

The Heathen Path for Icelandic Travelers

Ásbyrgi - the Shelter of the Gods

According to Norse mythology the god Óðinn was once riding his 8-legged horse, Sleipnir, and it put one of its hoofs down and created Ásbyrgi, which is in the shape of a very big horseshoe. Ásbyrgi is considered to be the capital city of the Huldúfólk - Hidden people of Iceland and psychic people have seen many homes, public buildings and concert halls belonging to the Hidden people in the cliffs. You will find several hiking trails in Ásbyrgi, one leading to the beautiful Botnstjörn pond.

Goðafoss Waterfall – Waterfall of the Gods

In the year 1000 the Lawspeaker Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði made Christianity the official religion of Iceland. After his conversion Þorgeir threw his statues of the Norse gods into the waterfall.

Skagafjörður Fjord – Turf Houses on the Saga Trail

Within Skagafjörður is the folk museum at Glaumbær, situated in an old traditional turf farmhouse dating back to 1750. The museum explores life in historic rural Iceland and also commemorates the lives of Þorfinnur Karlsefni and his wife Guðríður. Another popular attraction in the Skagafjörður area is Grettislaug, or “Grettir’s Pool.” This naturally-warmed pool is near an abandoned farm on a beachhead where the legendary outlaw of Grettir’s Saga, Grettir the Strong, warmed his cold, aching body after swimming over seven kilometres from the island of Drangey.

Stöng - Ruins of a Real Viking Settlement Manor- Þjórsá river Valley

In the days of the Old Commonwealth, the valley of the river Þjórsá was grassy and flourishing, but in 1104 the valley was laid waste by a layer of tephra from an eruption of Mt. Hekla. Sites of many buildings have been unearthed in Þjórsárdalur, and the best preserved and most remarkable is the farmhouse at Stöng, excavated in 1939. Based upon the Stöng farmhouse, a replica Saga-Age Farmhouse was built in 1974 to mark the 1100th anniversary of the settlement of Iceland. The replica farmhouse stands at the mouth of the valley, together with a replica of an early church. The Þjórsá Visitor Centre (Þjórsárstofa) in Árnes provide information on the nature and history of the Þjórsá river valley; with its diverse and beautiful nature (lava, waterfalls, vegetation) and a colourful history, through an exhibition and multimedia presentation.

Hofsstaðir Historic Park

An impressive Viking-Age longhouse stood at Hofsstaðir from the Settlement period (AD 870-930) until the twelfth century. The historic park aims to give an impression of Hofsstaðir at that time: turf walls show the outer limit of the longhouse during its final phase, and remains of a large enclosure have been left untouched. Excavations were carried out at Hofsstaðir in 1994-2000.

Þingvellir National Park

The history of Iceland and of the Icelandic nation coincide at Þingvellir, where the Alþingi (national assembly) met each year from 930 until 1798. Many crucial events in Icelandic history took place at Þingvellir. No less remarkable is the geology of Þingvellir, which lies on the junction of the Eurasian and North American tectonic plates, whose divergence has formed the great rift valley of Þingvellir with its many crevasses and gorges.

Arctic Henge

The Arctic Henge at Raufarhöfn is under construction. The Henge will harness the Midnight Sun at the Arctic Circle. It is inspired by the mythical world of eddic poem Völuspá (Prophecy of the Seeress). The Henge will be 52m in diameter, containing a Dwarf Path including the names of 72 dwarfs which form a year-circle in which each dwarf has five days. A crystal at the top of an 8-metre-high column will throw light all over the Henge. Each dwarf will have his name and character, and visitors can find their own Birthday Dwarf.

Hrafnkels saga trail

The Saga of Hrafnkell tells of Hrafnkell Freysgoði (who worshipped the Norse god Freyr), a powerful chieftain who lived at Aðalból in Hrafnkelsdalur valley. When Hrafnkell kills one of his shepherds for daring to ride his stallion Freyfaxi, it sparks a chain of events that lead to Hrafnkell's defeat and humiliation. The Saga of Hrafnkell takes place in the Fljótsdalshérað region. Archaeological excavations have been made in the saga's area. Information signs at saga site, marked footpaths.

Reykholt

Reykholt is one of Iceland's main historic sites, a cultural centre past and present. Snorri Sturluson, a famous medieval historian, politician and chieftain settled in Reykholt in 1206 and

was killed there in 1241. The most distinctive antiquity in Reykholt is the pool of Snorri Sturluson, called Snorralaug. The pool and the water conduit, leading water from a nearby hot spring, date back to the 10th century and are maybe the oldest preserved constructions in Iceland.

Flókatóftir - the ruins of Hrafna-Flóki

On the southern part of the Westfjords of Iceland, in Vatnsfjörður at Barðaströnd, the ruins of Hrafna-Flóki are to be found. The Norwegian Hrafna-Flóki Vilgerðarson arrived in 865 in Iceland before it was settled by the Vikings. Landnámabók - the Book of Settlement tells us about Hrafna-Flóki, who is believed to have stayed in Iceland for a year. At Flókatóftir ruins, you will see six ruins of what is believed to have been Hrafna-Flóki's farm. The walls of the longhouse (the oldest type of the Icelandic turf houses), the boathouse and fire-pit can be seen here according to the Book of Settlement of Iceland.

Eiríksstaðir - the ruins of a Viking longhouse

At Eiríksstaðir in West-Iceland, you will find the ruins of a Viking longhouse from the 10th century. Here the Vikings Eiríkur rauði - Erik the Red and Þjóðhildur lived. And at Eiríksstaðir their son Leifur heppni - Leif the Lucky (ca 980-ca 1020) was born. Leif is famous for being the first European to discover America. A statue of Leif the Lucky has been erected close to the ruins.

Grettisvarða Cairn

In the historical Vatnsfjörður in the Westfjords of Iceland - above the Viking ruins - hovers a huge cairn called Grettisvarða cairn. It is believed that the Viking outlaw, Grettir Ásmundarsonar, a.k.a Grettir, the Strong, built this cairn - who else but he could have erected such a huge cairn? Another idea is that it could have been a watch-tower. It is hollow from the middle up, so a fire was possibly lit to warn the neighbours of enemy-approach. Grettir stayed in Vatnsfjörður for some time during his outlawry (which lasted for almost 20 years). Grettir, the hero of the Saga of Grettir, was saved from hanging by the lady of the estate, Þorbjörg hin digra - Þorbjörg the portly, when he had robbed the neighbouring area.

The Viking ruins in Herjólfsdalur in the Westman islands

In Herjólfsdalur valley in the Westman islands in South-Iceland, the Viking ruins of Herjólfsbærinn, Herjólfur's old farmstead were discovered. It was back in 1924 when the first

director of the National Museum of Iceland was doing excavation work in Herjólfsdalur valley that he discovered 3 ruins; one Viking longhouse along with two smaller houses. The ruins of 8 turf houses were discovered from around 4-5 building periods. These ruins might have been the farmstead of Herjólfur Bárðarson, the first settler of the Westman islands in around 900. Some of them might even be older.

Skallagrímshaugur - Skalla-Grímur's Burial Mound

In Borgarnes town in West-Iceland, you will find what we like to believe is the burial mound of the Viking settler Skalla-Grímur Kveldúlfsson and his grandson, Böðvar. Skalla-Grímur was the father of the well-known hero Egill Skallagrímsson of Egilssaga - the Saga of Egill - and Böðvar was the son of Egill. He was buried with his weapons and tools and his horse, as shown in drawings by the mound. When the teenage boy Böðvar drowned in Hvítá river, his father, Egill, had the burial-mound of his father, Skalla-Grímur, reopened and buried Böðvar with his grandfather. By the burial mound, you will notice a beautiful relief of Egill Skallagrímsson carrying his drowned teenage son Böðvar home on a horse, grief-stricken. In front of the burial mound, you will see one of the nine cairns that mark interesting locations in the Saga of Egill.

The Viking Burial Mound of Hjörleifur in Hjörleifshöfði

On the highest point of Hjörleifshöfði promontory in South-Iceland, you will find a Viking burial mound, Hjörleifshaugur, where the remains of Iceland's second settler, are believed to be buried. This Viking settler was Hjörleifur Hróðmarsson, the blood-brother of our first Viking settler Ingólfur Arnarson. The blood-brothers arrived in Iceland in ca 874 AD, and Hjörleifur was killed by his slaves the year after in 875 AD.

Hraunhafnartangi and Þorgeirdys Burial Mound

In Melrakkaslétta plains at 66 degrees North, you will find a huge heap of stones - which represents the northernmost protected relics in Iceland, declared as protected back in 1931. This is the burial mound of the Viking Þorgeir Hávarsson - called Þorgeirdys burial mound. Another burial mound close by is Gautsdys - of Gautur Sleituson. This Burial Mound is mentioned in the Saga of Sworn-Brothers (Fóstbræðrasaga), but in this Saga, you can read about the slaying of Þorgeir Hávarsson in the first part of the 11th century. Þorsteinn defended himself Viking style and killed 14 of his attackers. Þorgeir's torso is buried in the burial mound, but his enemies beheaded him and carried his head with them to Eyjafjörður as a proof.

Borgarvirki Viking Fortress

On Vatnsnes peninsula in North-West Iceland, you will find what we like to believe is a Viking fortress from the 13th century, called Borgarvirki -the Citadel. Borgarvirki is a volcanic plug, which forms a natural fortress of basalt columns, to which the Vikings then added. Old folkore tells us that the Vikings used Borgarvirki for Viking military purposes. The fortress is 177 meters above sea-level and 10-15 meters high. The people of this area seem to have used Borgarvirki as a fortress when they were under attack from the chieftains of Borgarfjörður in the 13th century. At least on two occasions the local people of the Húnavatn's district were under siege here. The opponents' strategy was to starve the locals out. The locals had run out of food during one of the attacks and overheard the attackers talking amongst themselves how much provision the Húnavatn's locals had left. Their leader, Víga-Barði, came up with a strategy to get rid of the attackers. Provisions were running out, and only one piece of meat was left. Víga-Barði had his people throw that piece of meat out from the fortress, giving the attackers the idea that they had plenty of provisions left.

MUSEUMS

Saga Museum

The Saga Museum intimately recreates key moments in Icelandic history, moments that have determined the fate of our people and which give a compelling view into how Icelanders have lived for more than a millennium. Visitors are guided through the museum's many attractions as well as through a chronological history of the country with audio guidance in 5 different languages. In this vibrant museum, visitors can learn about Icelandic history in a way that is both educational and fun. Lifelike replicas of historical Icelandic figures have been created, based on descriptions found in the Viking sagas and chronicles.

The Settlement Exhibition & Settlement Sagas

At the Settlement Exhibition in Aðalstræti visitors can experience the settlement of Iceland in late 9th century through two remarkable exhibitions. The Settlement Exhibition revolves around an excavated site, the actual remains of a Viking Age longhouse that have been preserved in situ. The exhibition gives an invaluable insight into the life and times of the first people to inhabit the Reykjavík area and the ways in which they adapted to their new environment.

Reykjavik Maritime Museum

Nothing has been more vital to Iceland's survival than fishing, and so it should come as no surprise that there is a whole museum dedicated to the nation's maritime history. You can

check out the country's seafaring heritage at the Reykjavík Maritime Museum in the newly renovated part of the Reykjavík's harbour, known as the Grandi area. The museum gives a good insight into the life and times of Icelandic fishermen by displaying great old fishing artefacts, detailed model ships, mock-ups of wireless signal rooms, and a compass repair shop.

Culture House

On the Hverfisgata street in downtown Reykjavík, you can find a large and beautiful building known as Safnahúsið or Culture House. The stark-white house holds a collection which includes paintings, sculptures, and other works of art, alongside cultural pieces and historical artefacts. All designed to give you the history and perspective needed to appreciate the Icelandic nation as it is today. The permanent exhibition, 'Points of View', gives guests a chance to delve into the collection of six different cultural institutions, from contemporary art to thousand-year-old relics. The suggested tour starts on the fourth floor, and the layout will take you from room to room and down the floors, exploring each wing of the house. There are plenty of chairs along the way if you need to take a rest. The latest in Icelandic art is on the fourth floor, and medieval items are on the ground floor. However, the collections are arranged thematically, rather than chronologically, to paint a picture of various aspects of Icelandic culture and way of life. There are also special, temporary exhibitions in a separate room on the third floor which provide a greater insight into a specific topic.

The Settlement Exhibition

The Settlement Exhibition is another underground museum, but there is a practical reason for its subterranean location as it is built around an archaeological dig. In 2001, renovations of the nearby buildings were about to start when archaeologists found a few relics which turned out to be the oldest remains of human habitation in Reykjavík, including a tenth-century Viking longhouse. The longhouse is believed to have been inhabited from 930-1000 AD, and older still is a boundary wall at the back of the museum, built around 871 AD. What is equally impressive is that these buildings were found at the very place where Iceland's first settlers made his home, as described in the old Icelandic Sagas which were written down some 200 years after the event.

Arbaer Open Air Museum

Another way of exploring what Reykjavík used to look like is with a visit to Árbær Open Air Museum where you'll find a large display of ancient Icelandic houses. The museum consists of more than 20 buildings that have been preserved and relocated to form a small town, a square and a farm, giving visitors a sense of how Icelanders used to live before the country underwent its period of industrialisation. Each building is different and has its own story. You'll find homes of people with diverse occupations and social statuses, from a professor's resident to a 19th-century home of landless labourers, as well as houses from different time periods, such as traditional turf houses and WWII storage huts. To keep with the theme, the employees and tour

guides dress in traditional Icelandic attire and go about the business of working the farm, which includes tending to sheep, cows and chickens. There is also a children's room at the museum with traditional mid-century toys for the young ones.

The National Museum of Iceland

The National Museum houses many treasures of Iceland's history, beginning with the ship in which Viking settlers crossed the ocean to their new home, and ending in a modern airport. The vast collection of art and crafts, tools and furniture, religious artefacts and archaeological remains for the permanent exhibition 'Making of a Nation', are organised chronologically so you can easily follow this journey through time. The section describing the settlement era features swords, drinking horns, a bronze figure of the thunder god Thor, and the Valþjófsstaður door, a priceless medieval church door on which the legend of Lion-Knight is carved.

The Museum of Icelandic Witchcraft and Sorcery at Hólmavík in the Westfjords

The museum is not for the faint-hearted, surrounded by zombies, milk-sucking demons and magical staves. At the museum, you can learn all about Icelandic witchcraft - even how to make yourself invisible. And at the museum, you will even "see" an invisible boy! The museum is on two floors and depicts the history of sorcery, which was seemingly powerful in this area of Iceland called Strandir. It was in the year 1652 that the first man was burned as a sorcerer, up in North-Iceland. His name was Jón Rögnvaldsson and he was charged with raising a ghost (zombie) to cause harm to his enemy. You can see the zombie crawling out from the floor of the museum. The Necropants. Now, this is by far the most infamous piece at the museum - the horrible necropants, which date back to the 17th century. Made of the skin of a man, and worn by a sorcerer.