

Birch scrub, wild flowers and angelica are prominent in the vegetation of the Hrífunes Nature Park. The sound of purling streams and the scent of fresh growth follow the visitor on walks in the park.









# THE PROPERTIES

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A guiding principle in the design of the properties in the park was to integrate the experience of the natural environment with modern comfort. The properties were planned and laid out to ensure that each occupant can enjoy the views, wildlife and vegetation that the region offers. Materials used in building the properties were chosen for their quality and to ensure that they harmonise with the landscape, and large south-facing windows make for a maximum of natural lighting indoors. The siting of the park was carefully considered so as to command interesting views over the hills, valleys and streams in the park which is 2200 hectares in total.

Each property stands on a one-hectare lot, but owners will enjoy far more space: a further 150 hectares are for common use. The lots will not be fenced off, as the aim is that habitation should have a minimum impact on the environment. All property lots will be served by all-year roads; electricity, water and telephone connections have been laid to the lot boundaries. Properties with areas of up to 230 m<sup>2</sup> may be built on the lots.

Each property is equipped with all the main modern conveniences: Wi-Fi, a hot tub, sauna, two showers, a large verandah and quality household appliances. They are designed as a place for the family to spend time at all seasons of the year and enjoy relaxing in a mild climate. Furnishings are modern but tasteful: warm, colourful and attractive. From the verandah, where people spend much of their time in the summer, barbecuing and eating, there is a magnificent view of the Atlantic Ocean in the distance. An ideal way of ending the day is to enjoy the silence in the comfort of the hot tub.





## VAST LANDSCAPES

A broad view across the park, with the Atlantic in the distance. The properties are designed to harmonise with the landscape and are themed in natural Icelandic colours. French windows make for maximum views and natural lighting indoors.





## LIVING ROOM

Modern and cosy design characterizes the living room. This spacious room will accommodate large numbers of visitors and with its high ceilings it is the ideal place for meals, games, entertainment and relaxation.









## KITCHEN

Well-organized functional design in the kitchen makes it fun to cook and bake for the family. Quality appliances and spacious cupboards make for maximum pleasure and efficiency.







## BEDROOMS

The comfortable bedrooms are fitted with large, bright windows; in the summer, you can enjoy views of the landscape tinged by the setting sun. The rooms are headed by electricity, and are fitted with roomy cupboards and wardrobes.



## BATHROOMS

The bathrooms are tastefully finished with large tiles. Behind the bathroom mirror is a cupboard for small items; underneath the wash-basin there is room for storing towels, and the shower is fitted with a thermostatic control to ensure comfortable water temperature all year round.





**DRY-STEAM SAUNA**

Quality Harvia dry-steam saunas are installed in the properties. Harvia has 60 years of experience manufacturing sauna equipment. The sauna cubicles can easily take 5-7 people and provide an ideal way of warming up before getting into the hot tub. Saunas have a positive health value and can help to reduce inflammation, stimulate circulation, relax stiff joints and relieve pain.





## HOT TUBS

Each property has its own wood-fired hot tub. To crown a perfect day, climb into the tub, forget your cares, enjoy the warmth and relax.





## NATURAL LIGHTING

During the day the properties are filled with natural daylight, so family breakfasts can be enjoyed without electric light. The view across towards the volcano Katla comes into its own in conditions like this. Proximity to nature has been taken into account and the design seeks to unite the external and internal space to the fullest extent.





## VERANDAH

A large verandah, partly under shelter, is ideal for barbecues or simply as a place to enjoy a meal out of doors.





## NIGHTFALL

Nights at Hrífunes are magical. In the right conditions the Milky Way and sometimes the Northern Lights dominate the sky. Then, or on moonlit nights, it is tempting to relax in the hot tub and contemplate the vastness of the universe.





# THE ROUTE TO HRÍFUNES NATURE PARK

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The way from Reykjavík to Hrífunes contains plenty of variety, with lots to see and do and many reasons to break the journey. Southern Iceland is the country's main agricultural area, which makes it easy to find fresh produce and many farmers sell directly from farm stalls. Products available in this way include veal, pork, beef, mutton and smoked trout (from Útey by the lake Laugarvatn, for example). Market gardening is practised on a considerable scale in and around Reykholt, Flúðir and Laugarás. There, and on many smaller farms in the south, it is often possible to buy tomatoes and strawberries the same day that they are picked; other products include potatoes, carrots, herbs, lettuces, swede turnips and other vegetables.

Restaurants serving locally-produced food have sprung up like mushrooms in recent years and dozens of them can now be found in Southern Iceland. One of these, Friðheimar in the Biskupstungur area, can be included in the trip to Hrífunes by making a short detour. The menu at Friðheimar is based largely on the tomatoes that are grown on site; many say its tomato soup is the best they have ever tasted, and the restaurant's reputation has spread outside Iceland. It has been featured in numerous TV programmes. The café at Efstidalur is known for its home-made ice cream, and also for coffee and meals based on produce from the nearby farms. Both places are popular for refreshment stops, not least because they are close to the 'Golden Circle' sightseeing route, and many visitors to the country cite them as special experiences during their time in Iceland.

Barley has long been grown at Þorvaldseyri, just east of the village of Hvolsvöllur. Barley flour, rapeseed oil and whole-wheat flour can be bought there. Langholtsskot, in Hrunamannahreppur, serves cuts of meat for all occasions, mince, goulash, hamburgers, marinated

beef and many other varieties. At Fagridalur, just east of Vík í Mýrdal, anglers can have their catches smoked; for those not lucky with their rods, fillets of Arctic char and salmon are on sale, smoked, marinated or fresh, in addition to wind-dried legs of mutton.

There are more than ten golf courses and nearly twenty swimming pools in southern Iceland, so it is easy to break the journey to Hrífunes with some stops for exercise along the way. Many of the swimming pools have recently been rebuilt and modernised; some also include gym facilities, such as the World Class gym attached to the pool in Selfoss. Almost all population centres in the area, both on the main road east to Hrífunes and in the interior of Árnes county, have swimming pools. The oldest pool in the country, Gamla laugin, in the village of Flúðir, harnesses water from a number of hot springs right on the edge of the pool, including a 'Little Geysir' which spouts at intervals of a few minutes. The open-air pool has been restored in its original form with the addition of a service centre with modern changing and washing facilities and a bar. A swim there – in any season – is a very special experience.

Several museums and exhibitions can be visited along the way, e.g. 'Húsið,' the historic factor's house in Eyrarbakki; the Lava Centre (an exhibit about earthquakes and volcanoes) and the Saga Centre (both in Hvolsvöllur); small sale galleries; the Skógar Museum; occasional exhibitions at Sólheimar, the Commonwealth Farm (a replica of a Saga-Age Norse farm); the visitor centre Þjórsárstofa in Árnes and, in Vík í Mýrdal, Brydebúð, a country store built in 1895, and Skaftfell-ingur, a boat built in 1918 to move people and goods along the Southern coast when inland there were neither roads nor bridges.





















LITLI - GEYSIR















# NATURAL ATTRACTIONS

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## FJAÐRÁRGLJÚFUR

North-east of Hrífunes, on the east side of the huge lava-field of Skaftáreldahraun, lies the Fjaðrárgljúfur gorge, one of the most spectacular natural attractions in the country. It has long been a popular destination, not least since the Canadian pop idol Justin Bieber recorded a music video there which has been viewed more than 380 million times.

Fjaðrárgljúfur is about two kilometres long and 30 metres deep, and is a very impressive sight. It is believed to have been formed in a catastrophic event about 9,000 years ago. It is most likely that the river Fjaðrá, which flows from the Geirlandshraun lava-field into the river Skaftá, wore its way gradually through the tuff. Fjaðrá is now a small and innocent-looking freshwater stream, but it must have changed its character considerably since then: a raging torrent, carrying quantities of sand and mud from the glacier, must have carved out the gorge. Fjaðrárgljúfur is steep-sided, with a zig-zag course and is very narrow in places. The walls display various types of tuff, volcanic ash, breccia and lumps of more compact basalt. There is much here, besides the majesty and beauty of the gorge itself, to reward the visitor: birds, plants, water and the changing effects of light and weather make this natural wonder well worth the 25 minutes it takes to reach it from Hrífunes.







## DVERGHAMRAR

Rather further than Fjaðrárgljúfur, east of the village of Kirkjubæjarklaustur, are the rock formations of Dverghamrar (‘Dwarf Cliffs’), a beautifully-formed sequence of basalt columns not far from Hrífunes. They form a horseshoe-shaped enclosure and are thought to be ancient coastal cliffs, dating from the end of the Ice Age, from which the breakers washed the loose tuff, revealing the columnar basalt below. The columns are capped by another variety of basalt. There is a fine view from the site of the farms in Síða, which is among the most picturesque farming communities in Iceland.

The formations at Dverghamrar are well marked with a sign on the main road. This includes a drawing by Erla Stefánsdóttir, an elf enthusiast, of a dwarf, measuring 20-30 cm in height, who she claims lives in the cliffs. The existence of elves and dwarves is a recurrent element in Icelandic folklore, and formations like these were commonly believed to be the homes of these invisible beings; dwarves are particularly closely associated with cliffs and rocks.

Dverghamrar are surrounded by grassy slopes. This is a pleasant place to relax, walk around and perhaps listen for sounds of singing from inside the cliffs. There is considerable variety in the columnar basalt shapes: ‘floors’ consisting of the rough polygonal column ends, regular walls and columns that lean forwards from the perpendicular. An ideal place for a picnic and perhaps a folk-tale or two.



## REYNISFJALL & FJARA

At 340 metres, the mountain Reynisfjall towers over the village of Vík í Mýrdal. It is composed of layers of tuff with basalt belts, and extends down towards the sea. In front of it, rising up out of the water, are the rock stacks of Reynisdrangar. According to a folk-tale, two trolls set out to tow a three-masted ship ashore but were turned to stone by the rays of the rising sun. There are four stacks; the highest, at 65 m, has only been climbed once.

A steep road runs up the mountain from Vík. It was made when the US Army operated a Loran station on the mountain, and is said to be the steepest stretch of road in Iceland. This may or may not be true, and all four-wheel-drive vehicles can make the ascent and come back down again. Remains of the military structures and occupancy can still be seen on the top of the mountain with various souvenirs of an age now past. Broken and disintegrating desks lie on their sides among rusting fridges, and pages from operating manuals for complex equipment blow about in the wind. It could be said that the boundary line in the Cold War ran through the mountain, as the Loran system was used by submarines to navigate in the depths of the ocean in the same way as the GPS system is used in navigation and positioning today. A walk up to the top of Reynisfjall to look at the remains and enjoy the view out over the Reynisdrangar rock stacks is a rewarding experience.

To the west of the mountain lies one of the most frequently visited sightseeing spots in the country, the beach of Reynisfjara. Here the visitor is between the open sea and a vast black-sand beach, the four rock stacks and a wall of basalt columns. For this reason, the beach, with its exposure to the elements, has a unique pull for tourists – but unfortunately the other side of the coin is that it is an extremely dangerous spot. The breakers rise in unpredictable surges and several fatal accidents have occurred in which people have lost their footing and been drowned in what seemed calm water only a few seconds before. Be careful and heed the warning signs!







## DYRHÓLAEY

Dyrhólaey is a unique tuff stack not far from Reynisfjall. The name (translating as ‘Door Hill Island’) refers to the ‘doorway’ or hole that has opened in this long, 120-metre-high neck of rock jutting into the sea. It was long the southernmost point in Iceland since glacial rivers joined it to the mainland by their alluvial deposits during the last Ice Age. Dyrhólaey was declared a protected site in 1978 in an attempt to save the puffin colony from disruption.

The island is divided into two: Háey (‘High Island’) to the west and Lágey (‘Low Island’) to the east. Except for a small stretch on the north side, it is flanked by steep cliffs. To the west lie the beaches of Dyrhólahverfi, with the rock stack Hildidrangur.

Dyrhólaey is believed to have been formed about 100,000 years ago during a warm interglacial period in the Ice Age, originating in submarine eruption. There were probably two separate eruptions, the first emerging from an eruption fissure to the east of the island; this produced only loose tephra and the sea completely eroded the resulting island. Later, another eruption began further west with a massive explosion. Gradually the island rose above the water level and kept the volcanic channel isolated from the sea. The island was probably considerably larger than it is now, and it has been eroded by wave action and glaciation.





## ELDGJÁ

Eldgjá ('Fire Chasm') lies northwest of Hrífunes Park. It is an eruption fissure, formed in a huge volcanic outbreak that occurred in the year 934. As a geological feature it is unique in the country; it is neither a traditional volcano nor an eruptive crater.

The bottom layers in the walls of the chasm are of tuff and tillite, which is the dominant rock type in the area. The lava shows features of having been produced in an eruption with massive ejections that reached a great height. This gives it a range of colours that gives the chasm a special appearance.

In all, Eldgjá extends over 30 km in length, the clearest features of the chasm being at the northern end, near Gjátindur, and in the south near Landmannaleið. At these points it is 300-600 m wide, with a depth of 100-150 m, and these are the most popular destinations for sightseers. From Gjátindur there is a good view over Eldgjá, to the mountains flanking the lake Langisjór, and to the Fjallabak and Síðumannafréttir areas, including Lakagígar. The ascent of Gjátindur is a pleasant walk. From the parking-place there is a path up to the waterfall Ófærufoss and also to the eastern edge of the Eldgjá chasm.









## LANDMANNALAUGAR

Among both domestic and foreign tourists, Landmannalaugar is now the most popular place in the interior of Iceland. It is a place of spectacular contrasts in the landscape with an unusual range of colours, and once seen it is not quickly forgotten. A number of interesting hiking paths have been staked out and several tour operators run organised visits and activities; there is also a well-appointed campsite with toilet facilities. In the course of a day, the visitor can see lava and tuff mountains, deep valleys and lava-fields, and relax in a natural hot pool in the evening.

The hot pool in Landmannalaugar is fed by geothermal springs from the edge of the Laugahraun lava-field, the water mixing with cold sources from under the lava. A small retaining wall creates an attractive pool with a pleasant temperature that can take several dozen people at once. The water is generally slightly warmer in winter than in summer; as a result, the vegetation is lush and more varied than might be expected at the altitude of 600 m. Varieties of tundra vegetation, clover and Arctic plants used in traditional medicine can be found close to the pool and elsewhere in the area.





## ÞÓRSMÖRK

Þórsmörk (‘Thor’s Forest’) is a natural wonder lying in the embrace of mountains and glaciers, north of Eyjafjallajökull and west of Mýrdalsjökull. The landscape here is of tuff that was piled up in the Ice Age, later to be planed and carved by glaciers and rivers to produce a wide variety of forms. At first sight it seems a rough and harsh landscape with thundering glacial rivers, rugged mountains, gorges, isolated cliffs and glacial moraines, but on closer acquaintanceship it reveals a surprisingly lush vegetation cover. Springs and cascades stream down the near-vertical walls of mossy gorges and cliffs; woods with rich undergrowth and grassy expanses lie in the shelter of valleys and cliff fronts. Naturally, all this makes an ideal habitat for numerous bird species in all seasons. The main reason for the lush vegetation of Þórsmörk is its natural isolation: the rivers, glaciers and precipitous mountains have prevented livestock from entering the area. In the 19th century, farmers in the Fljótshlíð area used to drive their flocks

here to graze and also cut wood from the natural forest. The result was that the vegetation was in poor shape at the beginning of the 20th century. After the eruption of Katla in 1918 it was decided to put a stop to further grazing and the site was put under the supervision of the State Forestry Service. Þórsmörk is one of the most popular recreational resorts in Iceland, visited by many people at all times of the year. It is the ideal place to ‘get away from it all’ and enjoy a totally different environment that is packed with variety. There are many marked walks and hiking trails in Þórsmörk, e.g. to Eyjafjallajökull, the ‘Laugavegur’ trail to Landmannalaugar and the route south across Fimmvörðuháls to Skógar. Shorter walks within the boundaries of Þórsmörk include those to Litlaendi, Stóraendi and Valahnúkur. Þórsmörk enjoys something of a micro-climate with warmer and drier weather than in adjacent areas, as it is protected to some extent from the visitation of rain clouds by the surrounding high mountains.



## JÖKULSÁRLÓN

This lagoon, 250 km east of Hrífunes on the main road is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Iceland. The ever-changing display of icebergs, sunshine and shadow presents a challenge to the photographer and the landscape artist; you can also take a boat trip among the ice floes on the lagoon. The lagoon has been used in several films, some of them world famous. James Bond and Angelina Jolie are probably the brightest stars to have shone on the sand and water with the ice in the background.

For those who prefer a less crowded experience of a glacial lagoon, the one on Fjallsá, near Jökulsárlón, offers much the same experience, with majestic icebergs floating on a calm lake and a view of the glacier as it descends towards the sea. Those who visit Fjallsárlón early in the day in calm weather should be able to hear the creaking of the glacier as it moves a few millimetres each day.

Services at the lagoon have been expanded recently. At present there is a café offering light refreshments while further developments are planned in the future.











## LAKAGÍGAR

Lakagígar is a gigantic chain of volcanic craters punctuating a 25 km long fissure running southwest from Vatnajökull. The fissure extends from the edge of the valley glacier Síðujökull to Úlfarsdalur. Near the middle of its range it cuts through the tuff mountain Laki, which gives the craters their collective name ('Laki Craters').

Many of the craters merge into each other, and inside some of them are still further small individual craters, so it is difficult to state a definite number for the whole series. The eruption of Lakagígar in 1783 was, for the Icelandic nation, the greatest single catastrophe that has occurred. It began early in the summer and ended only in the February of the following year. As a result of the eruption, 75% of the sheep, 50% of the horses and 40% of cattle in Iceland died. This resulted in widespread famine and death: about 10,000 people, one-fifth of the population, died over the course of two years.

Poisonous gases and an aerosol haze in the atmosphere were the main causes of these deaths and losses. The haze was caused by volcanic gases released from the craters and the lava flow. It affected the weather, blocking the heat of the sun, resulting in lower temperatures and also acid rain. Grass became contaminated by chemicals deposited by the ash-fall and the poisonous rain, and as farm animals grazed they absorbed toxins, including fluorine, that stimulated unnatural bone growth. Their teeth and bones developed at abnormal rates and the animals were soon unable to eat or walk. Many of them died either as a result of these toxins or else from starvation.

These craters, formed by an eruption that almost wiped the Icelandic nation out, remain today as a fascinating geological feature with a unique history. Now green with moss, the craters lie across an area of black sand, and it is quite an experience to climb up to the highest point and try to imagine what they must have looked like when the lava flow was in full swing. From the top there is an impressive view to the river Skaftá and the Fögrufjöll mountains in the north. Just beyond them lies the lake Langisjór. Further towards the right looms the Vatnajökull glacier, while the lakes Lambavatn and Kambsvatn lie straight ahead.





## VÍK Í MÝRDAL

Mýrdalur is an area of contrasts and magnificent landscapes. It has a lot of precipitation which waters the brilliant green grass in the steep mountainsides, while higher up, on the Mýrdalsjökull glacier, it falls as snow and maintains the ice-cap. East and west of the Mýrdalur valley lie barren sands that were deposited in massive floods released from the Sólheimajökull and Kötlujökull glaciers. During the summer, Mýrdalur, with its blaze of green grass, stands out in vivid contrast to these stretches of sand, particularly the stark blackness of Mýrdalssandur. Nowhere else in Iceland is the grass greener, and at first sight the whole area seems to be under a thick coating of vegetation: even the cliff sides of the tuff mountains, the rugged gorges and the naked peaks of the high-land interior seem to take on a velvety appearance with the approach of summer.

The village of Vík í Mýrdal seems tiny beneath Reynisfjall, but it plays an immensely important role in the service network of Southern Iceland. It is the third most-visited tourist destination in the country, with nearly one million visitors every year.

In past centuries fishermen's row-boats used to set out from the beach below the village, but fishing no longer plays any part in the local economy. It was difficult due to the lack of any natural harbour and the violence of the breakers. The village also used to play a role in providing services for the local farmers, and to a trickle of tourists. Now this is all changed: Vík is the largest service centre in the south of the country, with food shops, hotels, a wine and spirit retail outlet, a post office, bank, gymnasium and a swimming pool.

Vík provides overnight accommodation for more than a thousand people, and many restaurants, no two of them alike, have opened up to meet their needs. The main attractions of the village include walks on the rewarding hiking paths, microlite flying, bird-watching and day-trips further afield with tour operators; these include glacier climbs on Sólheimajökull, snowmobile trips on the Mýrdalsjökull glacier and other sightseeing trips in 4x4 vehicles.





## KIRKJUBÆJARKLAUSTUR

Nestling under the mountains, the small village of Kirkjubæjarklaustur, with its abundant tree growth, has a rich history and is the centre of services for a large part of southern Iceland. Facilities in the village include food shops, a wine and spirit retail outlet, a pharmacy, health clinic, car repair workshop, hairdressing salon, a craft shop, exhibition gallery and restaurants. It also has a fine gymnasium, swimming pool and sports field.

In Icelandic terms, Kirkjubæjarklaustur enjoys an unusually comfortable mild climate, with mild winters and warm, sunny summers which attract both domestic and foreign tourists. Agriculture, tourism and other services form the main occupations; as in many other parts of the country, tourism has expanded immensely in recent years, and the village is in a key position midway between Vík í Mýrdal and Jökulsárlón.

The village has a long and interesting history. It is believed that Irish monks were living on the site when the Norse settlers arrive in the late 9th century. In 1186 a nunnery was founded on the farm Kirkjubær

(‘Church Farm’); hence the rather unwieldy name Kirkjubæjarklaustur, which translates as ‘the Nunnery at Church Farm’. The nunnery was abolished in 1554 following the Reformation.

There are several natural attractions close to Kirkjubæjarklaustur. These include the waterfall Systrafoss (‘Sisters’ Waterfall’) and the isolated mound Systrastapi (‘Sisters’ Mound’), both which names allude to the proximity of the nunnery in the past. According to a folk tradition, the graves of two of the nuns are on the top of the mound, where they were burned at the stake for breaches of the nunnery’s rules. One is supposed to have made a pact with the Devil, taken the communion host past the door of the privy and had sexual relations with men; the other is supposed to have spoken disrespectfully about the Pope. The waterfall Systrafoss, above the village, is fed by water from the Systravatn lake on the top of the hill. The waterfall is supposed to owe its name to two nuns who died in an attempt to retrieve a golden comb from the lake. One tried to wade out into the lake; the other rode into it on horseback and disappeared.



# THE COAST

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The south coast of Iceland includes some impressive shorelines and beaches, but they have not always been admired: in the past this was a dangerous place for ships. Now the beaches have become popular with tourists, and the sight of the Atlantic breakers on this long and exposed shore is scarcely less imposing than the view inland up to the mountains of central Iceland.

Shipwrecks were recorded on the south coast from the earliest times of settlement nearly 1200 years ago. Foreign ships, especially from Britain, France and Germany, became an increasingly familiar sight in Icelandic waters in the 19th century, first in sailing ships and later in steam-powered trawlers. On average, two shipwrecks occurred each year on the south coast, most of them in the counties of Skaftafellssýslur, with a concentration in the Meðalland area. This stretch of the coast proved so dangerous to shipping that it became known as “the ships’ graveyard.” About 110 ships ran aground in Skaftafellsýsla between 1898 and 1982; nearly 1,500 lives were saved, but at least 57 were lost, either in the wreck events themselves or when the survivors reached land but failed to find help in time in this sparsely-populated region. It therefore became part of the daily life for the people of the area to keep an eye open for ships passing by. If a shipwreck occurred, they had to drop everything and do what they could to save lives.

Most of the wrecks broke apart or were buried in the sand within a few years. The local people tried to utilise everything they could from them, carrying loads from the wreck sites up to their farms on pack-horses or, later, by car. Iron from wrecked ships made an important contribution to the building of electrical generation plants in the south of the country in the years after 1920. Naturally, carrying it from the beaches back to where it could be used was both difficult and dangerous. Not all ships that ran aground were wrecked, and relatively few lives were lost in these incidents.

The first vessel that was successfully refloated from West Skaftafellssýsla is believed to have been an English trawler, the Ugadale, which ran aground on 20 January 1911. Its captain was making his first voyage, and was worried that his career would be over if he did not manage to get the ship back out to sea. A salvage vessel, the Geir, came from Reykjavík and pulled the trawler afloat, after which it continued fishing. No doubt this successful outcome owed something to the fact that there was an Icelander in the crew of the Ugadale, which made for smoother communication between the crew and the local people. After this, more was done to try to refloat grounded ships before they began to be buried in the sand. Nevertheless, there were times when shipwrecks resulted in deaths on the south coast, not least because of

the great distances for the survivors to walk to the nearest farm or settlement. It was because of this that the German consul in Iceland had a refuge built in 1904. In it were beds with straw mattresses and woollen blankets for 14 men, with food, tobacco, matches, bandages and some means of passing the time. There were also maps and instructions in Icelandic, Danish, German, English and French on how to reach civilisation and the best way of dealing with local conditions. Only eighteen months after the refuge was built, a German trawler ran aground not far from it. The entire crew came safely ashore and were found comfortably drinking coffee in the refuge when the rescue team arrived from Öræfi.

Nowadays, thanks to various developments, shipwrecks in the area are practically unknown. Iceland’s economic zone is much larger, which means that large freight vessels and trawlers no longer come close to land; advances in navigation, vessel design and telecommunications also play a part in greater safety at sea.











L A M B :

# DIRECT FROM FARM

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Hidden in a small valley not far from Hrífunes, on the other side of the river Tungufljót is a place of great interest for those who are interested in gourmet cuisine. Borgarfell is a family business that has received numerous awards for its meat products for the consumer. It has long earned a special reputation for its sheep farming; inside, prize medallions and trophies cover entire walls. Lamb from Borgarfell has been in particular demand year after year because it is considered tenderer and more flavoursome than other lamb.

Sigfús and Lilja, the husband-and-wife team at Borgarfell, have spent the greater part of their lives perfecting the breeding and rearing of their prize-winning stock with the emphasis on producing tender, protein-rich lamb with a moderate fat content. In addition to the breeding methods, this ambition is supported by the fact that the sheep have access to the birch scrub, wild flowers and angelica that grow in the Hrífunes Nature Park; these give lamb from Borgarfell an extra advantage over lamb of other provenance in terms of flavour. Right from birth, efforts are made to ensure that the lambs are treated well and never lack food or experience stress; this makes for steady muscle growth, achieving the optimum muscle/fat ratio when the animals are slaughtered.

Modern slaughtering methods ensure maximum quality in meat from Borgarfell. The lambs are taken to a small artisanal abattoir only 40 km from the farm, which makes for minimum stress on the animals; in many cases, livestock are driven far greater distances and the resulting stress and suffering are thought to reduce product quality in terms of flavour. After slaughtering, lamb from Borgarfell is allowed to hang for longer and it is chilled more slowly than is commonly the case; this treatment makes for extra tenderness. By contrast, larger abattoirs freeze carcasses rapidly after slaughtering.







## SPECIAL CUTS ON REQUEST

Residents of Hrífunes Nature Park can purchase lamb direct from Borgarfell and have it specially cut and vacuum packed. Whole carcasses, or select parts (legs, saddles, slices) and filet cuts are available. Borgarfell also produces quality lamb sausages: ale ausages and breakfast sausages that are ideal for a barbecue. The recipes for these products have undergone long refinement and they are guaranteed to contain only high-quality products and be free of all types of additives. For special occasions, Borgarfell produces marinated mutton and smoked mutton using newly-sprouted birch twigs from Hrífunes. Specially smoked mutton, sausages, mince, goulash and pastrami-style sausages are available for family brunches. Borgarfell's production facilities meet the highest quality standards and have received all necessary permits from the MATÍS. Special efforts are made to ensure traceability and product safety.











**I highly recommend this house for someone that  
wants to get away from crowds and enjoy the  
stunning beauty Iceland has to offer.**

- Tim, USA







**We loved this place! It was truly perfection!  
I wish we would've had more time there!  
Make sure you show up early so you can  
really enjoy the incredible space!**

- Stephanie, USA







**We were treated to a beautiful  
sunset over the glacier.  
Unforgettable!**

- James, USA







**Huge private cabins. Brand new facilities with  
absolutely amazing views! Our only regret  
was that we didn't stay long enough!**

- Andrew, USA







**Fantastic location, we enjoyed the remoteness of the cabin. Having the hot tub and sauna was an added bonus. The cabin was very spacious and had everything we needed.**

- Christine, UK



# PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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## **Hrífunes Nature Park**

Hrífunes, 880 Kirkjubæjarklaustri

Telephone: +354 680 7141

Website: [hrifunesnaturepark.is](http://hrifunesnaturepark.is)

E-mail: [info@hrifunesnaturepark.is](mailto:info@hrifunesnaturepark.is)

## **Owners**

Inger Elisabeth Langfeldt, s: +47 404 95 151

Sigurdur Gardarsson, s: +47 930 51 900

## **Distances**

Vík í Mýrdal 45 km

Skaftafell 90 km

Núpsstaður 100 km

Landmannalaugar 75 km

Laki 55 km

Þórsmörk 135 km

Reykjavík 225 km

Kirkjubæjarklaustur 31 km

Jökulsárlón 155 km

Dverghamrar 46 km

Eldgjá 45 km

Fjaðrárgljúfur 31 km

Lómagnúpur 68 km

Núpsstaður 66 km

Núpsstaðarskógar 75 km

Ófærufoss 44 km

Systrastapi/Systrafoss 35 km

Vatnajökulsþjóðgarður 150 km

Lakagígar -60 km

Skaftafell 103 km

## **Borgarfell**

Borgarfell, Skaftártunga

Website: [facebook.com/borgarfell/](https://facebook.com/borgarfell/)

Telephone: +354 862 3575

## **Medical center - Vík** (Heilsugæslan í Vík)

Hátún 2, 870 Vík

Telephone: +354 432 2800

Sími vaktþjónusta lækna

& hjúkrunarfræðinga á HSU: 1700

Emergency number: 112

## **Medical Center - Kirkjubæjarklaustur**

(Heilsugæslustöðin Kirkjubæjarklaustri)

Skriðuvellir 13, 880 Kirkjubæjarklaustur

Telephone: +354 432 2880

Vaktsími: +354 432 2888

Emergency number: 112

## **Kjarval, grocery store - Kirkjubæjarklaustur**

Klausturvegur 13,

Kirkjubæjarklaustur

Telephone: +354 487 4616

E-mail: [klaustur@kjarval.is](mailto:klaustur@kjarval.is)

## **ÁTVR, state liquor store - Kirkjubæjarklaustur**

Klausturvegur 15, 880 Kirkjubæjarklaustri

Telephone: +354 482 2122

## **ÁTVR, state liquor store - VÍK Í MÝRDAL**

Ránarbraut 1, 870 Vík

Telephone: +354 486 8660



**N1, gas station - Vík**

Austurvegur 18, 870 Vík í Mýrdal  
Telephone: +354 487 1230  
E-mail: vik@n1.is

**Kjarval, grocery store - Vík**

Austurvegur, 870 Vík í Mýrdal

**Fire department Mýrdalshreppur**

(Slökkvilið Mýrdalshrepps)

Austurvegur 17, 870 Vík  
Emergency number: 112

**Fire department Kirkjubæjarklaustur**

(Slökkvilið Kirkjubæjarklausturs)

Iðjuvellir 5, 880 Kirkjubæjarklaustur  
Telephone: +354 487 4717  
Emergency number: 112

**Iceland Touring Association** (Ferðafélag Íslands)

Mörkin 6, 108 Reykjavík  
Telephone: +354 568 2533  
Website: www.fi.is  
E-mail: fi@fi.is

**Icelandic Met Office: Weather** (Veðurstofa Íslands)

Bústaðavegur 7-9, 108 Reykjavík  
Telephone: +354 522 6000.  
Website: www.vedur.is  
E-mail: fyrirspurnir@vedur.is

**Vatnajökull National Park Information**

(Vatnajökulsþjóðgarður)

Klapparstígur 25-27 101 Reykjavík  
Telephone: +354 575 8400  
E-mail: info@vjp.is

**The Icelandic Road and Coastal Administration**

(Vegagerðin)

Borgartún 5-7, 105 Reykjavík  
Telephone: +354 522 1000  
Information service number: 1777  
E-mail: vegagerdin@vegagerdin.is

**N1, gas station - Kirkjubæjarklaustur**

Klausturvegur 29, 880  
Kirkjubæjarklaustur  
Telephone: +354 487 4628  
E-mail: n1@n1.is

**Police department - Vík**

Ránarbraut 1, 870 Vík í Mýrdal  
Telephone: 444 2010  
Emergency number: 112  
E-mail: sudurland@logreglan.is

**Police department - Kirkjubæjarklaustur**

Iðjuvellir 7, 880 Kirkjubæjarklaustur  
Telephone: 444 2010  
Emergency number: 112  
E-mail: sudurland@logreglan.is











