

Our animals



Sheep: The Icelandic sheep graze freely with their lambs during the summer, feeding on fresh grass, herbs and berries. In the autumn farmers go to “göngur” which means gathering the sheep and driving them home. The search parties ride horses and quadbikes when gathering the roaming sheep, each trip lasting from a day up to a week. When the flock of sheep reach home, they are herded into special sheep sorting pens. The sheep are sorted by earmarks but each farm has their special mark. The sheep stay on the farm during winter. In 2023 there were about 9500 sheep in Langanesbyggð. Did you know that most farmers remove wool twice a year because it grows so fast?

But why do some sheep have wool on their backside but not on their front? Find the answer on the map!

Horses: Look outside the window. You will probably see horses grazing somewhere. The Icelandic horse used to be called “the most needed servant” because before cars the Icelandic horse was used as transportation and for hard work. In 2023 there were 377 horses in Langanesbyggð but today they are mostly used for sport but also, most of the farmers use them to herd sheep in “göngur”. Ask your mom and dad how much horsepower your car has – what does that mean?

Arctic fox: You probably need to go to the mountains to see a fox because they are afraid of people, but it was the only land mammal living in Iceland when the Viking settled here for over a 1000 years ago. The fox eats everything, for example sometimes it eats sheep, so farmers are not fond of the fox, but mostly it eats birds. Once there were three arctic fox farms in the area but today there are none.

What is the home of the fox called? But in Icelandic?

Mink: The mink is small, smooth and is an amazing swimmer. Minks eat almost everything like the fox. There is an Icelandic saying, “Like a mink in a chicken coop” (eins og minkur í hænsnakofa) which means someone is sly and mischievous, does whatever he wants without thinking about the consequences. It’s important that we take good care of nature and keep in mind not to act like “a mink in a chicken coop”.

Seals: Have you heard about the adventures of Snorri the seal? His grandfather grew up right by the Langanes beaches. If you walk along the shores, there’s a chance you’ll see seals poking their heads out of the ocean and greeting people that are walking by. They are incredibly curious creatures. Try whistling or singing and see if any of them pop out of the water. Under their thick skin, there is a layer of fat that helps them stay warm in the cold ocean. On the adventure hunt, you get points if you sing for the seals. On the map, there are several seals in the sea near the places where they like to come ashore.

Birds: During the summer months, the land becomes bustling with activity as migratory birds arrive to lay their eggs and raise their young. Among the summer visitors are loons, plovers, swans, geese, and Arctic terns, plus many more. Carrying a bird guide and perhaps binoculars while exploring the area can be both enlightening and great fun. Furthermore, cliffs are teeming with seabirds like seagulls, auks, fulmars, and guillemots. It’s believed that around 75 bird species breed here regularly. At Skoruvíkurbjarg on Langanes, there is a bird-watching shelter. You can also stop in Finnfjarður at the bird-watching shelter by Finnfjarðará and watch the birds.

Arctic Tern: In the summer, the arctic tern arrives and builds its nest near the shore. It is a migratory bird and travels long distances each year. If you spot one, be watch out as it might swoop down and peck you on the head because it does not want people near its nest and chicks. The arctic tern lays 1-3 eggs and they take 16 days to hatch. When the chicks hatch and start to explore the area, they often venture onto the road, putting themselves in danger. Therefore, it’s incredibly important for those driving near arctic tern nesting sites to exercise extreme caution and drive slowly. If your parents are driving the car, remind them to drive carefully.

Plover: has a long, curved beak that it uses as a tool for food gathering. It is a solitary bird, and half of all plovers in the world breed in Iceland. Plovers arrive in Iceland in early May, and most have departed by September. The plover is a protected species. There is an Icelandic song about the Plover, but do you know any songs about birds? You get points on the adventure hunt for singing a song about birds.

Fulmar: The fulmar is often referred to as the Queen of the Atlantic Ocean, and it is the largest seabird commonly seen around Iceland. When the fulmar dives into the sea for food, it’s known as “a fulmar diving.” The fulmar typically lays its eggs during April and May, with just one egg per clutch. There is an amaz-

TURN THE MAP TO FIND THE ANSWERS

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Fish: The waters surrounding Iceland are home to around 340 fish species and 6 freshwater species, such as salmon, brown trout, arctic char, stickleback, eel and flounder. It is ideal to go fishing on the pier in Þórshöfn (wearing a life jacket of course). The most caught species are cod, anglerfish, catfish, and dab. It’s exciting to see what might take the bait. While anglerfish may neither be considered pretty nor popular, they’re edible, despite common misconceptions. However, the fish has been known to carry parasites like tapeworms, so it’s advisable to release anglerfish back into the sea. Cod, dab, or catfish, on the other hand, make for delicious meals.

Do you know why the haddock has a black stripe on its side? Find the answer!

Salmon: In Pistilfjörður and Bakkafjörður, there are numerous salmon fishing rivers that are popular among anglers. Salmon spawns in rivers, and after hatching, the fry dwells in the river for 1-3 years before migrating to the sea. After spending 1-2 years in the ocean, they return to the rivers. It is believed that salmon find their way back to their home rivers using their sense of smell, which is a thousand times more powerful than the sense of smell in dogs.

Herbs, flowers, and wild crops

Various herbs can be found that can be used for all kinds of purposes. It is recommended to carry a book on the flora of Iceland to look up pictures of the flowers you find along the way. You can also take a photo or draw a picture of the flower and later search for it online or in a book. Some herbs that grow wild in Iceland are used for food or as remedies. Sorrel, angelica, and yarrow are examples of herbs that can be found almost everywhere in the country.

Yarrow has white flowers that cluster tightly on green stems. It grows in the wild areas’ northeast of the country, but around settlements in other parts of the country. Achillea millefolium is yarrow in Latin and the herb is associated with the famous warrior Achilles from the Trojan War. Legend has it that he used the herb to stop bleeding in wounded soldiers. Yarrow can also help with digestive issues, flu, colds, and fever, and today it is commonly used in healing ointments. Yarrow blooms from June into July, and it is recommended to harvest the herb when it is in full bloom.

Mother-of-Thyme: Icelandic thyme has been used for centuries both for medicinal purposes and as a spice. You can make tea from Mother-of-thyme which is said to be good for flu, colds, and various digestive ailments. Mother-of-thyme resembles the herb thyme and is therefore preferred for lamb and poultry meat. It can be harvested throughout the country and is mostly found in dry soils such as sand and moorland.

Harebell: We are very lucky to have harebell in our area, the charming little purple flower that is common in the East but rare elsewhere. Blooming from July to August, the medium-sized harebell has beautiful purple-blue bells. Typically, there’s one to two flowers per stem, though occasionally more. Finding and identifying the harebell earns points in the adventure hunt.

Hiking trails

On the map, five hiking trails are marked: around Rauðanes, up to Frakkagil, to Grenjanes Lighthouse, the path between Skálar and Hrolaugsaðaír, and the trail to Digranesvíti in Bakkafjörður.

Rauðanes is a unique natural treasure located 30 km west of Þórshöfn. There lies a well-marked circular hiking trail, approximately 7 km in total length. The birdlife there is abundant and diverse. “Lundabyggð”, a puffin colony, can be found on several cliffs around the peninsula. Along the shoreline, you can also spot seals, black-backed gulls, and eider ducks. The

panoramic view from Rauðanes is breathtaking, with great view of the moorlands and Þórshöfn on clear days. Hikers are advised to bring water along, as there are no natural springs on the peninsula. Additionally, it’s essential to stick to the designated hiking trails and avoid getting too close to the cliffs. **Frakkagil and Þjófaklettur:** Pistilfjörður, lies Frakkagil ravine, and the intriguing Þjófaklettur, known as Thief’s Cliff. According to legend, French sailors caught stealing sheep, were allegedly hanged here. A shepherd claimed to have witnessed the incident while tending to his flock, as the sailors planned to take the sheep back to their boat. A group of farmers gathered and caught the thieves and took them to the ravine where they were hanged. A grim tale but such events were not uncommon in the old days. You can access the ravine from the main road, it is a brief walk from the farm Brekknakot before reaching the site. It’s important to ask for permission from the landowner before venturing, or you can drive the old road up Óxarfjarðarheiði and walk from there.

Hiking Trail to Grenjanes Lighthouse: Begin from the old Sauðanes Airport, following the path towards the lighthouse. Because of the birdlife in the area, you will have to leave the car by the side of the road next to the airstrip and be sure to close the gate behind you.

Digranes Lighthouse in Bakkafjörður: The hike will take you past Steintún but according to old sources, is believed to be a place of supernatural activity. There are two caves found on the way to the lighthouse, the Farmer’s Cave and the Housewife’s Cave. It was believed that elves lived in these caves, so they are not to be disturbed.

We respect nature. We do not throw garbage or collect bird eggs. We drive only on marked roads and respect the markings of landowners.

Let’s go to the beach!

The shores of Iceland are an endless source of fun and games. The main thing is to be creative and come up with something clever. You can play soccer, beach volleyball, build sandcastles, write your name in the sand, explore the coastline, collect shells, look out for seals, and much more. Maybe you will find a message in a bottle or a treasure the sea has washed up ashore. One fun activity you can do on the beach has a weird Icelandic name, to “fleyta kerlingar” or to “skip old ladies”. This is skipping stones across the water, trying to make them bounce on the surface. We recommend the beaches marked on the map but always remember to approach the shores and the sea with caution.

Þórshöfn Beach: The beach isn’t large, but behind the Search and Rescue building of the area, there is a pleasant and sheltered area where the water is shallow and popular for wading and playing in the sand.

The Beach at Heiði: The beach below the abandoned farm Heiði is a sandy shore with endless possibilities. There is a lot of driftwood along these shores, making it ideal to let your imagination run wild, just make sure to leave things the way you found them. There’s also quite a bit of tern activity, so it’s important to allow them and their young to be undisturbed.

Nowadays, a lot of waste from the ocean washes up on our shores, so we ask everyone who visits there not to leave garbage behind. Plastic and other waste can be hazardous to both life on land and sea and have serious consequences. However, it should be noted that picking up garbage earns points in the Adventure hunt!

Ocean quahog is among the largest shells found in Iceland. The shell is usually white in color under the light brown and glossy outer layer, which darkens with age. Sometimes, you can also find a pink sheen on the shells. You can make all sorts of things out of shells, for example, it’s possible to use them for soy sauce when eating sushi.

Sand clam: was first found in Iceland in 1958 in Skagafjörður. This shell is slightly smaller than the ocean quahog, somewhat elongated, white in color with a dark yellow outer layer. It buries itself in sand and mud, which can cause it to become quite dark in color due to the staining from the mud.

Blue mussel: Also known as mussel, is, as the name suggests, usually blue in color, though the color can vary from purple to dark blue on the outside, often depending on age. The inside of the shell is usually light blue.

Amphipods: These crustaceans, found frequently along the shores of East Iceland, grow to the size of about half a centimeter to two centimeters. Many species feed on amphipods, such as the eider duck. They usually hide under seaweed or stones on the shore, but when the tide comes in, they swim out in search of food. Amphipods can be green, brown, or reddish. They are not popular animals, and it’s not recommended to bring them into the car!

Kelp/Seaweed: Different types of kelp can be found on shores, both alive and washed up. Bladderwrack features air-filled bladders that typically appear in pairs at the top of the seaweed, but they can also form dense rows along the entire length of the plant. It can be dried and used in all kinds of artworks. A fun fact: kelp is often used in medicines and cosmetics.

Driftwood: In earlier times, driftwood that washed ashore was highly prized by farmers and landowners for its uses. While still esteemed today, its utilization has diminished somewhat. People used it for various purposes, such as building houses, boats, furniture, and making fences. It is believed that the driftwood carried here by ocean currents comes all the way from Siberia. The driftwood has traveled a long way and has therefore been soaked in saltwater for a long time. This gives it a natural protection against rot, allowing it to last an incredibly long time. Different types of wood arrive here, such as spruce, white pine, and red oak, but according to folklore, red oak should not be used in shipbuilding because the ship might sink.

Þórshöfn:

The village of Þórshöfn is named after the thunder god Thor. Legend has it that his hammer was buried in the center of Langanes, and therefore the harbor was named after him. There is lots to do in Þórshöfn, there is a large sports hall with indoor swimming pool. A short distance outside the village, a small waterfall can be found in the river Fossá. You can hike there and paddle in the river. In late summer, you can find some berries nearby. A small creek flows past the camping site where you can wade, fish for trout, build dams, or sail boats. Above the camping site, hobby farmers with horses and sheep give place a cozy charm. Exploring the beach, walking along the harbor wall, visiting the viewpoint at Hleinartangi, and fishing from the pier are a few things worth mentioning for you to do.

Hleinartangi: If you walk along Bakkavegur in Þórshöfn, you will come to a viewing platform at Hleinartangi, which is sometimes called Svartiklettur (“Black rock”). Seals can sometimes be seen in the sea there, and you never know, they might pop their heads up if you sing for them.

Bakkafjörður:

Bakkafjörður has a great campsite. There is a playground for children by the old school building. Walking to the lighthouse at Digranes is a beautiful route. Below the store, there is a viewing platform and a lovely beach, perfect for picnics and treasure hunting.

Just outside the village of Bakkafjörður the Hafnará river flows with its little waterfall where you can swim on nice summer days. However, an adult must always be present.

Bakkaá: The largest salmon ever caught with a rod in Iceland was caught in Bakkaá in Bakkafjörður by fisherman Marínó Jónsson. The salmon weighed 43 pounds and measured 130 cm long and was caught with a small fishing rod that was bought at a local gas station. This goes to show that great things are possible even with a small fishing rod.

Djúpílækur in Bakkafjörður: On the Langanes coast near Bakkafjörður, there is an abandoned farm called Djúpílækur. There the poet Kristján from Djúpílækur was born and raised. Kristján contributions to literature have earned him a lasting place in Icelandic literary history. There is a monument dedicated to him near his birthplace, which includes some of his notable works. **Kristján also translated songs for plays and stories. Can you guess which popular children’s play he translated into Icelandic? Find the answer!**

The beach at Djúpílækur: By the memorial of Kistján from Djúpílækur, a path leads down to a beautiful and peaceful sandy beach. It’s an ideal spot for a picnic and go for a swim, collect shells, wade in the sea, and play in the sand. The beach has a diverse birdlife, which should be respected, meaning that taking eggs, chicks, or anything else that interferes with nature, is forbidden. You can explore an old outbuilding near the beach but be careful cause the building is very old.

Draugafoss: Right by the church site at Skeggjastaðir is a waterfall called Draugafoss (“Ghost Waterfall”), but the strangely there is no ghost story to be found about the waterfall. On the adventure hunt, you get points for composing a great ghost story about the waterfall.

Churches

Svalbarðskirkja: This lovely church was built of timber on a stone foundation in 1848. It is easily recognizable because it is black with a red roof. **Sauðaneskirkja:** A rather old church as it was built in 1889. Inside, there is a beautiful altarpiece from 1742. At least once a year, services are held in the church, otherwise Church in Þórshöfn is the main church for the area.

Þórshafnarkirkja: is the youngest church in the area and the largest, accommodating around 160 people. It was consecrated and formally opened in 1999. **Skeggjastaðakirkja:** proudly holds the title of being the oldest church in East Iceland, built in 1845.

Lighthouses:

Lighthouses serve three main purposes: they indicate locations, warn of navigation hazards, and guide ships into harbors. In the past it was the lighthouse keepers’ job to make sure the lighthouses were up and running. Today, most lighthouses are equipped with automated systems, and their lights are powered by solar energy. At the top of the lighthouse, four solar panels capture sunlight during the day. In this area, there are three lighthouses: Grenjanes Lighthouse, Fontur Lighthouse in Langanes, and Digranes Lighthouse near Bakkafjörður.

Fontur: lighthouse was first built in 1910 and then rebuilt in 1914 and again in 1950. It is almost 10 meters (9.3 m), with its light 53 meters above sea level. It is powered by solar energy. **Grenjanes Lighthouse** was built between 1941 and 1944 and is 19 meters high, with its light reaching 25 meters above sea level. **Digranes Lighthouse:** was built between 1944 and 1947 and, like Grenjanes Lighthouse, is 19 meters tall, with its light reaching 28 meters above sea level.

Sauðanesúshús: Located at Sauðanes in Langanes was the old rectory. It hosts a heritage exhibition. This house is one of the oldest stone buildings in Þingeyjarsýsla and was renovated at the end of the last century.

The leader sheep study center: In Svalbarð in Pistilfjörður is a study center dedicated to the leader sheep. The area is known for its sheep and remarkable leader sheep. The center, which offers many fascinating exhibits, is housed in the old community hall where local dances were once held.

Polar bear: In January 2010 a polar bear came ashore in Pistilfjörður and unfortunately it had to be put down. The bear is now stuffed and resides in the school building at Svalbarð. Sometimes, arrangements can be made with the locals to see it. **The writer Jón Trausti:** When driving through Hólfaskarð, you can stop at a viewpoint that offers a great view over Pistilfjörður. There are informational signs about the author Jón Trausti, who was a well-known writer in the early 20th century. He grew up in Melrakkaslétta, which is the setting for his most famous books about Halla and the farmstead on the moor.

Viewpoint at Gunnarsstaðaás: When driving through Pistilfjörður, it’s a good idea to drive up to the viewpoint at Gunnarsstaðaás, which is marked by the highway at the same spot as the farms Laxárdalur and Holt. From there, you can see the entire mountain range surrounding the fjord. In the adventure hunt, you can earn points by identifying and recognizing the mountains.

Viewing Platform at Stóri Karl: At Skoruvíkurbjörg in Langanes, there is an impressive viewing platform that offers a unique opportunity for birdwatching. However, it’s always important to be careful near the cliffs.

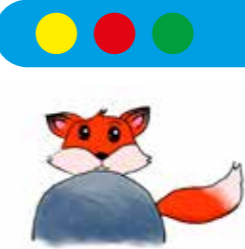
Heiðarfjall in Langanes: Heiðarfjall offers beautiful views, and in clear weather, you can see far in all directions. There is a trail up the mountain where the U.S. military once had a radar station, and traces of it can still be seen.

Skálar: In the past, Langanes was considered an excellent place to live because of its fishing grounds, the cliffs full of eggs, and the abundance of driftwood. Over time, more people moved to urban areas, abandoning their homes and farms. On the eastern side of Langanes lies an old fishing village called Skálar, which was abandoned in 1954. It was once a bustling fishing hub, with fishermen from the Faroe Islands, Netherlands, France, and Britain. The second mechanized freezing plant in Iceland was built in Skálar in 1921. However, landing boats there was difficult, and over the years, storms and naval mines destroyed the harbor, causing the village to be deserted. Today, all the buildings have collapsed, with only a few walls, foundations, and the old pier standing as remnants of the past. Skálar also has an old cemetery. Visitors to Skálar will find signs explaining the functions of the buildings and a map of the village as it once was. You can purchase a brochure about Skálar at the sports center, which is great to have while exploring the abandoned village.

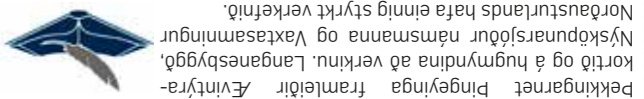
11 English Men: Along the road to Skálar, there is an old wooden cross with the inscription “Here lie 11 English men.” The stories differ slightly in their meaning, but it is believed to mark the burial site of sailors who were shipwrecked near Langanes. On the peninsula, there is a fissure called Engelskjúgá where the sailors are said to have come ashore.

TURN THE MAP TO FIND THE ANSWERS

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Turn the map around and join the Adventure Hunt!



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Hönnun: Hjarfátalag - Prentun: Prentmæt

Sportscenter in Þórshöfn
Langanesveg 18B
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Opening hours
Monday-Friday 08:00-19:30
Weekends 11:00-17:00
Swimming Pool & Gym

Bakkafjörður Camping
in Skólagera
in Bakkafjörði
Þórshöfn Camping
in Miðholt, Þórshöfn
Sauðanesúshús
Bakkafjörður Camping
in Skólagera

KIDS ADVENTURE MAP
Bakkafjörður, Langanes and Pistilfjörður
Adventure hunt