

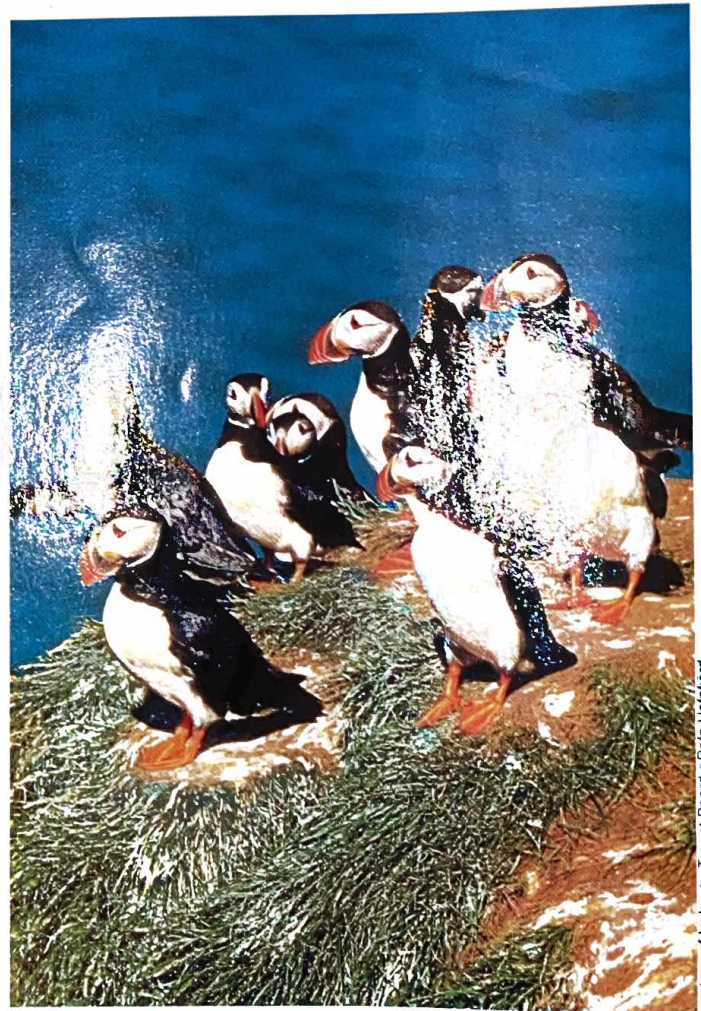
**E**ven a confirmed urbanite needs to experience the restorative powers of nature from time to time. Iceland is the ultimate frontier—an Arctic island of wild contrasts where Europe and North America meet, a country of fire and ice, a land of midnight sun and midday twilight.

On the drive from Keflavík International Airport to Reykjavík, Iceland's capital, I note how the landscape is barren—formed by lava, covered with moss—but the Nordic sky is luminous. In such a mystical lunar environment, one begins to understand why forty-one per cent of Iceland's population believes in gnomes, fairies, and elves. The rocks and hills, where these fantastic beings are reputed to make their homes, are carefully preserved, with public roads going around, rather than through, the haunts of The Hidden People.

## postmark: reykjavík

BY SUSAN BRESLOW SARDONE

**“... hot springs hissing with steaming water, hillsides covered with blue lupine, and puffin perches are all staples of Iceland's repertoire.”**



courtesy of Icelandic Tourist Board © Raim Hainjard





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## vikings in new york

A thousand years after Leif Eriksson set foot on North America, the Vikings are back. Celebrate the adventure and rediscover the past.

- October 5-25** The *Icelander*, a seventy-four-foot replica of a Viking ship, docks at South Street Seaport.
- October 9** The Icelandic Symphony Orchestra performs at Carnegie Hall.
- October 17** Scandinavian folk music.
- October 25** "Vikings: The New York Edition" featuring the *Icelandair* and the *Natur* tour.



Latrabjarg image courtesy of Icelandic Tourist Board © Rafn Hafnifjord

As we get closer to the city, snow-capped mountains appear in the distance. It's the middle of the summer; New York is sweltering but I'm seeing snow. Knowing that at this time of year Iceland stays light for all but a half an hour each day further invigorates me. I can pack a lot more into my holiday.

My first priority is a visit to an outdoor community swimming pool, heated entirely by underwater geothermal springs. Icelanders frequent such facilities every day of the year, meeting friends, debating politics, or simply luxuriating in the adjacent Jacuzzis. No wonder they look so healthy and enjoy such longevity.

Next up is a chance to experience Icelandic culture. With a population of only a hundred thousand, Reykjavík is an easy stroll. Landnáma, my eco-tour operator, has provided a guide for a visit to Asmundur Sveinsson's outdoor sculpture garden. Sveinsson's creations call upon Nordic sagas for inspiration, and his work provides a window to the Icelandic soul. When I later contrast his sculptures with those of Ainar Jonsson, I realize that although Jonsson may have been the better technician, his work lacks Sveinsson's warm emotion. Later, at the quaint Lækjarbrekka restaurant, I feast on a squadron of prawn-sized Icelandic lobsters; their succulent meat puts Down East braggarts to shame.

Touring beyond the city is imperative. There's everything from geysers to glaciers to hold you spellbound. Thingvellir National Park, shaped by glaciers and volcanoes, is where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates meet and stretch apart. (It's also where Europe's first parliament convened in 930 A.D.) Walls of waterfalls, volcanic craters, hot springs gurgling with steaming water that unexpectedly lurches high into the air, hillsides covered with blue lupine, and puffin perches are all staples of Iceland's repertoire. An ideal way to take in the sights is on horseback. The sturdy little Icelandic horses are so gentle that even a neophyte would feel at ease riding across these magical landscapes.

Don't pass up the opportunity to visit the Blue Lagoon, surrounded by black lava fields. The big draw is its therapeutic waters. This opaque blue-green reservoir of mineral-rich water is about a hundred degrees, in contrast to the sixty-degree air, so steam continually rises from the milky waters. I paddle around, peering through the fog at the seniors and kids, the lovers and the lonely, all bobbing in this ethereal human soup. Stress dissolves away and I start to think that maybe heaven isn't made up of clouds, but of naturally warm, buoyant, healing waters. It seems like a distinct possibility. You'll have to visit this magical place and decide for yourself.

### investigate iceland

Flights from New York's JFK to Reykjavik on Icelandair take less than five hours. Plan a trip with help from these sources:

#### Iceland Information

[www.icelandnaturally.com](http://www.icelandnaturally.com)  
[www.icelandculture.com](http://www.icelandculture.com)

#### Icelandair

[www.icelandair.com](http://www.icelandair.com)

#### Blue Lagoon

[www.bluelagoon.is](http://www.bluelagoon.is)

#### Landnáma Ecotours

[www.landnama.is/ecotour/indi.htm](http://www.landnama.is/ecotour/indi.htm)