

# GÓÐA FERÐ

Travel Issue



**JOHNSON SEEDS**  
P.O. BOX 3000 ARBORG, MB ROC 0A0  
*Specialists in Edible Flax*  
Production, processing, contracting and marketing of forage seed and special crops  
Tel: 204-376-5228 Toll Free: 800-363-9442  
Fax: 204-376-2201 Email: info@johnsonseeds.com  
www.johnsonseeds.com



**Jon Letman**  
Lihue, Hawaii

## Pylsur nation

Some years ago, while I was living in Japan, there in the heart of Osaka's Dotonbori entertainment district, clustered amongst all the ramen stands, shot bars, pachinko parlors and garish pink store fronts advertising "fashion health" massage, was a solitary black and white sign which stated sim-

ply "Icelandic Cuisine." It seemed so out of place, so unlikely, that every time I saw it, I wondered if it was for real. Just what was Icelandic cuisine and why were they serving it here? I never did visit that restaurant, but I did eventually make it to Iceland a few months ago and was able to discover, if not the

national cuisine, at least what is commonly eaten in the land of fire and ice. Thumb through any guidebook or visit a few Icelandic tourism promotion websites and you can read about the many ways in which seafood, lamb, puffin and even rotting shark flesh (a dish called *hákarl* is made of "putrefied shark meat buried underground for up to six months") are served in Iceland.

On an island nation anchored in the north Atlantic, clinging to the Arctic Circle between Greenland and Norway, it is not surprising that cod, halibut, salmon and herring are mainstays. The same can be said of lamb; sheep are one and a half times as numerous as the Icelanders them-

selves, and can be seen grazing on the vast open expanses throughout the country.

Reykjavík, the nation's capital, is well-known for its raucous night life, fashionable shops and exorbitant prices, and also abounds in high-end restaurants where you can dine on the finest cuts of mutton, grilled Arctic char and even whale sashimi.

But when I visited last May during a 100-year-record cold snap, what caught my eye and captured my imagination (and palate), was Icelandic fast food. Not to be confused with the super-sized, high-calorie trappings of trans-fat-filled foods typical of its North American neighbour, fast food in Iceland revolves around an item so ubiquitous, it could arguably be called Iceland's national dish.

I'm talking, of course, about *pylsur*.

Translation: hot dogs. Yes, hot dogs, or *pylsur* (singular *pylsa*) as they are known in Iceland, are the quick-eat staple around which all other Icelandic fast foods orbit. And please, don't imagine that the *pylsa* is just a hot dog. Far from it, the *pylsa* is a long thin lean mix of lamb and beef, steamed and served with crispy fried onions, mustard and remoulade sauce in a soft warm bun.

And once you've tried your first *pylsa*, you'll probably find that your craving for puffin and shark will wane.


I had my first *pylsa*, appropriately, at Iceland's most famous hot dog stand, Bæjarins Beztu Pylsur ("Best hot dogs in town"), a tiny shop, which stands near the port of Reykjavík and is well-known for its long queues of peckish Icelanders who line up day and night to order "*eina með öllu*" (one with everything). And here, by chance, I had stumbled upon this Reykjavík landmark on a frigid morning with not a soul around.

I approached the window of Bæjarins Beztu, looked at the

## The Icelandic Field School

### On the edge of Europe - A summer course in Iceland


#### June 1-25, 2007



The Icelandic Field School will take place from June 1-25, 2007. The aim of the course is to explore Icelandic culture and language, highlighting the relation between nature, culture and environment. This field school program will offer instruction around the country in cooperation with the University of Iceland in Reykjavík, the University Centre of the West Fjords, and the University of Hólar in Hjalteadalur. Icelandic writers, poets and visual artists will also give readings and performances.

Courses offered:  
CONVERSATIONAL ICELANDIC  
ICELAND HERE AND NOW - SOCIETY AND CULTURE  
OLD NORSE MYTHOLOGY - THE NORSE OLYMPUS

For information on the Icelandic Field School and Scholarships, please contact:  
Department of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba  
Phone: (204) 474-8487  
um\_icelandic@umanitoba.ca  
umanitoba.ca/arts/icelandic





**1-866-314-4423 or 780-481-3502**  
Store in Edmonton  
e-mail: snorri@icelandic-goods.com  
Check out our imported products online  
**www.icelandic-goods.com**

THE FINEST WOOLEN PRODUCTS  
IN THE WORLD, ICELANDIC  
PÖNNUKÖKUR PANS, JEWELLRY,  
MODEL VIKING SHIPS, VIKING  
FIGURINES,  
SOUVENIRS  
...AND SO  
MUCH  
MORE

VISIT US AT THE INL CONVENTION!  
APRIL 27th to 29th  
Joint venture between  
Icelandic Goods by Brendan  
& Icelandic Canadian Frón

## STEFAN J. STEFANSON



92 years old  
February 13, 2007  
Best wishes  
from his family

# GÓÐA FERÐ

Travel  
Issue

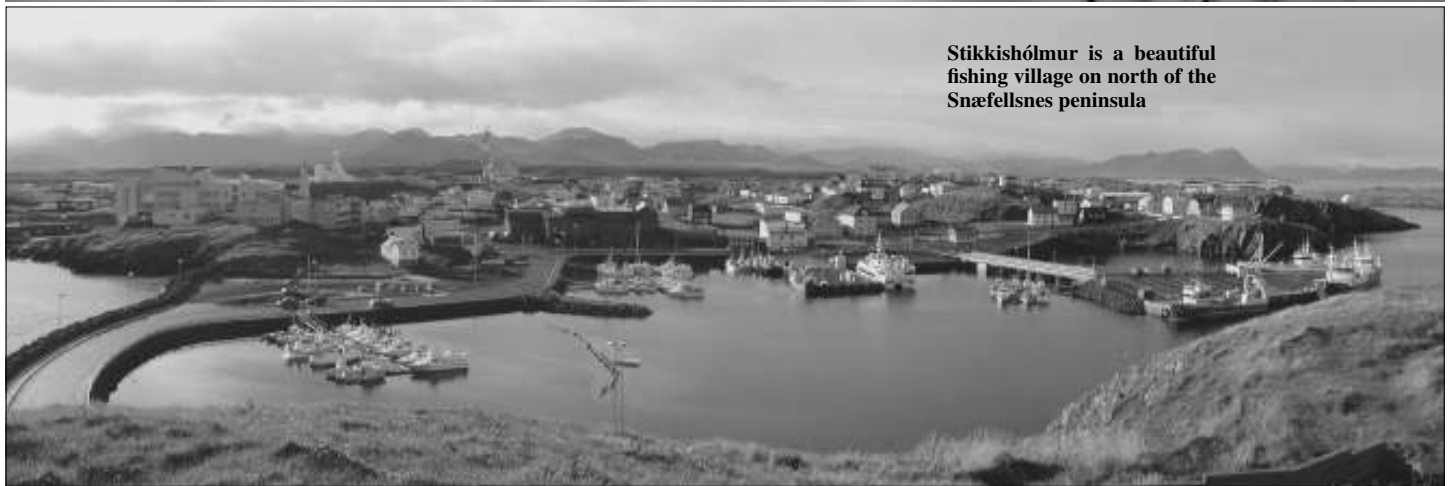


PHOTO: KENT LÁRUS BJÖRNSSON

Stikkishólmur is a beautiful fishing village on north of the Snæfellsnes peninsula

menu (*pylsur*, Coke) and held up my finger, "one *pylsa*, please."

In earnest, the woman inside prepared my mid-morning meal. Taped to the window of the stand was a black-and-white photo of Bill Clinton enjoying a *pylsur* at this very spot. It has been reported that the former US president ate at Bæjarins Beztu just weeks before his 2004 bypass surgery. Another famous visitor to Bæjarins Beztu was James Hetfield of Metallica, but on this day, it was just me and the *pylsur* lady.

As I enjoyed my *pylsa*, I commented on the unseasonably cold weather, punctuated by snowflakes dancing in the wind, and told the woman inside I was from Hawaii. She remarked that her husband's choir had just performed some Hawaiian songs and now here she was speaking with someone from Hawaii.

This chance encounter was probably as odd for her as it was for me to be standing in the freezing cold, eating a hot dog beside the Reykjavík pier.

After my last bite, I paid the woman 250 *krónur* (a little over \$3 US) and shuffled off into the cold spring morning.

As we travelled around Iceland by car (I was with my wife and 20-month-old son), we invariably ran into more places serving *pylsur*, and before long, we were searching them out, although we didn't have to look very hard.

Driving north of Reykjavík, we stopped for gas at a Shell station in Borgarnes where we

sampled other Icelandic treats — rolled ribbons of oil-slick-black licorice, chocolate-covered Draumur licorice bars and blueberry-flavoured *skyr*, an Icelandic dairy food reminiscent of yoghurt. Oh yes, and we had a couple of *pylsur* — with the works.

At Þingvellir National Park, site of the first meeting of the Alþingi (Iceland's general assembly) around 930 AD, we enjoyed *pylsur*. A few days later, after a welcome, long hot soak in the Blue Lagoon hot springs south of Reykjavík, more *pylsur*, and again on the road to Gulfoss waterfall, *pylsur*.

This pattern of conspicuous *pylsur* consumption continued as we ventured further into the wilds of Iceland. Outside the small port of Stykkishólmur on the Snæfellsnes peninsula, I stopped to fill the gas tank and couldn't resist another late afternoon *pylsa*.

In the small town of Selfoss, we stayed in a curious guesthouse with Siamese décor to match the Thai restaurant below, and forsook tom yum soup and a viking-themed restaurant for Hrói Höttur, which our guide book described as a "licensed" pizzeria. Seated in the small crowded pizza parlour amongst families with small children and bubbly teens slurping bottles of Coke, we had fine Icelandic pizzas and discovered what modern Icelanders eat when they aren't eating *pylsur*.

During our stay, we also

tried Icelandic versions of doner kebab, fish and chips and, at a rather posh sandwich shop in central Reykjavík, traditional Danish open-faced sandwiches. Two half-sandwiches (fried plaice with caviar and shrimp and smoked salmon, scrambled egg and dill) at this shop cost us a neat 3,400 *krónur* (about \$48 US). It just may be the most expensive fast food on the planet and guarantees no one will ever utter the words, "Iceland — what a bargain!"

In remote Reykholt, a village near Langjökull glacier, we stopped for a snack at an Esso station which lamentably had no *pylsur* and so we settled for *skyr* and licorice. Here I eyed the amazing varieties of licorice which the Icelanders marketed with captivating names like Salt Bomber, Risa Opal, Nizza and Sambo. Licorice was sold in every conceivable form — rope, ribbon, vines, sticks, plugs, balls, twists, throat lozenges and apparently most popular, bars dipped in chocolate.

One thing I never did find, however, was a *pylsa* with licorice. Maybe some things are better left undiscovered.

*Jon Lettman is a freelance writer in Lihue, Hawaii.*

## (New) Iceland

Continued from page 7

Valuable time is wasted digging through sources which may in the end not help at all. To know one's original district — east, west, north or south — naturally helps, not to mention the original family or farm name.

The ideal visit for the average North American of Icelandic descent should start at home. If you don't have any records, look for someone who might know your background or have proper sources. A fam-

ily name or the name of the farm and/or district goes a long way. Once such information is available, help can be found here in Iceland.

The main reason for the founding of The Icelandic National League in North America and INL-Iceland was to strengthen the ties between the North Americans of Icelandic descent and their cousins in Iceland. It is therefore the responsibility of INL-Iceland to help anyone in North America find his roots and relatives. We will assist in any way we can.

**NORDIC TRAILS**  
www.nordictrails.ca

Plan on touring Iceland?

KENT LÁRUS BJÖRNSSON  
CERTIFIED GUIDE  
PROFESSIONAL DRIVER

ISLAND GUIDE

A COMMUNITY-FOCUSED  
CREDIT UNION  
COMMITTED TO CREATING  
VALUE FOR OUR MEMBERSHIP

34 Centre Street, Gimli 642-6450  
23 Stitt Street, Winnipeg Beach 389-2550

**YEOMAN FARM**  
Stefanía Sveinbjarnardóttir  
Ray Dignum

Partam, ON K0H 2K0  
Tel: 613.375.8127  
E-mail: yeomanfa@frontenac.net  
www.yeoman-icelandic-sheep.ca

Breeders of Icelandic Sheep

Brewing Evil  
Deadly Spells  
BY CAROL GÁRDARSSON

The battle continues as Elfar struggles for her own survival against greed, superstition and the brutal forces of nature!

\$24.95

Books available at:  
Selkirk: Blaine's Records & Tapes; Teulon: Fry Days Restaurant; Gimli: H.P. Torgersen; Arborg: Arborg Pharmacy; Riverton: Shop Easy; Fisher Branch: Fisher Furniture; Lundar: Lundar Pharmacy; Eriksdale: Shop Easy; The Narrows Lodge & Store.