



By Laura Millar

THE rental agreement for my hire car in the Faroe Islands has a few eyebrow-raising clauses that you don't get at your average Avis.

One insists: 'By signing this contract, you agree to rent a car that won't tell you where it's going.'

Another says: 'You agree to follow the car's GPS instructions at all times – manual input, GPS override or "just a little detour" are strictly forbidden,' ending rather theatrically: 'I, the brave and curious renter, declare I am ready to follow the car's mysterious path... and enjoy the experience.'

It is all part of a jaunty initiative launched this summer by the Faroe Islands' tourist board in which drivers follow curated routes designed to avoid tourist hotspots.

You don't really have to obey the car's directions, but it's an attempt to address overtourism in these 18 beautiful, craggy islands, which have a population of a mere 55,000. With so many visitors jostling to photograph the same spectacular waterfall or striking sea stacks, a plan was needed.

'We wanted to explore how technology and creativity could offer a new way for travellers to discover the islands,' explains Gudrid Hojgaard, the chief executive of Visit Faroe Islands.

I'm a first-time visitor to the Faroes, a self-governing nation that's part of Denmark. You reach them on direct flights from the UK during the summer, or via Copenhagen at other times. And I'm more than happy to outsource my sightseeing decisions to a benevolent artificial intelligence.

It's all quite simple. You collect your car, scan its QR code with your phone and link through to a website that asks if you're ready to 'head off into the unknown'.

Click yes, and it reveals the first destination and directions to get you there, with the next destination revealed only after you reach the previous one.

The locations, from historic churches to eye-catching fjords, are all lesser-known favourites handpicked by locals, and the website offers information about each place on arrival. I'm raring to go, except there's a problem: it's suddenly become so misty I can barely see 5ft ahead.

However, the car hire assistant is optimistic, and checking a weather app called Faroe Islands Live she informs me it's not



TOP GEAR: One of the scheme's hire cars, above left, and, above, the dramatic scenery of the Faroes. Below: Some of the islands' ponies

so foggy in the north. This bodes well, as my first destination, Vid Air, on Streymoy, the neighbouring island to Vagar (where international planes land), is in that direction.

Driving couldn't be easier, and most of the islands are connected either by regular ferries or underwater tunnels (one even has its own underwater roundabout). It's initially slightly unnerving seeing yourself moving across open ocean on Google Maps, but you soon get used to it.

Vid Air, a 40-minute drive away, proves to be an abandoned whaling station, and I'm the only human around. So I follow GPS instructions to my next stop: Fossa waterfall, the islands' tallest, tumbling 460ft (140m) down jet-black volcanic cliffs.

The scenery while driving is jaw-dropping. Craggy hills, ridges and slopes are riven with gorges and clefts that expose obsidian stone, while the roads skirt the roiling Atlantic and shimmering lakes.

Occasionally I spot the odd pony, but more often it's sheep, which enjoy the right of way, meaning I have to halt several times while a woolly committee deliberates over whether to cross.

This blend of whimsy and wilderness is what makes the Faroes so different. It's a place where trolls and elves are part of folklore, and where the tourist board once strapped cameras on to sheep to create Google Sheep View.

From Fossa, I'm directed by the GPS to Leynar, where a sweep of black sand beach sits beneath inky-hued timbered houses crowned with the traditional grass roofs. Then it's on to picturesque Lake Toftavatn, circled by a peaceful walking trail that I tackle in the welcome sunshine.

That night I toast the experience with a seafood tasting menu at Roks restaurant in

the comparatively bustling capital, Torshavn, before retreating to Hotel Foroyar, perched above the city.

The next morning, curiosity gets the better of me and I play tourist the old-fashioned way. A quick Google points me to the sea cliffs alive

with birdlife in Vestmanna. I stroll into the visitor centre just as three tour buses arrive, disgorging dozens of camera-wielding sightseers. It takes less than two minutes for me to decide to hand back control to the car – it may be bossy, but it knows how to avoid crowds.



TRAVEL FACTS

RENT a 'self-navigating' car from £69 a day (62n.fo). Doubles at Hotel Foroyar from £97 (hotelforoyar.com). Direct flights from London to Faroe Islands from £110 one-way between the end of May and end of August (atlanticairways.com). Return flights at other times, via Copenhagen, available from a number of airlines including KLM. More information: visitfaroeislands.com/en/cars.

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