

# THE **REYKJAVÍK GRAPEVINE**

**Special Issue**

Summer 2023

# Best Of Reykjavík

**The  
Reykjavík  
Grapevine  
City Awards**



## **Dining**

Sate your appetite at these certified Best™ eateries

## **Drinking**

Quench your thirst, party hearty and dance the night away

## **Activities**

Do as we say and as we do — we know how to have fun

## **Shopping**

Spend your krónur wisely at Reykjavík's top shops



**SKY LAGOON**  
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# Make Every Moment in Iceland Count

Minutes from the City Centre



REYKJAVÍK  GRAPEVINE

BEST OF REYKJAVÍK



BEST SPA



AN INTRODUCTION

# Best of Reykjavik:



## DINING

8

- + We visit an oasis in the food desert atop Laugavegur
- + Get in your greens with our salad guide

P:18  
P:20



## DRINKING & NIGHTLIFE

20

- + Where do Grapevine staffers tie one on?

P:30

# Smiling In The Sun

It's summertime and the living is easy — especially with this handy guide to all the best shops, restaurants, bars and activities in your pocket.

The coming of summer might have had a few false starts in this part of the North Atlantic, but we've made it. The days are long and bright, the temperatures are ever so slightly warmer than other times of the year and nature is in full bloom, beckoning us all to get outside, explore and drink up the beauty around us (and maybe a cold beverage or two).

Speaking of cold beverages, the staff at the Reykjavik Grapevine have shared their personal favourite spots to grab a drink in this issue. Do the watering holes crowned Best™ by our esteemed panel align with the preferred pubs of our staff? Turn to **page 30** to find out. And then flip back to **pages 18 and 20** for a love letter to the delightful bites at Arabian Taste and our plea for a decent salad in this otherwise burger-laden

town. We're also taking you birdwatching on **page 36** and on a shopping spree on **page 42**. Have fun!

This volume of the Best of Reykjavik is a whole lot of new – with many new winners picked by new panels of picky locals. Panellists contributed their fresh perspectives on the dining, drinking and shopping experiences the city offers and give hot recommendations for the best things to experience in and around town. We've even given space to one Reykjavíkingur who dares question our authority to deem anything "best" (see **page 6**) — we're nothing if not fair.

Give it a read, give it some thought and try out our recommendations. Maybe some of our Bests™ will become some of your new favourites. Let us know. You can find us on our preferred patio, smiling in the sunshine.

**Catharine Fulton**  
Editor in Chief



## ACTIVITIES

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- + How many birds can you spot in Iceland?

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- + Shop til you drop for the best Icelandic design

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# Farmers Market

ICELAND

OUR STORES IN REYKJAVÍK: FARMERS & FRIENDS

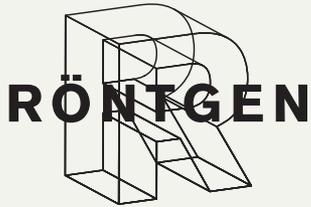


Laugavegur 37



Hólmastlóð 2 / Grandi

[WWW.FARMERSMARKET.IS](http://WWW.FARMERSMARKET.IS)



Hverfisgata 12



Happy hour / 4–7pm

Beer / Wine / Cocktails



# Foreword From A Hater

The annual Best Of Reykjavik magazine is once again upon us. We waited patiently while the Icelandic culture gods debated, argued and fought until they finally came to a consensus. Now, they are ready to bless us with their conclusions.

You might get lucky and see them throughout the streets of Reykjavik, plastering their iconic Best Of Reykjavik stickers on this year's crop of worthy establishments. As their power grew through the years, so did the stickers. What started as cute badges of encouragement have ballooned to multiple square metre crests that you shall never dare take down. Business owners have described a nirvana-like experience of achieving the ultimate goal of covering their windows entirely. They call it "The Blackout." Some were not able to handle it and barricaded themselves inside, refusing to let anybody in, such was the burden.

Let's go back in time. The humble beginnings of the Reykjavik Grapevine's nominations were treated lightly, even with amusement. It was fun. Locals flipped through the pages. "This is cute," they said, with a smirk on their face. "But who are they to tell me anything?"

Fast forward to Iceland becoming the must-visit travel destination. Move over Paris and London, you're old news. Screw off Pyramids. We have Geysir coming through — oh and who is that cool cat with the sunglasses in the back-seat? Well it's just little old Blue Lagoon, of course.

The streets of Reykjavik flooded with travellers searching for something

to do. Lost souls looking for something to eat and drink. Maybe even buy a traditional Icelandic garment. But where should they go?

Thus began the rise of Grapevine's influence.

Not only were they the sole outlet recommending how to spend your time and money in Reykjavik, but they were telling you what the absolute "best" was. They took the power nobody else dared claim. They became the official judge of Icelandic culture. Why them and not some food blogger with the same sense of self confidence?

The answer is twofold. No one challenged the Grapevine. No one questioned their evaluation process. Has there been progress from the early days? While I imagine the staff and various local legends once sat down over a beer and had some fun making a list of things they like, I assume the process is much more sophisticated today. With the weight these awards carry, surely it is. Right?

But let us not forget the part that the people receiving the awards play in this saga. They could have refused to acknowledge the Grapevine as the new rulers of Icelandic taste making. But there is a sinister correlation between the success of a business and being mentioned in this magazine, thus creating a silent agreement between all parties.

But no more, my friends. The revolution has started. Yes, I will be spat on by people on the streets. Yes, I will have to isolate myself from my family to protect them. Am I a martyr, you ask? Your words, not mine.

But if I can get you to open your eyes and read and enjoy this magazine for what it really is — a lovely and well executed recommendation pamphlet and nothing more — then I have achieved my goal.

**Pavel Ermolinski**  
Basketballer, Martyr  
@pavelino15

## THE GUIDE-GUIDE

# How To Spot The Winners

Establishments deemed "best" can be identified by the Grapevine's iconic (Pavel's words, not ours) Best Of Reykjavik stickers, which we distribute in a very tasteful standard size. 🍷



# Icelandic design made in Reykjavík

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1



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1

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2

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# Dining

Remember when everyone became a home baker? Yeah, they didn't make the list

Reykjavík's dining scene has never been more vibrant. Breakfast might prove to be too early for Reykjavík, but get down to local bakeries like Deig or if you are feeling fancy to Tides, and see what a difference a spot of warm grub in the wee hours can do. Lunch offers abound and dinner is ripe for experimentation — be it sampling Pueblan tacos at La Poblana, rediscovering Mat Bar, experiencing Nordic fine-dining at Dill, or tucking into tapas inspired plates at weeks old Skreið or blistering pizzas at BakaBaka. Whatever you fancy, dear gourmands, whatever your proclivities or budgets, our esteemed panel has done the hard work to bring you the best of the best of Reykjavík. Skál!

## Best Bakery



## Sandholt

Laugavegur 36

Amidst the Scandi fever that has firmly gripped Reykjavík bakeries, Sandholt stands tall with its Parisian vibes. Beautiful marble counters piled high with freshly baked goods are a sight to behold, even for the gluten intolerant. Even the less-than-perfect service doesn't seem to dim its popularity, "what can I say? I'm a die-hard loyalist," one panellist confessed. There is hardly a place in town that could hold a candle to Sandholt's croissants, vinarbrauð or legendary sourdough. A current favourite are the new born baby sized, olive oil drunk, warm focaccia — if you're not careful, you could easily eat the whole in one sitting.

### Runners-up



**Brauð & Co.**  
Multiple locations

"They source the best, ethical raw ingredients," notes one panellist privy to the supply chain of Brauð og Co, "and it shows in their bakes." That care and sensitivity shines through the city-wide Danish-style bakery chain and over the past two years they have noticeably addressed their once incoherent QC concerns. Sure, the cinnamon snúður rules the roost, but make room for the granola version, their often warm jammy hjónabandsæla — there are few who make this better — and their weekend special croissants. Other must-do's include the bronzed pretzel croissants and the dense, seeded rye.



**Hygge Coffee & Microbakery**  
Seljavegur 2

Sandholt alumni Þórey Lóvísa's palette skews sweet for some panellists, but it cannot be said enough that she is making some of the prettiest pastries and bakes in the city. Seasonal tarts constructed with house-made jams, frangipane and other fillings are a treat and the pistachio croissant and vegan blueberry danish are set to become classics in their own right.

### Previous Winners

**2022: Sandholt and Deig**  
**2021: Sandholt and Deig**  
**2020: Sandholt**

## Best Burger



## Le Kock

Tryggvagata 14

Le Kock's gourmet tuck-shop burgers aren't too sloppy, nor are they so fine to the point where they're try-hard. No ma'am, these are obscenely tasty burgers that elicit sighs of pleasure and guilt in equal measure. Here is an ode to the OG cheeseburger with crisp toasted buns, perfectly melty cheddar, a juicy patty cooked just right, and pickles and slaw adding fresh crunch. The Trump tower, on the other hand, is an unapologetic double-patty American smash with yellow mustard, a shockingly balanced truffle ketchup and perfectly smashed patties.



## 2 Guys

Hlemmur Square

2 Guys have got us between the bun and patty, and how! Last year's newbies and this year's one of two top dogs, this homage to hip-hop and sweaty burgers are a panel favourite. Each burger is assembled with such precision that it never slides or falls apart. What is particularly striking is that the chef lets the burger truly shine, without the weight of unnecessary frou-frou. A rule they break with aplomb with the candied jalapeno and crushed Dorito studded 2Pac that feels like a levelled up midnight munchie.

### Newcomer



**Beef & Buns**  
Bildshöfði 9

"You guys should venture out to suburbia more," quipped one of our panellists cheekily, before making a case for newcomer Beef & Buns. American smashed burgers continue to reign supreme in popularity and this outpost too pays homage to the lace edged, singed fringed burger. It's a tough world out here for burgers and we fervently wish for this one's continued success.

### Previous Winners

**2022: Le Kock**  
**2021: Yuzu**  
**2020: Le Kock & Hamborgara Bullan**

## Best Coffeehouse



## Reykjavík Roasters

Brautarholt 2

As you'd expect from the name, RR roasts their own beans and makes a mean cup of joe. Roasters have hit upon that perfect balance of Scandi cool vibe without being pretentious, even if their baristas refuse to engage in banter — an expectation oddly reserved for baristas and bartenders. Perhaps it's Scandinavian pain. Despite the absence of small chat, the coffee is third-wave loyal, the teas are brewed to temperature and time perfection, the hot chocolate isn't hot cocoa, the wi-fi is strong for some solitary work or small meetings, and the space large enough for parent-child outings — all of which make for excellent people-watching.

### Runners-up:



**Kaffi Ó-le**  
Hafnarstræti 11

Nostalgically named after a genX cool kids only spot, Kaffi Ó-le in its current avatar firmly looks forward. With its pastel chic interiors that connect to both the 101 Radisson hotel lobby and the streetfront, this urban cafe focuses on precisely roasted and brewed beans (from Kaffibrugg húsið), poured to exacting standards. Several on the panel shared their love for the "city's best matcha latte" as well.



**Kaktus Espresso Bar**  
Vitastigur 12

This cute-as-a-button cafe is the perfect spot to meet a friend for a chilled catch up, or settle in with your laptop for a productive work session. Adorned with cacti (but of course) and plants in the many nooks and crannies, Kaktus feels like a twee urban oasis. The cafe's goal seems to be to please everyone, thus making it one of the few places a coffee snob and a vegan sweet tooth can hang.

### Previous Winners

**2022: Reykjavík Roasters**  
**2021: Reykjavík Roasters**  
**2020: Reykjavík Roasters**

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The Westman Islands. An exhilarating ferry ride to the picturesque harbour, awe-inspiring seafront cliffs lined with puffin nests, the serene sight of grazing sheep, and the rugged volcanic landscape with its dramatic colours – this place exudes magic. If you crave off-the-beaten-path adventure, you need to visit the Westman Islands.



**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2023**

# Dining

Iceland's not cheap, so it had better be good

**Best Goddamn Restaurant**

Joint winners



## Austur-Indíafjelagið

Hverfisgata 56

It doesn't matter if you are new to Indian cuisine or a seasoned consumer of curries, this place welcomes you with its warm embrace of Indian teak coffered ceilings, antique bronze and vermilion hued artwork on the walls. While we've shared our love of their tandoori meats, old-timers know that it is the hariyali salmon that is the dark horse. And if you haven't yet experienced the joy of a biryani, render that to the past stat. This is a restaurant where there is more to discover with each visit, and the exemplary service ensures you keep going back.



## La Primavera

Grandagarður 20

It's no surprise that the best goddamn restaurants in town would be the stalwarts of Reykjavik. With views overlooking the bustling old harbour and Harpa in the distance, La Primavera is a sly old creature that is always delightful. No matter what time of day or year you dine here, you're sure to have peak season ingredients, handled with the devotion of someone who deeply understands that good produce needs so little. So whether it's rare legumes like roveja from northern Italy, is-it-a-rose or salad conundrum of pink radicchio or the many pasta dishes, Primavera's food is only matched by its service.



## Skál

Hlemmur Mathöll, Laugavegur 107

With a revamped menu and a drinks programme to match, Skál continues to be the small place with a big heart; its food hall location is no deterrent for their die-hard patrons. This year we've enjoyed their ice-cold scallops, served sliced, in their shell. Sometimes, thin slices of rutabaga are tucked between them, others there is crimson granita of tart berries. Always refreshing. Then there are the fried shrimp heads with a punchy aioli. The steadfast beets, and butter bathed trout. A crisp glass of mineral natural wine alongside and you've got yourself a banger of a meal each and every time.

**Best Place for a Fancy Meal**



## Dill

Laugavegur 59

Now with a green star in addition to their Michelin star, Dill has steadfastly steered the country's culinary ship towards a future firmly rooted in its traditions. Chef Gunnar Karl's dedication to sustainable kitchen practices is more than laudable generally, but even more so in the context of fine dining. Utilising vegetables and protein in their entirety, the menu is a celebration of the whole, eschewing dining diktats that no two proteins are repeated in one meal. For a true taste of Icelandic hospitality, Dill is where you need to be, special occasion or not.

Runners-up



Tides

**The Reykjavik Edition, Austurbakki 2**  
The Edition has managed to lure the reclusive Reykjaviking into its fold, proving to be the 'it' spot. The gorgeously designed restaurant is more than mere luxury. "The fat was rendered so skilfully in the Iberian ham, and so well cooked, I could taste it long after the meal," cooed a very satisfied panellist. The mocktails are as good as their cocktails and while the wine menu is priced fairly steep, you're bound to find a number you wouldn't elsewhere.



**Sumac Grill + Drinks**

**Laugavegur 28**  
Walking into Sumac recalls being on food streets in warmer places elsewhere around the world. The open grill lends its smokiness to more than just the food and the buzz of happy guests make for a vibrant evening out that is both fancy yet curiously laid-back. Especially popular with big groups, it's best to approach the food here as a meze and order a little bit of everything. The flatbreads are the one sore spot in their otherwise flavour-some menu.

Previous Winners

- 2022: Dill
- 2021: Dill
- 2020: Grillið

**Best Value for Money**



## Deig

Tryggvagata 18

Deig's "poor man's offer" has been the offer to beat for some time. They recently upped their price to 1500 ISK for a toasted and filled bagel of your choice, plus a doughnut and drink. Available only on weekdays from 10am onwards, the price rise hasn't affected the quality on offer. While the offer alone is tempting, the panel urges you to try one of their special bagels for the princely sum of 1700 ISK. It's a steal on this rocky, windy, expensive as heck island.

Runners-up



**Icelandic Street Food Lækjargata 8**

A family-run business built on their amma's recipes, this establishment has been meeting that "taste of Iceland" craving that many travellers have. Unlimited refills of soups — both of the fish and lamb variety are on offer — and that sweet deal is best topped off with a slice of their "happy marriage cake." Our astute panel does note that seasoning is not always their forte, but a quick sprinkling of salt usually does the trick.



**Flatus Skúlagata 28**

It's undeniable that Reykjavik is expensive. But if you dig a little deeper you'll find attractive deals like the beer and pizza lunch at Flatus for 2000 ISK. A 10" pizza, frosty beer, views over Esja. What's not to like?

Previous Winners

- 2022: Deig
- 2021: Sægrefinn
- 2020: Icelandic Street Food



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# Dining

It's not all shark and sheephead

## Best Family Restaurant



## Osushi

Tryggvagata 13

Like many curious things about Iceland, sushi has managed to become a common culinary love easily shared between generations. A firm panel favourite, what makes Osushi tick is that it is “perfect for the younger kids who love sushi, to the teen who still likes going out with the parents.” The sushi is freshly rolled before being sent out on the conveyor belt, which means there is zero waiting time before everyone can tuck into their favourite bite. The staff is attentive and is happy to entertain their young guests’ many requests, be it wanting mochi ice cream before dinner, or sending out those mango hosomaki stat.

### Runners-up



#### Hornið Hafnarstræti 15

Hornið has been around so long now that chances are you went there as a child and you’re taking your own kids there now. One of the first to introduce Italian food to Icelanders, this restaurant knows that pasta is a secret comfort food and they cater to this nostalgia with unabashed pleasure. Think Italy by way of Iceland. And the pizzas are an ode to simplicity. Sure, rings of raw onion may sometimes mysteriously appear on a pie, and the service can sometimes seem harried, but Hornið remains ideal for when nothing but the comfort of familiarity will do.



#### Jómfrúin Lækjargata 4

“You wouldn’t think that a Danish smorrebrauð place would be super child friendly, but Jómfrúin not only is, but is also accommodating of picky eaters,” mused a panellist. “I’ve been a regular for over six years now,” added another, “and from my 70-something grandmother, to my teenagers, there is something for everyone. But the attentive service and genuine consideration for kids is what makes this a hidden gem for families.” How can we argue with testimonies like that?

### Previous Winners

2022: Kaffi Lækur  
2021: Osushi  
2020: Hamborgarafabrikkan

## Best Vegan Meal

Joint winners



## Hnoss

Harpa, Austurbakki 2

While chef Fanny Dora’s legendary smoked carrot dish inspired copycats everywhere, she herself has moved onto focussing her attention to showcasing vegetables and legumes front and centre at her Harpa restaurant, Hnoss. This is one of a handful of restaurants that borrow from non-European cuisines, successfully marrying them with Icelandic produce. Take the grilled miso rutabaga, for instance. Hefty chunks of this often overlooked vegetable is marinated with savoury Japanese miso, then branded on the grill; the smokiness a lovely foil to the spicy peanut-sesame-chilli based sauce at once recalling both West African stews and South Indian chutneys. The Omnom praline cake is perhaps “the most sumptuous dessert in town right now,” gushed our panellist dreamily. This is food both vegans and non-vegans can enjoy heartily.



## Fönix

Bildshöfði 12

Long before the city caught up to vegan dishes, let alone full-fledged menus, Fönix was the first to have a menu dedicated entirely to vegan classics at their industrious industrial outpost, a secret many kept to themselves and with good reason. The vegan mapo tofu overshadows the original, the darkly sweet braised eggplant arrives blistering hot, their velvety slinkiness perfect to scoop over rice. The dumplings are hand-pleated parcels of love, stuffed with glass noodles and chewy wood ears and shitake, a wonderful juxtaposition of texture and flavour. Don’t sleep on Fönix. Here you’ll find no battered cauliflowers pretending to be chicken in sight.

### Previous Winners

2022: Sono Matseljur  
2021: Sono Matseljur  
2020: Vegnaes (RIP)

## Best Brunch



## Brút

Pósthússtræti 2

The brunch at Brút is so of-the-moment chic that makes it worth waking up early-ish on a weekend. Brút shakes things up by leaning into that fresh, good for you energy without any of the crystal healing vibe. There is a salad for every preference, a couple of warm dishes, often an excellently prepared fish, plenty of fruit juices, mimosas and cocktails, and always something thoughtful for the vegan too. It’s at the dessert table that Brút loses their mind and there are whole cakes running the gamut from cheesecakes and pies to tarts and macarons.

### Runner-up



#### Hnoss Harpa, Austurbakki 2

Hnoss channels generosity of spirit, transforming into a laid-back yet elegant family-friendly brunch over the weekend with long rows of fresh salads, steamy soup, fried to order eggs and a house-made dessert table often surrounded by eager kids and adults alike. What sets Hnoss apart from the other brunches besides the usual suspects is their love for Icelandic classics.

### Newcomer



#### The Roof Bryggjugaata 6

If a decadent location is non-negotiable for your brunch pals, then The Roof is certain to please. With a large wrap-around terrace, floor to ceiling windows and breathtaking views, this is a place that impresses even before the food arrives. “Perfect for a hangover,” the menu is very American — there are crispy waffles, stacked with fried chicken and eggs, avocado toast and mac and cheese. The boozy milkshakes are “slightly strange at first, but mad delicious once you try them.” This isn’t a hurried affair but a fashionable brunch lightened with the playful menu.

### Previous Winners

2022: Coccoo’s Nest (RIP)  
2021: Coccoo’s Nest (RIP)  
2020: The Coccoo’s Nest (RIP)



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Gallery

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# — Brút —

Food and Wine

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STAR  
WINE  
LIST  
OF THE  
YEAR

REYKJAVÍK GRÁPEVINE

REYKJAVÍK GRÁPEVINE

BEST OF REYKJAVÍK

BEST OF REYKJAVÍK

2023

2023

BEST SEAFOOD

BEST BRUNCH

## BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2023

# Dining

Fun fact: Iceland derives its name from our love of ice cream

### Best ice cream



## Skúbb

Laugarásvegur 1

When asked for their top choice for best ice cream, panels old and current have been unanimous in their love for Skúbb's creamy treats. "I'm in love with their espresso — nice, clean flavours," said one. Is it simply the deliciousness of their ice creams, or the straightforward simplicity of flavours, or their commitment to values that shines through that have made them a consistent winner? It's all of the above and consistency. Skúbb's scoops haven't succumbed to cutting corners in the run up to popularity. They use BioBu's milk for all their dairy-based scoops, and whatever on offer is bound to knock your socks off. The sorbets are bursts of pure fruit and the vegan flavours give stiff competition to their dairy-based brethren. Skúbb, we love you.

### Runners-up



#### Gæta Gelato Aðalstræti 6

From the moment they opened their doors, Gæta quickly became the name on everyone's lips for authentic Italian gelato. Our astute panel did note that their gelato has in recent times become sweeter than it used to be. But that shouldn't deter one from the excellent gelato here. Nut forward flavours rule the roost, although store attendants do confess that the local palate skews sweet (perhaps that is what they are addressing?) with their soft spot for salted caramel and Oreo cookie flavours. Seasonal flavours are aplenty at Gæta, so when mango season strikes, that is the one to try. Recently they've taken to offering cannoli and twee krikri gelato cones as well.



#### Ísbúð Vesturbæjar Hagamei 67

Chocolate dipper, blitzer of candy streaked bragðarefur and the one-stop shop for all the essentials needed for a good ol' ísbíltur is local haunt, and neighbourhood jaunt Ísbúð Vesturbæjar. If you really want a sneak peek into the Icelandic psyche, the ice cream shop is where it's at — a childhood treat of simple vanilla soft serve, swirled into that papery cone becomes the vehicle for a veritable spread of dippings and toppings. For a true taste of the local, hit up this institution.

### Previous Winners

2022: Skúbb  
2021: Skúbb  
2020: Skúbb

## Best Seafood

### Joint winners



## Fish Company

Vesturgata 2a

For over a decade now, Fiskfélagið has been delighting diners with their fresh-off-the-boat, bonkers good seafood. Whether it is the shrimp-langoustine salad that has gained cult status amongst lunch goers, or their elegant sushi, or the achingly good cod and ling prepared in a multitude of ways, Fiskfélagið always delivers. "I can't remember ever having a bad meal there," echoed many of our panelists. And with good reason, too. This restaurant seems to attract the very best talent and it has managed to stand tall in a sea of restaurants all peddling similar fare.



## Brút

Pósthússtræti 2

In their small yet mighty menu, Brút showcases the best seafood that Iceland has to offer. Just the sheer variety — from char to cod, monkfish to haddock, scallops to sea snails — is a celebration of the bounty of the sea. No matter what you choose, each dish is carefully prepared in a thoughtful fashion that effortlessly converts even the stoic seafood reluctant. Even skate haters turn into skate lovers — and if that isn't high praise, then it's time you go see what the fuss is about for yourself. The award-winning wine list spans the globe.

### Runner-up



#### Fiskmarkaðurinn Aðalstræti 12

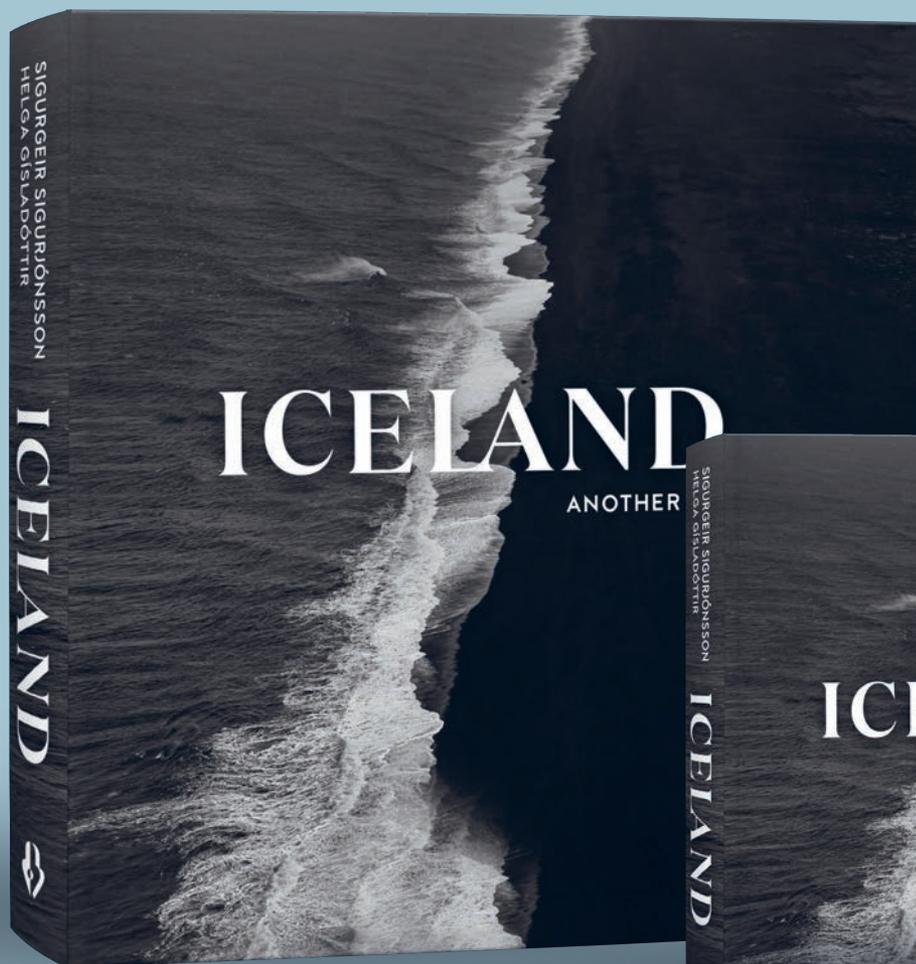
Fiskmarkaðurinn may have undergone several changes to their menu over the years, but what remains steadfast is the presence of the lightly salted cod with apples and their robata grilled salmon. The portions here aren't dainty like their sushi. Instead, these are hearty cuts of high quality fish that truly reflect local seafaring traditions.

### Previous Winners

2022: Fiskfélagið  
2021: Fiskfélagið  
2020: Fiskfélagið



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**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2023**

# Dining

At this point we're just waiting for a viking-themed foodhall. Working title: Foodhalla

**Best Food Hall**



## Hlemmur Mathöll

Laugavegur 107

What Hlemmur Mathöll lacks in size, it makes up for in the quality of its establishments. The OG, it is precisely its size and careful curation of cuisines on offer that underlines its cool-beyond-trends vibe. While other mathölls are dealing with deafening decibels and toe-tripping crowding, Hlemmur is still a comfortable haunt. From uber cool Skál to truly Danish smorrebrauð at Tivoli, to the champagne selection at Kröst, hearty Vietnamese pho or some Napoli pizza by Flatey, this is the best place to sample a cross-section of Icelandic restaurant fare without having to worry about reservations and wait lists. We still miss the fresh produce stand, if that could be brought back, it'd be golden, baby.

**Newcomers**



**Pósthús Mathöll**  
Pósthússtræti 5

The cross stitch art on the wall says "Sorry, this is yet another food hall" — but that brash declaration belies the selection on offer at Pósthús. "Cannot get enough of the heritage details of this place," cooed our panellist. Reykjavík's youngest mathöll is perhaps the prettiest, too. Once a post office, now a refurbished food hall, the room by room layout allows guests to meander and discover for themselves the broad selection on offer. Moving beyond the now tired formula of the usual suspects offering the trifecta of sameness — burger, pizza and some insipid "Asian," Pósthús gives one hope that perhaps ambition in the F&B industry isn't dead yet. There is fresh pasta at Enoteca, fun drinks at Drykk, fresh sushi and poke bowls at Djúsi Sushi and Indian food via Scandinavia at Funky Bhangra.



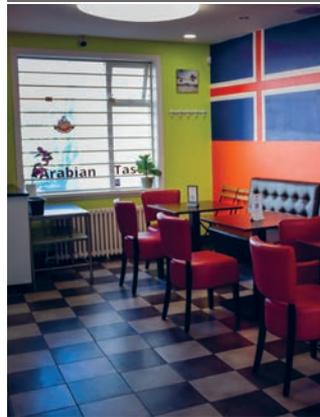
**Hafnartorg Gallery**  
Geirsgata 17

The design of this mathöll left our panel split between "cushy comfy" to "sport bar vibe" to "airport lounge" — it's a good thing we are the food panel and not the design panel. The aesthetics aside, what seemed to win the panel over was the selection of food on offer , proximity to ample parking and the comfortable seating. Hrefna Sætran's behind La Trattoria, an Italian restaurant, there is Brand, by the same team as Bál, Mexican tacos at Fuego, NY style slices, and a poke bar.

**Previous Winners**

2022: Borg 29  
2021: Hlemmur Mathöll

**Best Late Night Bite**



## Arabian Taste

Laugavegur 87

"The service is so friendly!" seems to be the common refrain one hears about Arabian Taste. The Syrian family-run restaurant has been channelling their pain into joy for us on their plates of torpedo lookalike kibbeh — pounded bulghur wheat stuffed with spiced minced meat, deep fried to crusty goodness — smokey lamb kebabs, spectacular baba ghanoush and fresh tabbouleh. We strongly recommend getting a side of pickles, and some extra spicy sauce alongside your falafel wrap. Late nights don't translate to a grift here; the family is all smiles no matter the time of day.

**Runner-up**



**Devitos**  
Laugavegur 126

Even bad pizza is good pizza and Devitos is better than bad, it's good. Another staple of the Icelandic late night bites for over 25 years, this place is sure to sort you out at the end of a long shift at the hotel or a long line at the bar bathroom. Now stop your yapping and grab a slice with pepperoni, pineapple and cream cheese like a real native.

**Previous Winners**

**Renewed category**

**Best Newcomer**



## Óx

Laugavegur 55

After a few years as a speakeasy restaurant tucked away inside another restaurant, Óx has grown wings and leaves its old nest behind, with a newly minted Michelin star in tow, and has moved to a new location further up the high street. The sense of arrival is intact as a non-descript graffiti'd wall spares no hints as to the gastronomic delights awaiting diners inside. A speakeasy bar, named in honour of chef Þráinn Freyr's grandmother, Ammadon, is the sort of welcome that is a sign of all good things that are yet to come. Now seating 16, the new space is ambitious and the food just as memorable. Reykjavík fine dining has arrived, and how.

**Runners-up**



**Fröken Reykjavík Kitchen & Bar**  
Lækjargata 12

"Didn't expect anything and was pleasantly surprised," has been the consistent feedback about Fröken, Reykjavík's newest restaurant. Housed in the new Íslandshotel, the art deco flourishes carry on from the lobby to the restaurant. Perhaps it is a sign of a booming economy, or the post-pandemic longing for beauty, but restaurant decor has firmly moved away from industrial grunge-chic to plush velours and gilded accents. The menu may sound like usual suspects, but the delivery is near-perfect.



**Funky Bhangra**  
Pósthússtræti 5

Indian-ish burgers? That's exactly what Yesmine Olsson's Funky Bhangra does. Inspired by India by way of Sweden, this mathöll restaurant sets its sights firmly on Northern Indian cuisine and is loosely based on chaat flavours. The popular burgers are lamb or vegetarian, served with a mint chutney, fried papads and raita. The grilled skewers of meat are rather delicious too.

**Previous Winners**

2022: Brut  
2021: Dragon Dimsum  
2020: Makake (RIP)

# Dining

## The Grapevine Recommends

Hungry for some more best of the best? We got you.

We've done something a little different in this edition of Best Of Reykjavik, morphing some of our dining categories into these quick and snappy Grapevine Recommends lists. It's a quick and easy way to see what's Best™.

The Reykjavik Grapevine heartily recommends these hot spots, as determined by our expert dining panel. Go try them all back-to-back-to-back (to back-to-back-to-back) for the most delicious day of your life.

### Best Vegan Burger



#### Kröst

Hlemmur Mathöll

Runners-up

**Yuzu**, Multiple locations  
**Le Kock**, Tryggvagata 14

Previous Winners

**2022: Yuzu**  
**2021: Junkyard**  
**2020: Bio Borgari (RIP)**

### Best Pizza



#### BakaBaka

Bankastræti 2

Runner-up

**Flatey**, Multiple locations

Newcomer

**Pizza Popolare**, Pósthússtræti 5

Previous Winners

**2022: Flatey**  
**2021: Flatey**  
**2020: Flatey**

### Best Indian



#### Austur-Indíafjelagið

Hverfisgata 56

Runners-up

**Gandhi**, Bergstaðastræti 13  
**Hraðlestin**, Multiple locations

Previous Winners

**2022: Austur-Indíafjelagið**  
**2021: Austur-Indíafjelagið**  
**2020: Austur-Indíafjelagið**

### Best Thai



#### Ban Thai

Laugavegur 130

Runners -up

**Krua Thai**, Skólavörðustígur 21  
**Mai Thai**, Laugavegur 118

Previous Winners

**2020: Ban Thai**  
**2019: Ban Thai**  
**2018: Ban Thai**

### Best Chinese



#### Fine

Rauðarárstígur 33

Runners-up

**Fönix**, Bildshöfði 12  
**Fine Take-Away**, Helluhraun 22,  
Hafnarfjörður

Previous Winners

**2022: Fine**  
**2021: Fine**  
**2020: Fine**

### Best Sushi



#### Umami Sushi + Bar

Borgartún 29

Runners-up

**Sushi Social**, Þingholtsstræti 5  
**Fiskmarkaðurinn**, Aðalstræti 12

Previous Winners

**2022: Fishmarket**  
**2021: Sushi Social**  
**2020: Sushi Social & Osushi**



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LATE NIGHT NOSHING

# An Oasis In The Food Desert

Arabian Taste sets the bar for Middle Eastern street food in Reykjavík

Words: **Ragnar Egilsson** Photo: **Art Bicnick**

Laugavegur may technically run all the way up to Krínglumýrabraut, but the top part of the street is traditionally considered to be the stretch running from Vitastígur to the bus terminal turned food hall Hlemmur. That part of the street has never been known for its breathtaking culinary offerings, but the tourist

boom has seen the area take a real steep dive into exploitative feeding troughs for weary travelers. The exceptions are Eiríksson Brasserie for splurge dining, Nebraska for natural wine sipping and, last but not least, the succulent Syrian takeaway at Arabian Taste.

## Taking the lead

The other two well-known Middle Eastern street food spots in Reykjavík have unfortunately taken a dip (and not of the hummus variety), albeit for different reasons. Mandi has suffered a significant blow to its image due to legal shenanigans of one of the founders and Zorbian simply suffers from inconsistent quality. Meanwhile, Arabian Taste has overtaken its rivals in terms of quality and care and are killing it in the street food category, without slashing into the old Apple Wallet.

Though the initial idea for this article had been to sample each of the spots atop Laugavegur, the cacophony of tacky fonts, absentee service and cringy tourist baiting sent me fleeing into the welcoming arms of Arabian Taste. The moment I walked in, I was greeted by a symphony of sizzling meats and a pungent wallop of fenugreek and friendly staff ready to help me navigate their impressive range of Middle Eastern street food.

## Pico de Canoush

After perusing the menu for a few minutes, I settled on one of my favourite comfort foods in Reykjavík at the moment, the lamb arayes maria (the other two being the tomato soup at Anna Jóna and the mezze platter at Fröken Reykjavík). Arayes are something I mostly associate with Lebanese food but the folks at Arabian Taste have put a hearty spin on it. Each grilled pita pocket is dripping with fat Icelandic lamb and melted cheese, served with fries and two sauces. Your mind will thank you for it, even if your body may have some concerns.

Another standout is their chicken shawarma, which has the most tender and satisfying

chicken in town along with tahini sauce and a mix of lettuce and red cabbage. It's not reinventing the wheel but it will help you roll out of the shop with a smile on your face.

On the vegetarian end of the spectrum we have a baba ganoush that's unlike any that I've tried before, instead of a creamy purée of eggplant, we get something closer to a smokey pico de gallo or an Italian caponata. A finely diced medley of vegetables and vinegar where the eggplant couldn't really be said to be in the starring role. While it was a bit unexpected, it was also completely delicious. Definitely give it a shot, especially if you don't like the usual baby-food-textured baba ganoush.

The only (very minor) point against Arabian Taste is that I would have liked more herbs in the falafel to boost them up with a green tang and a more peppery flavour. That said, the falafel texture is a cut above most others you will get in Iceland.

## The bottom line

Arabian Taste is much better than it needs to be in an area that can really use it. The food is full-flavoured and satisfying, the service is excellent, the portions are generous and the atmosphere is warm and inviting. What more do you need? 🍴



BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2023  
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**NOT TO BRAG ..... BUT :)**





**GREEN GUIDE**

# Sometimes You Just Want A Salad

The Grapevine guide to getting your greens in Reykjavik

Words: **Catharine Fulton** Photos: **Art Bicnick**

Travel can take a toll on your resolve to get in your recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables. Long days of touring are so easily fuelled by roadside fare. But after days of burgers and fries and hotdogs and gas station sandwiches, the body craves real food with real nutrients. Sometimes it just craves a big ol' salad.

Here are some spots in 101 we go to for our daily dose of greens.

**Vegan World Peace**  
Aðalstræti 2



After an extended closure for repairs, Vegan World Peace is open

once again – it’s particularly convenient since it’s directly below Grapevine HQ – and serving up a selection of salads. I’m partial to the Bean Salad (2.150 ISK), a nice base of mixed greens, topped with lightly roasted crispy bell pepper, carrots, cucumber, tomato, avocado, cashews, edamame, green beans and tofu. A bean curd dressing is served on the side so the diner can dictate how much they want to add to their veg. In short, it’s a delightful lunch.

**Sólón Islandus**  
Bankastræti 7a



The Sólón Salad is a fine salad. At 3.990 ISK, it’s also the most expensive on this list by a fair margin. Still, a bed of baby romaine, topped with pickled tomatoes, cucumber, apples and roasted walnuts is a dependably tasty combo. The lemon dressing is nice, but, again, should be asked for on the side if you’re a control freak like us, who want a very precise dressing-to-salad ratio.

**Laundromat Café**  
Austurstræti 9

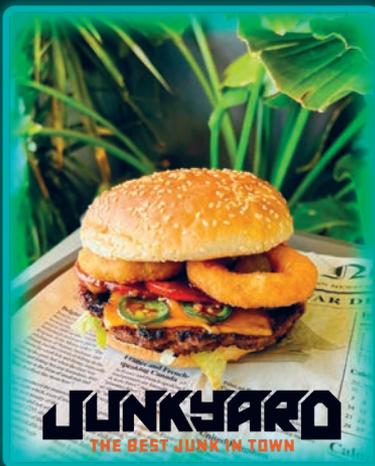


The Quinoa Salad (2.899 ISK) at Laundromat is a heartier take on a salad, with the greens mixed in with red quinoa, seeds and rye bread croutons. It’s lightened up by the added green veggies and avocado. The cranberry and hibiscus dressing is delicious, but the last bites of the salad are sometimes swimming in it, so ask for a sparing amount if you want your salad crisp to the last bite. Laundromat is also a great place to go if you’re dead set on a salad, but your travel companions want a burger or anything else with a hearty side of french fries.

**Gló**  
Austurstræti 17



It was a happy day when Gló re-opened a 101 outpost in mid-May. Though it’s a takeaway spot tacked on to the 10-11 convenience store, I’ll take it! In fact, I’ll take a Vegan Bowl (2.231 ISK), with mixed greens, crispy broccoli, roasted sweet potato, quinoa, hummus and roasted coconut shavings, thanks. Gló is also a great spot to grab pre-made breakfast bowls and fresh-pressed juices to keep the vitamins flowing throughout the day. 🥗



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**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2023**

# Drinking

Some people drink to forget, we drink to remember. Remember what? We forget

The crème de la crème. The cherry on top. It's the best of drinking and nightlife. Carefully imbibe every word you read on these pages as the gospel itself. Bask in its glory. Please do not send unsolicited criticism to grapevine@grapevine.is. We beg you.

Having sat down with a panel of expert beer drinkers, wine connoisseurs and all-around people in the know, we've compiled the absolute greats of contemporary Reykjavík watering holes. Do the Grapevine special and try them all in one night, only to wake up with a hangover that'll last you until next season's Best Of.

**Best Goddamn Bar**



## Röntgen

Hverfisgata 12

For the third year in a row, Röntgen claims the prize of the Grapevine's Best Goddamn Bar. A unanimous choice by the panel, there's simply nothing else that competes with Röntgen's comprehensive atmosphere. Whether you're looking for a relaxing weekday drink or a full-on weekend party, Röntgen has it all. "There's some kind of a magnet that draws me to it," one panellist said. "They also attract a good mixture of locals and tourists, which makes for an interesting atmosphere," said another panellist. Röntgen's all-encompassing glory continues to dominate the Reykjavík bar scene.

**Runners-Up**



**Lemmy**  
Austurstræti 20

Ian Kilmister, in memoriam. This irreverent theme bar, known for its DJ/drummer combo nights earned a special nod from the panel. "I love this bar because they are so accommodating and ambitious," said a panellist. "In the summertime, there's a backyard stage, Freddi Arcade has moved in there and they even have an aquarium. It's a no-pressure environment," said another. "They always have something going on. There's a real consistency."



**12 Tónar**  
Skólavörðustígur 15

Record store-gone-café, 12 Tónar's owners Einar and Lárus will make you feel like a regular, even if it's only your first time. "It's absolutely my favourite place in town," chimed one panellist. With a good selection of beer on tap, they also host regular DJ nights and a summer concert series. "The outdoor patio is fantastic when the sun's up," chimed one panellist.

**Previous Winners**

**2022: Röntgen**  
**2021: Kaffibarinn**  
**2020: Kaffibarinn**

**Best Wine Bar**



## Vinstúkan Tíu sopar

Laugavegur 27

Tucked away in the cellar of Laugavegur 27 is Vinstúkan 10 Sopar. Vinstúkan has a wide selection of natural wines, as well as lavish French vintages. Offering not only great wine but greater customer service, Vinstúkan 10 Sopar claims the prize again as the best wine bar. If you're not sure what you like, go ahead and ask the owner and head bartender Steinar for a recommendation. "I feel like I'm in safe hands whenever I'm there," confessed a panellist. You can even snag a great deal on a full bottle, as Vinstúkan imports their own.

**Runners-up:**



**Aperó Vinbar**  
Laugavegur 20b

A Grapevine favourite, Aperó is a French-inspired wine bar, utilising the latest in wine technology to offer its patrons an exquisite experience. "It's so cool what they do there. Each wine is stored in a specific closet, with a specific temperature," one panellist reports. If you're hungry, they also offer food that pairs well with your drink of choice. If you're missing that continental European feel, go to Aperó.



**Bodega**  
Týsgata 9

Claiming the spot as the best bar for outdoor drinking, Bodega is tucked away from the hustle and bustle of Laugavegur partying. "It's a serious wine place," a panellist said. And serious it is. Serving wine from all over the globe, Bodega is also a fantastic place for outdoor drinking, as per the panel's deliberation. Don't forget to have a little snack with your drink while you're there.

**Previous Winners**

**2022: Vinstúkan Tíu sopar**  
**2021: Vinstúkan Tíu sopar**  
**2020: Port 9**

**Best Craft Bar**



## Session Craft Bar

Bankastræti 14

Catering to seasoned craft beer veterans as well as lightweights who only want a Coors Light, Session is the place to be. "Session is an accessible place to visit as a group. If I'm in the mood, I can treat myself to a nice craft beer. But they also have good lagers," said one panellist. Its colourful selection of beers offers a good overview of the breweries around Reykjavík, as well as the Danish brewery Mikkeller. "It's good for beer nerds, but also people who just want to take it easy and play board games," said another panellist.

**Runners-up:**



**Microbar**  
Nýbýlavegur 8 (Kópavogur)

The panel didn't confine itself to the drinking scene in downtown Reykjavík — Microbar is also located in Kópavogur. "Microbar has very nice vibes. Comfortable lighting and a great range of beers," a panellist said. The first craft bar in Reykjavík, Microbar offers beers from all over the world, with a special focus on the owner's brewery, Gæðingur. If you want a mix of both international and local craft beers, Microbar's got you covered.



**Skúli Craft Bar**  
Aðalstræti 9

Near Alþingi, on Fógetatorg — sheriff's square — is Skúli, with its entrance tucked quietly away in a small alley. Named after the OG Icelandic entrepreneur, Skúli fógeti, whose centre of operations was on Aðalstræti, it's a fantastic spot for craft beers. Having been one of the vanguards of the Icelandic craft beer culture, Skúli serves both local and international brews. It's certainly a spot you mustn't miss on your craft beer quest.

**Previous Winners**

**2022: Session Craft Bar**  
**2021: Session Craft Bar**  
**2020: BrewDog**

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**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2023**

# Drinking

Pro-tip: Try the drinks!

**Best Sports Bar**



## Reykjavík Sportbar

Hverfisgata 40

As far as sports bars go, the panel all agreed that this bar was the perfect spot. You can watch the game with the lads, have a drink with the lads, and even brush up on your pool skills with the lads. “When I visit a sports bar, I want screens, I want a pool table. I want a sports bar to have a specific atmosphere, and this place delivers,” a panellist said. With their selection of various activities — think pool, foosball, darts and the like — Reykjavík Sportbar caters to sports enthusiasts and non-fans alike.

Runners-up



**Just Wingin' It Snorrabraut 56**

Starting out in Garðabær, Just Wingin' It has branched out to Snorrabraut. Although technically a restaurant, the place is great for a main dish of beer with a side of wings. And sports? Well, they got that. “There are screens everywhere. At one point I was watching the NBA, NFL and the Premier League all at the same time,” said one panellist. “There was a crazy amount of energy.”



**American Bar Austurstræti 8**

The bar of the free, and the bar of the brave. Don't let the giant statue of Uncle Sam scare you away — he's just there to recruit you into day drinking. American Bar screens all manner of sports, offers a good selection of draft and bottled beer, and features Reykjavík partygoers' favourite pastime, the Wheel of Fortune. With its overall atmosphere and focus on sports, American Bar deserves a mention.

Previous Winners

2022: American Bar  
2021: American Bar  
2020: American Bar

**Best Bar to Start the Night**



## 12 Tónar

Skólavörðustigur 15

12 Tónar brings the concept of the duality of man to the Reykjavík nightlife scene. One part of you wants to chill out and drink beer with some good friends. The other needs a place to pregame before going all out. “You can sort of choose whether you go partying or take it easier,” said one panellist. “You're sent straight to the middle of the atmosphere and get all riled up,” contrasted another. As mentioned previously, this record store-cum-bar hosts all manner of music events, ramping up its claim for the best bar to start the night.

Runners-up



**Bió Paradís Hverfisgata 54**

Is it strange to call a cinema a bar? It doesn't need to be, as Bió Paradís was one of the first cinemas in Iceland to start serving alcohol in its concession. You don't even need to see a movie. “Going there for drinks is a very romantic idea,” said a panellist. “It's an extremely vibey place. What's better than popcorn and beer?” asked another. We can't think of anything.



**Veður Klappartígur 33**

Veður is a nice middle-ground for all sorts of people to come together at the start of the night. There always seems to be enough space, as Veður also has downstairs seating, accessible by a wheelchair lift. They offer exquisite cocktails and if you're there during happy hour (19:00-21:00), be prepared to down a few before you start your partying, or just enjoy your company, chatting the night away.

Previous Winners

2022: Jungle Cocktail Bar  
2021: Kaldi  
2020: Veður

**Best Bar to End the Night**



## Kiki Queer Bar

Laugavegur 22

No need to debate this one. Kiki received a unanimous vote on the best bar to end the night. Being the go-to queer club in Reykjavík, everyone is welcome for a drink and a dance. The only ask is that you're respectful of the space. Kiki has multiple levels for when you need to dance the night away or sit down for a soul bearing chat with someone. “There's nothing but happiness at Kiki,” a panellist chimes in, reminiscing about last Saturday night. As another panellist added: “It's hands down the best place to end the night. You dance the alcohol away!”

Runners-up



**Ölstofan Vegamótastígur**

Ah, Ölstofan, the introvert's drinking hole. If you're ever in town late at night and aren't in the mood for a full-on dance extravaganza, Ölstofan is the place to be. It's the perfect place if you want some time away from all the ruckus and need a nice, long chat with a good friend. “It's the only place where you can sit and talk until 5:00,” said a panellist.



**Paloma Naustin**

Known for its rave-style night outs, Paloma has seen a resurgence of a new generation of partygoers. A popular place amongst the old-school rave heads and people in general looking for a good time — isn't that what life's really about? — Paloma is sure to show you what you're looking for. There are even strategically placed joists in the rafters to place your drink there while you dance your heart out.

Previous Winners

2022: Kaffibarinn  
2021: Kiki Queer Bar  
2020: Prikjá

# Drinking

What's better than an honest pint with the lads?

## Best Place for Cocktails



## Jungle Cocktail Bar

Austurstræti 9

Although they don't have the smash hit "Welcome to the Jungle" by Guns 'n' Roses on repeat, Jungle makes up for it with their complex, innovative and all-around great-tasting cocktails — the best in town, according to the panel. "There's nothing that competes with Jungle. They're constantly innovating, and they employ award-winning bartenders. What they're doing, no one else is doing in Iceland," said one panellist. Along with the work they put into their drinks, they also put a lot of effort into their names. Menu monikers like "Michael Scotch" and "Chamomile High Club" are sure to please your taste buds as well as your humour.

## Runners-up



### Kokteylbarinn Klapparstígur 28

When walking into Monkeys on Klapparstígur, you are given two choices. Either continue in to the restaurant, business as usual, or turn into Kokteylbarinn and have a seat in their train — destination: cocktail town. "At Monkeys, there's a side bar. When you walk into it, suddenly you're sitting in a train, drinking tasty cocktails," reported one panellist. Serving award-winning cocktails by award-winning bartenders, Kokteylbarinn offers a serious experience for the initiated and the newbies alike.



### Uppi Aðalstræti 12

This grandiose restaurant/bar on Aðalstræti has shown it's a force to be reckoned with. Focusing on wine and lavish dining within its carefully curated interior, Uppi has also demonstrated its quality cocktails. Uppi also hosts all manner of events, from wine presentations to bingo nights. When you're looking for that feeling of luxury, it's a bar you must check out.

## Previous Winners

- 2022: Jungle Cocktail Bar & Veður
- 2021: Jungle Cocktail Bar
- 2020: Miami (RIP)

## Best Bar for Live Music



## Húrra

Tryggvagata 22

Without going into the details, Húrra closed a few years ago, was replaced by a different bar, and then opened again under the same brand. It was the go-to for exciting shows, weekday night outs, and dancing until the break of dawn. Now, it has regained its spot as the best bar for live music. "It's truly the spot where most good things happen in music," one panellist said. Húrra makes room for chart-topping artists and new voices, guaranteeing an unforgettable experience. Not to mention being musician-friendly, as Húrra boasts one of the best backlines in town.

## Runners-up



### Gaukurinn Tryggvagata 22

A true legend of a place that has stood the test of time, Gaukurinn has a jam-packed schedule every month. Concerts, stand-ups, drag shows and karaoke nights all have their place at Gaukurinn. It's shown they're open to almost anything and their policy of inclusivity deserves a mention. The bar has long since implemented gender-neutral bathrooms, delivering a "No Bullshit" policy towards bigots, and is known for its willingness to accommodate everyone.



### 12 Tónar Skólavörðustígur 15

Having claimed their spot as the best bar to start the night, the panel couldn't get away without giving 12 Tónar a nod towards their efforts to support the live music scene. Owners Lárus and Einar have a knack for booking exciting bands and DJs at their store. Although the space isn't built for live music, the collaborations 12 Tónar undertakes with musicians makes it feel like an extraordinary venue.

## Previous Winners

- 2022: Gaukurinn
- 2021: Gaukurinn
- 2020: Gaukurinn

# Treasures of European Film Culture

Places of a symbolic nature for European cinema, places of historical value that need to be maintained and protected not just now but also for generations to come.



"Kaffibarinn has been "Serving thirsty people since 1993". A cozy café during the day, it turns into a cool party place with an impressive DJ line-up and the crowds spilling out into the courtyard until early morning."



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**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2023**

# Drinking

All hail Bakkus!

## Best Happy Hour



## Prikið

Bankastræti 12

What have we done to deserve this? Prikið's too-good-to-be-true happy hour serves thirsty and thrifty patrons beer for no more than 700 ISK. "You can't fight with a 700 ISK beer. When does happy hour start? I'm thinking of going now," joked a panellist. (It's 16:00-20:00 every day — sometimes even longer.) Prikið works in mysterious ways. Who are we to speculate how they do it? We are but lowly slaves to the golden gods. Prikið's patio is a gift on nice days, for when you want the cheapest beer in town and a good selfie for the socials.

## Runners-up



### Veður Klapparstígur 33

When Prikið's happy hour is past and you've drunk more than enough beer, you might crave something slightly richer than fermented yeast. That's when you head over to Veður. Why, might you ask? Because Veður offers a late cocktail happy hour. That's right, from 19:00-21:00, a wide array of cocktails can be purchased for a measly 1800 ISK. "That late happy hour is the GOAT," quipped one panellist.



### Loft Hostel Bankastræti 7

On the topic of day drinking on a good day, Loft's patio will make you never want to leave. Offering a picturesque view over the city centre, Loft does its absolute best to keep you inebriated. From 16:00-20:00, the beer runs for just 750 ISK, leaving the rest of your hard-earned money free for tipping the bartender. Wait, that isn't a thing here. Unless you want to, of course.

## Previous Winners

2022: Bravó  
2021: Bravó  
2020: Kaffibrennslan

## Best Newcomer

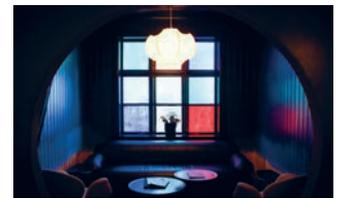


## Bingó Drinkery

Skólavörðustígur 8

From the same folks who brought us the best cocktail bar, Jungle, is best newcomer Bingó. The bar scored a full bingo by the panel, as it demonstrates good potential for an established drinking hole. "It has great potential. They make their own drinks as well as host events. It'll be interesting to see how it develops," said a panellist. Located behind Skólavörðustígur, on Bergstaðastræti, its inconspicuous location makes it a good place for when you need to impress the most knowledgeable of pub crawlers.

## Runners-up



### Uppi Aðalstræti 12

Relatively new in the Reykjavík bar game, Uppi has eluded many a seasoned connoisseur. Offering a brand-new, high-end experience just above Fish Market on Aðalstræti ("uppi" translates to "upstairs"), Uppi is the place to visit when you seriously want to impress someone. It's an intriguing bar, landing itself a spot as the runner-up for best newcomer — one we'll keep our eyes peeled on in the future.



### Aperó Vínbar Laugavegur 20b

This French-inspired wine bar has earned its claim to fame by bringing a mixture of new and old-world oenology — that's fancy-speak for the study of wine — to the world's northern-most capital. Located on the second floor overlooking Laugavegur and Klapparstígur, it's nary a stone's throw from the bustle of the rest of Reykjavík nightlife. Aperó prides itself in offering quality wine from smaller producers, adding more diversity to Reykjavík's wine scene.

## Previous Winners

2022: Húrra  
2021: Skuggabaldur (RIP)  
2020: Röntgen

# Drinking

Why have just one happy hour when you can have nine?

## Best Outdoor Drinking (Summer)



## Bodega

Týsgata 9

When thinking of a good place to drink outside in Iceland, the first thing that comes to mind is the question: "Is that possible?" Move over rooftop bars and sheltered yards that keep the North-Atlantic breeze away, Bodega on Óðinstorg is the place to be. In the summer, Óðinstorg square is decked out with tables and chairs, perfect for a sunny day of al fresco drinking. "If you're going outdoor drinking, Bodega takes it," said a panellist. "The sun lasts very long at Óðinstorg and, if you want, you can move over to the steps. It's a nice spot for an international feel."

### Runners-up



#### Petersen Svítan Ingólfsstræti 2a, 3rd floor, 101 Reykjavík

You can't go drinking outdoors in Reykjavík without mentioning Petersen Svítan. Be prepared that like-minded people will probably have the same idea as you. Fortunately, there's lots of space, as Petersen has not one, but two outdoor patios. The second one, albeit a bit smaller, is located above the main balcony. "You can even order your drinks at the table and have them served," said a panellist.



#### Loft Hostel Bankastræti 7, 101 Reykjavík

The second runner-up, Loft, has been a wildly popular place for good reason. Its outdoor area is one of the best in town. "They've also installed outdoor heaters," raved one panellist. "Game-changing." The view up there is also worth acknowledging, as you have a good vantage point over downtown. Use that powerful perch to spy on your neighbours, or just enjoy the beautiful cityscape while you drink a cold one.

Previous Winners

Renewed category

## Best Date Place



## Kaffibrennslan

Laugavegur 21, 101 Reykjavík

The panel decided that Kaffibrennslan is the best place for a date. Being both familiar to locals, and inviting enough for newcomers, Kaffibrennslan makes for a perfect neutral ground for a first date. If you're worried about running into someone you know and want to avoid potential awkwardness, the second floor is a foolproof spot. "You can start with coffee, and if you find things going well, you can move over to beer or wine and take it from there," said a panellist. "It's an accessible date place, especially if you don't want to assume your date is drinking," said another.

### Runners-up



#### Vinstúkan Tíu sopar Laugavegur 27, 101 Reykjavík

Alternatively, as a date night with your significant other, Vinstúkan hits the sweet spot between intimate and fancy. "It's a slightly higher investment, but a great spot if you want to treat yourself and try something new," said one panellist who is clearly knowledgeable on the dating scene. "It's a solid backup if you want to someplace slightly more romantic," said another.



#### Skor Kolagata 1, 101 Reykjavík

For those who want to be doing something productive, instead of yammering on about the past, present and future, Skor has demonstrated its potential as a date bar. While perfecting your darts high score, you can impress your date with your tireless practice. "If you want an activity date, you can book a table at Skor. You don't have to just sit and chat," said a panellist.

Previous Winners

2022: Port 9  
2021: Port 9  
2020: Hlemmur Mathöll

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**DRINKING**

# Drink Where The Locals Drink

Grapevine staffers share their personal favourite watering holes

Words: **The Reykjavik Grapevine Drinking Club**  
Photos: **Art Bicnick**

There are bars the esteemed panel of the Drinking & Nightlife section singled out as the best in their respective categories, then there are the places the Grapevine's staff members go to when looking to wet their respective whistles. Is there overlap? Are the Best Of Reykjavik winners the preferred watering holes of thirsty journo's?

Here's where Grapevine gets their drink on.

**Skúli**  
Aðalstræti 9, 101 Reykjavik



Skúli is conveniently located near Grapevine HQ, making it a great spot to unwind with a pint or two after a busy print week.

The pub offers a fantastic selection of craft beers, which is ideal for those, like myself, who have come to appreciate a good IPA or the occasional gose after years of drinking cheap lagers. I recently had the pleasure of trying their mango sour, and it was truly exceptional. The few sips I had are still lingering in my memory, and I can't wait to go back for another taste. **IZ**

**Röntgen**  
Hverfisgata 12



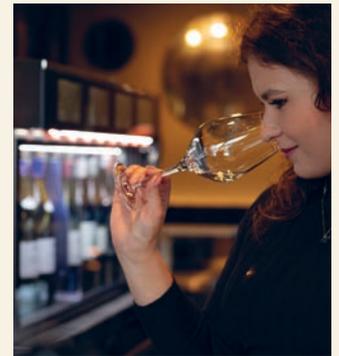
These days I try avoid bars at all cost, because I'm a misanthrope and a hermit. A hater, if you will. But if I must leave my house to consume alcohol, I'll head to Röntgen because they have the nicest, cutest staff who have gone above and beyond to make me the best dirty martinis I've ever had (filthy martinis, in fact.) Also the upper floor looks like the Black Lodge in Twin Peaks. **RX**

**12 Tónar**  
Skólavörðustígur 15



To me, 12 Tónar is more than a bar – it's a community. When I go there, I try to attend one of their events, especially their DJ nights. Whether I'm feeling pro or anti-social, there's guaranteed good vibes in the refuge of 12 Tónar. **JB**

**Apéro Vinbar**  
Laugavegur 20b



When I'm feeling thirsty, my go-to has been Apéro. Admittedly, I am a creature of habit, so it's comforting that the friendly faces behind the bar know my wine of choice. But it's also nice to go to a place where the staff is both knowledgeable and approachable, so if I ever did want to stray from my standard order, I know I'm in for a solid recc. Apéro is a great place to chat with a friend over several glasses of wine, or to just sit and scroll, enjoying your vino in solitude. Bonus points for the olives. Apéro has really nice olives. **CF** 🫒



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**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2023**

# Activities

## Stop doom-scrolling and go hill-strolling!

Get out of the city and into the sunshine! Or stay inside, we're not the boss of you. Whatever you're in the mood for, here are some of our suggested favourite places to catch the latest movies, have a soak or break an ankle hiking up a hill in a level 5 storm. It's really up to you! (But seriously, don't go hiking in a storm.)

### Best Pool



## Lágafellslaug

Lækjarhlíð 1a (Mosfellsbær)

The panel this year skewed towards the over-30 bracket, so the criteria for selecting the best municipal swimming pools had to take into account the needs of kids and their world-weary handlers. Lágafellslaug might not be the best spot for actual swimming but instead you get a triple-whammy water slide (one that ends in warm water, not the usual polar bear challenge) and a sauna with a glass window, which means you can watch the kids while you try to unclench that sciatica and buy yourself 10 minutes of uninterrupted adult-time.

#### Runners-up



#### Árbæjarlaug Fylkisvegur 9

Here's another one that's a fair bit outside of downtown Reykjavik but well worth a visit. Árbæjarlaug combines a lived-in 90s charm with facilities that seem better suited to Icelandic weather than most pools. First of all, you have a sauna in the changing room, which means you could forego pee-walking on frozen cement in your tankini and just hang out there. If you choose to brave the cold, then the first hot tub is strategically located right by the changing room exit. This is very much a family-friendly pool, though, so beware if you are looking for a quiet place to sweat out a hangover.



#### Sundhöll Reykjavíkur Barónsstígur 45a

Finally, one for the childfree people! The original hot tubs (on the 2nd floor) are a classic of the genre: large, aquamarine, hot, outside and without sharp angles. It's not one of the biggest pools, however, and the sauna is best described as 'good for two people who don't mind touching knees or for three people who don't mind human Tetris in the buff. Bonus points go to Sundhöll for regularly hosting cultural activities, like swim-in movie screenings.

#### Previous Winners

2022: Sky Lagoon  
2021: Vesturbæjarlaug  
2020: Vesturbæjarlaug

### Best Spa



## Hvammsvík

Kjósarhreppur (Mosfellsbær)

As many of the best spas are located outside of Reykjavik, we decided to include some that fell within a one-hour radius of Reykjavik City proper. A quick 45 minute drive delivers you to this picturesque spa in Hvalfjörður. The area served as a thoroughfare between the capital and Akureyri but after the opening of the Hvalfjörður tunnel, you can drive along this scenic route without seeing a soul (except for the occasional seal). The spa itself has an open design, which beautifully integrates into the surroundings. The hot tubs on the beach will even "disappear" to water level during high tide. It's the selection of hot tubs and saunas to fit every taste that makes Hvammsvík a great all-rounder!

#### Runners-up



#### Blue Lagoon

#### Norðurljósavegur 9 (Grindavík)

What can you say about the Blue Lagoon that hasn't already been said. It's blue, it's a lagoon, it's technically run-off from a geothermal power plant, and it's a pioneer in the modern Icelandic spa culture. If you don't want to rub noses (and other body parts) with the hoi polloi in the main pool, then the recently added ultra-fancy (and pricy) Retreat at Blue Lagoon offers a more exclusive lagooning experience, with tiered wellness rituals and celebrity-sightings.



#### Sky Lagoon

#### Vesturvör 44-48 (Kópavogur)

The verdict here was pretty unanimous for a panel of infrequent spa-goers: "I thought I would hate it, but was surprised at how much I loved it". A beautiful spa, nestled in an industrial part of Kópavogur, which offers killer views of the Reykjanes peninsula and any volcanoes that might be erupting there.

#### Previous Winners

New category

### Best Gallery



## Gallery Port

Laugavegur 32,

This year we considered how the art scene has sought out new ways of promoting and introducing art to potential buyers. Gone are the days of clear divides between the "sell-outs" and the heroically broke "real artists". As recently as 10 years ago, this wouldn't have been the case, but most of today's artists and gallerists are able to deftly maneuver the balance of creative focus and making a livelihood. There were many worthy contenders but the artist-run downtown gallery Gallery Port, captained by local dynamo Árni Már Erlingsson, has constantly made brave choices that represent the local scene and have helped shape the refreshingly straight-forward approach to communicating the artist's vision and finding that art a new home.

#### Runners-up



#### Listval

#### Austurbakki 2

Selling art in Harpan and in Grandi, as well as through their online shop, they have been, as one of our panelists phrased it "Unafraid to try new things and run a gallery more like an art shop." But it's not just their approachability that sets them apart but a keen eye for highlighting up-and-coming local artists.



#### Pula Gallery

#### Hjartatorg

Pula is a tiny gallery that has brightened the much-maligned Hjartatorg (a hotel courtyard, built on the remains of a local, grassroots art and activity space). 2022 saw them presenting a string of fascinating exhibits, including Auður Lóa, Rakel McMahon, Melanie Ubaldo and Lilja Birgisdóttir. Watch this space.

#### Previous Winners

2022: Gallery Port  
2021: Gallery Port  
2020: Kling og Bang

## Best Theater



### Tjarnarbíó

Tjarnargata 12

This one really is a no-brainer. It's smack in the middle of downtown Reykjavík, it has regular performances in English, and it caters to an incredibly diverse range of performers and performances. Despite the recent attempts of the grand dames of theater, Reykjavík City Theater and the National Theater, to branch out into new avenues, Tjarnarbíó manages to highlight how staid they are in comparison. Tjarnarbíó is an incredibly busy theater with seemingly 1-2 premiers a week, everything from dramas dealing with burning social issues to interactive shows for babies. All while retaining a doggedly independent spirit.

#### Runner-up



### Gaflaraleikhúsið Vikingastræti 2 (Hafnarfjörður)

A truly local theater, tucked away in an alley by the Hafnarfjörður viking village. This 220-seater has, since 2011, managed to put on a series of successful productions, appealing to a wide age range, and providing an avenue for new talent and seasoned pros alike. While it may be more geared towards lighter fare and less concerned with nude thespians flagellating themselves through Beckett, it's a rare and refreshing treat to see a true independent flourishing outside the system.

#### Previous Winners

#### New category

## Best Cinema



### Bió Paradís

Hverfisgata 54

What? The street magazine chose the only cinematheque in Reykjavík? Well, that took everyone by surprise. As much as we love many of our other theaters for a no-holds-barred blockbuster experience, there is simply no contender for the top spot. This is a theater that incorporates their customers' needs through a lively dialogue with its community on what to show and what kind of events to stage. They are also the only theater consistently serving the international community in Iceland and a center for many of the film festivals, openings and awards in Iceland.

#### Runners-up



### Laugarásbíó Laugarás

In the 80s and 90s, Laugarásbíó was a haven for cult action movies and B-horror (think Bloodsport and Critters). Today it's more respectable but it retains that renegade vibe somehow. Sure it could use some freshening up but they've kept up with the latest in sound systems and screening technology and you'll get much the same blast of Hollywood mayhem as you would with the bigger chains.



### Kringlubió (Lúxus) Kringlan 4-12

The Lúxus screen in Kringlubió recently introduced their "date seats" which are two-person leather recliners, where you can snuggle up to your partner with a blanket and a bucket of popcorn. It's like 90% of the way towards replicating what it was like bingeing romcoms in Covid except outfitted with a Dolby Atmos sound system, brand-new movies and a big ol' screen.

#### Previous Winners

2022: Bió Paradís  
2021: Bió Paradís  
2020: Smárbíó

## Best Art Museum



### Gerðarsafn

Hamraborg 4 (Kópavogur)

Gerðarsafn is often unfairly neglected when discussing the best that the Greater Reykjavík Area has to offer, despite being only a quick 10 minute drive from downtown. The museum has shown incredible ambition in recent years, putting on a staggering number of events and exhibitions which often serves to transport the conversations taking place outside the museum walls into the exhibition space — such as immigration and gender issues.

#### Runners-up



### The Living Art Museum Grandagarður 20

The Living Art Museum (Nýlistasafnið) is a modern art museum located at a nexus of an artist-owned gallery, non-profit artist run space and an artist's studio (oh, and there's an Italian restaurant on the first floor). Similar to Gerðarsafn, Nýló is willing to engage with social issues, while skewing slightly more avant-garde in their displays. The Marshall House building and the surrounding area is also an excellent example of the renewal that has happened in Grandi and the result makes for a charming date spot.



### The Reykjavík Art Museum Tryggvagata 17

The list wouldn't be complete without a mention of the Reykjavík Art Museum. While the past year has not been a particular stand-out for the museum, its Hafnarhúsið location is still one of the main conduits bringing big name international, contemporary artists into the country. Besides, it's the perfect place to dip in on a windy day for a coffee and some merch to give your friend who has everything.

#### Previous Winners

2022: Reykjavík Art Museum  
2021: Reykjavík Art Museum  
2020: Kjarvalsstaðir

# BEST ICE CREAM

## 6 YEARS IN A ROW



### LAUGARÁSVEGUR 1 104, REYKJAVÍK



# Activities

Doing stuff is great!

## Best Museum



## The National Museum

Suðurgata

The National Museum (Þjóðminjasafn Íslands) picks up the first place yet again, but not simply due to its institutional status. What our panel felt made it such a successful museum in its category was how the curation offers the exact right scope to view Icelandic history — it's condensed, but not too condensed. The past year saw them explore new angles from which to view the Icelandic national identity, including an exhibit on inheritance that highlighted the stark poverty of Icelanders prior to the 20th century, as they left their children the trifles of daily life upon their passing (down to a pair of underwear with a hole in it). The National Museum has also entered into successful partnerships with contemporary artists and designers to find new ways to explore Icelandic history in the making.

### Runners-up



#### Einar Jónsson Museum Hallgrímstorg 3

Once an imposing castle structure perched alone atop a barren hill, this building inspired by basalt hexagons is unmissable to anyone passing by Hallgrímskirkja church. A former home to one of Iceland's foremost sculptors, Einar Jónsson, it now houses his works and the charming sculpture garden, which plays home to Einar's unmissable fascination with Norse mythology.



#### The Settlement Exhibition Reykjavík 871±2

##### Aðalstræti 16

Most of the time, you won't find anything more interesting in the basement of a hotel than a laundry room or the occasional haunting. But underneath the Hotel Reykjavík Centrum you will find the 871±2 settlement exhibition. This exhibition explores the remains of a viking longhouse from the settlement age, which was excavated right on that spot in 2001 and remains one of the oldest man-made structures found in Iceland (from circa 871, hence the name). What better place to build an archeological museum but right in the spot where you found the damn thing, amirite?

### Previous Winners

2022: The National Museum  
2021: The National Museum  
2020: The National Museum

## Best Place to Take the Kids



## Fjölskylduland

Dugguvogur 4, 104 Reykjavík

Described as Iceland's "first holistic Indoor Playground and Family Center in Iceland," this one is sort of like a private members club for toddlers. Fjölskylduland is somewhat like a large indoor playground, full of stimulating activities for children 0-6 years old. If the playhouse isn't enough to keep their attention, you can enroll them in gymnastics, or baby yoga. Because you're never too young to align your chakras!

### Runner-up



#### The Salvation Army Suðurlandsbraut 72, 108 Reykjavík

This one took us by surprise, as it's not openly geared towards children, but several panelists mentioned how well this space served the family folk of the 108 area. The distinctive red building was designed by Teiknistofan Tröð and opened in 2021 as the new HQ for the Salvation Army. While the overt Christian themes may be off putting to some, there is no denying the appeal of the affordable and spacious café, generous play area and arts and crafts workshops.

### Newcomer



#### Höfuðstöðin Rafstöðvarvegur

Set in the beautiful Elliðaárdalur public park, this permanent installation by artist Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir (aka Shoplifter) is not, strictly-speaking, geared towards children but our panelists said their kids find so much to love in the vibrant colours and soft textures. Plus, you can chalk that up to a culturally edifying activity, as it's technically an art installation.

### Previous Winners

2022: Húsdýragarðurinn  
2021: The Maritime Museum  
2020: Húsdýragarðurinn

## Best Day Trip



## The Reykjanes Route

Reykjanes Peninsula

This sample platter of Iceland's offerings got kicked up a notch with recent volcanic activity (you may have heard about the eruptions at Geldingadalir and Meradalir in 2021 and 2022, respectively). This quick drive takes you on a route along the sweeping blue lake of Kleifarvatn. It takes you past charming ruins, geothermal hot springs, beautiful rock formations, snowy peaks and, yes, the occasional jets of spurting magma (N.B. no volcanoes are erupting at the moment).

### Runners-up



#### Sólheimajökull

At only 100 miles (160 km) from Reykjavík, this is one of the two glaciers closest to our bustling metropolis and a favorite among the locals. An imposing sight, Sólheimajökull's popularity is helped by it being one of the most accessible glaciers, as it's both fairly easy to find and to scale the side. That being said, we recommend that you go with experienced guides to avoid being put in cold storage in a glacial crevice until Katla finally erupts through the ice cover, sending you flying back to Reykjavík.



#### Helliggerði Helligsgata 3 (Hafnarfjörður)

This tiny enchanted rock garden 20 minutes from downtown Reykjavík is the perfect place to zen out on a sunny day. With a café, small pond and moss-covered lava rocks, they have taken care not to curtail the savage charm of Hafnarfjörður's lava fields. And it's probably for the best, since the rocks there are said to be home to the hidden people (known as elves to the normos).

### Previous Winners

2022: Geldingadalir Volcano (RIP)  
2021: Geldingadalir Volcano (RIP)  
2020: Reykjanes

## Best Summer Hike



### Glymur Waterfall

Hvalfjörður

After a scenic drive to the end of Hvalfjörður, you arrive at the foot of Iceland's second-highest waterfall, with its nearly 200 meter drop. Not only is the hiking route easily accessible, but it takes you up a varied landscape, darting through shrubbery, along cliff sides, through a small cave, and you can even cross the river right above the drop on the return (if you are not afraid of meeting Óðinn a little early). Overall, it's a relatively easy hike but with a couple of spots that hoist it up to moderate difficulty.

## Runners-up



### Reykjadalur Hveragerði

This is the one you've no doubt caught on Instagram. People bathing in a geothermal river in the Icelandic wilderness. Of course, what's missing is all the other people snapping up pictures, but the 2-3 hour round trip and 347 metre elevation does deter some tourists, so the crowding doesn't get too bad outside of peak tourist season. Even if you forgot to pack a bathing suit (or feel some kind of way about changing behind a simple wooden divider), the views and fresh air are still well worth the hike.



### Esjan Kjalarnes

This is Reykjavík's mountain, more or less. It's the one we see when we cycle to work, when we ditch school, when we drive to that out-of-town wedding, when we hit rock bottom arguing with a cormorant at the marina. It's always there in the distance like...well...a rock. It's also one of the most popular hiking routes in the country for good reason and barely needs mentioning.

## Previous Winners

2022: Volcano lava field  
2021: Akrafjall  
2020: Esjan

## Best Place to Watch the Sunset



### Gróttá Lighthouse

Seltjarnarnes

Seeking sunlight in Iceland is a bit like being married to a fisherman — you either get none at all or you get all of it at once. But we have earned it, damnit, so we're going to sit here at Gróttuviti and watch it go down. And it's going to be romantic, Pétur, and then you're heading back out because all you do is shout at the handball and eat kótilettur. When the conditions are just right, there really is no better place to catch Iceland's magical summer skies.

## Runner-up



### Viðey Ferry Terminal

By the big rock there's a tiny yellow beach, which (until now) has been a well-kept secret spot for sunset watching. In fact the whole Laugarnestangi area and the area around the Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum is one of the best spots you'll find in Reykjavík. And since the view is not blocked in any direction, you can walk along the path and get a full widescreen vista of the summer solstice fireworks for the whole duration.

## Previous Winners

Renewed category

## Best Place to Spend a Rainy Day



### Spilavinir

Suðurlandsbraut 48, 108 Reykjavík

The panellists were responsive with this one, as most residents of Iceland will have a few of these havens at the ready. Board game café Spilavinir got a couple of mentions and for good reason. Along with the Nexus comic book store, it's one of the best places to get to know the latest in board gaming — everything from 10 kilo box sets of baroque Euro-style games to something you can pick up in five minutes and probably involves some variation on the Werewolf game. Be aware that Spilavinir is more accurately described as being in the Skeifan shopping area, even though its address is Suðurlandsbraut.

## Runner-up



### FlyOver Iceland

Fiskislóð 43, 101 Reykjavík

An interactive special-effects "ride" with a 20 metre spherical screen, accented by water mist and scents to engage all the senses. A bit like the Sky Lagoon, several panellists had judged it beforehand as a bit corny, but it's surprisingly good fun. If it's too crappy outside to see Icelandic nature with your own two eyes, then this is the perfect substitute. As a bonus for Icelanders that spent all their travel savings on that all-inclusive in Tenerife, FlyOver Iceland also runs tours over Canada and the U.S. on the regular. Yeehaw, eh.

## Previous Winners

New category

# SNAPS

BISTRO · BAR

ÞÓRSGATA 1,  
101 REYKJAVÍK



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## BIRDING

# Birdwatching With A Pro

Learning to “catch and release,” the birder’s way

Words: **Iryna Zubenko**  
Photos: **Art Bicnick & Sigurjón Einarsson**

I vividly remember the moment I met with friends after lockdown. Everyone was sharing their pandemic hobbies and, as you can imagine, there was a lot of sourdough and banana bread baked over those months. One friend, however, proclaimed her newfound passion for birdwatching. She mentioned an app where you can track the birds you see. It sounded like a perfect hobby — learning something new, experiencing a sense of achievement when spotting a new bird

and spending time in nature (although, as I’d soon discover, that’s not entirely necessary).

Fuelled by curiosity to learn more about birds and how to spot them without travelling too far outside the city, I sought out avid birdwatcher and bird photographer Sigurjón Einarsson.

### Getting started

It’s not hard to spot Sigurjón at our meeting point — he keeps a

pair of binoculars on his windshield. Following him to the Flói Nature Reserve, he would stop occasionally and a giant lens would poke out the window — bird paparazzo Sigurjón snaps a few shots before I can blink. As we arrive at our destination he jokes: “I have to travel a lot all over Iceland for work and this one is always with me,” he points at his camera. “Sometimes my wife comes with me, so she has to sit in the back — this one has the front seat.”

“Do you need such a big camera to go birdwatching?” I ask, wondering if I could even lift that thing. Sigurjón reassures me that you don’t really need a camera or, in fact, leave the city.

His passion goes back to childhood, when he was spending time with his grandparents on a small island in Breiðafjörður. “I always liked birds and I was always interested in photography, even though I didn’t practise it before the digital technology came along,” he shares. “It somehow clicked together and I started doing more of both. Some people say I’m crazy,” he cracks up with laughter. “I think it’s one of the best types of craziness you can have.”

### How to small talk with a birdwatcher?

As we walk through a small forest, Sigurjón keeps asking me if I know this or that bird. Admittedly not knowing any, I try to ease awkwardness with a small talk.

“Are there mandarin ducks in Iceland?” I ask. They’re my favourite bird. Expecting a response in the negative, I’m surprised. “Right now we do,” Sigurjón says. “You

don’t see them all the time. They don’t breed here. There are two of them in Vík — two males, very colourful and beautiful.” In my mind, I’m already planning a visit. “I remember in 2017 there were two of them in Húsavík, so I drove from Akranes all the way to Húsavík to see them,” Sigurjón continues. His dedication doesn’t cease to amaze me.

“It’s probably like going hunting for hunters,” he says. “But the reward for the hunter is to shoot the bird. I have nothing against hunters, but this makes me more happy — just to go see the bird and take photos of it. We can say ‘catch and release’ when we’re photographing — I can shoot the same bird again and again.”

### Sneaky hideout

As we stop at the wetlands, it becomes more and more clear Sigurjón is no amateur. “This is my floating hide,” he says, producing a strange piece of equipment from his trunk — it’s a portable camouflage tent that allows you to blend in with the surroundings and approach the birds without disturbing them. Naturally, I want to see it at work and Sigurjón obliges. “Do you have other shoes?” Sigurjón asks and, as I shake my head, he says he can just carry me closer to the shore. “Should we do it the viking wife way?”

On the water, the floating hide looks even more bizarre — one needs to submerge themselves entirely, simultaneously trying not to disturb the water or cause any noise. There’s a bird nesting nearby, so Sigurjón only stays in the water for a few shots. On many occasions he has spent about six hours in his hide position. “In the

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beginning, I went out and just photographed birds. If I could get any photo, I was happy. Today, I usually go out because I have a photo in my mind. I spend more time waiting for that moment.”

### Birder’s playbook

How can an urban dweller, like myself, get started in birdwatching?

“Buy decent binoculars and go to some easy place, like the local pond or local forest. That’s a good beginning,” says Sigurjón.

After some time, you’ll learn how birds act around you and may be able to approach them. “If you see that the bird is stressed, move away a little bit,” the expert cautions. “This white bird here,” he loses his own train of thought as a bird flies past. “This is the Arctic tern — it has the longest migration of all animals on this planet, it goes from pole to pole

twice every year. They’re only 125 grams.”

Sigurjón returns to the previous topic and adds: “If you scare a bird off the nest, predators around are quick to come and steal the eggs. If it is cold, like now, the eggs can easily cool down quickly and kill the babies inside. Always think of the benefit for the bird, not yourself.”

### Starting my own bird count

There are 75 bird species that breed in Iceland and Sigurjón has seen around 265. While he might not be fully satisfied with today’s “catch,” I have had the pleasure of witnessing an array of species: a golden plover, Arctic tern, black-tailed godwit, red-necked phalarope, red-throated loon, raven, whooper swan, black-headed gull, meadow pipit, white wagtail, greylag goose, redwing and snipe. And even though you



won’t see me in a floating hide anytime soon, I’m already looking for “kikir” (binoculars). Nature is amazing! 🍷

Check out Sigurjón’s bird photography on Instagram: [@sigurjoneinars](#) To learn more about birds in Iceland or find birdwatching companions, join Fuglar á Íslandi - Birds in Iceland on Facebook.

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**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2023**

# Shopping

Money can be a burden — give it to us

Is there anything better than accumulating a whole bunch of stuff? Yes, and it's accumulating a few amazing items from the best of the best shops that Reykjavik has to offer. Whether you're on the hunt for a new book to lose yourself in, a cosy wool sweater to wrap yourself in, or some jewellery with which to adorn yourself, our shopping picks won't steer you wrong.

## Best Goddamn Store



# KIOSK

Grandagarður 35, 101 Reykjavík

Owned by a quintet of designers, Kiosk has been putting the work of Icelandic fashion brands front and centre for years — even before establishing their storefront in Grandi. It is the place to go, whether you're shopping for some seriously stylish everyday looks or that perfect outfit for a special event. "What's best is that it's an all female designer run space focusing on small batch, sustainably made pieces," one panellist said. "It's a store where one walks in and feels seen, realising that at long last they found their designer."

## Runners-up



### Fischersund

**Fischersund 3, 101 Reykjavík**

What can be said about Fischer that the Grapevine hasn't already raved about. It's more of an extrasensory experience than a standard shop. Walking in to the historic house on the laneway from which the shop borrows its name requires your eyes to first adjust to the low light, then your ears will pick up the soundscape curated specifically for the space, your olfactory senses will be brought to life by the herbaceous and earthy scents wafting through the air. Luckily, Fischer is a shop, so you can select perfumes, candles, beauty products, art and even an album to try and recreate that experience in your own home.



### Góði hirðirinn

**We'll soon see...**

"Inexpensive, sustainable, humanitarian aid and a treasure hunt all in one," is how one panellist summed up beloved second-hand store Góði hirðirinn. It's a place where you can find anything you could imagine and a whole bunch of other things you didn't even know you needed. It's an adrenaline rush in a shopping trip and it's all fuelled by Sorpa. We're standing by (and saving up) while they relocate to their new and bigger location.

## Previous Winners

**2022: Yeoman**  
**2021: Kiosk**  
**2020: Fischer**

## Best Design Store



### Rammagerðin

Skólavörðustígur 12, Harpa, Kringlan

Rammagerðin truly celebrates Icelandic design. Whether you're in the market for a vibrantly-coloured wool blanket, striking ceramics, one-of-a-kind candle holders or artisanal beauty products infused with plants foraged in Icelandic nature, you'll find it at Rammagerðin. What's more, Rammagerðin doesn't simply stock Icelandic design, they support and work with designers on collaborative products and special releases.

## Runners-up



### Epal

**Laugavegur 7, Skeifan 6, Kringlan**

If you're looking to capture that Scandi aesthetic in your home, look no further than Epal. This design mecca, with locations on Laugavegur and in Skeifan and Kringlan, has all the timeless classics from Nordic masters and the hottest pieces from Icelandic designers. "The range of what Epal carries is really what sets it apart," one panellist said. "I can buy a kid's water bottle (a very nice one) and a 200.000 kr. dining chair in the same trip." As for those prices, another panellist recommends keeping an eye out for Epal's very worthwhile sales events.



### Mikado

**Online**

Bear with us here, because Mikado isn't currently a brick and mortar shop for you to visit. They're between digs, but their webshop is wide open for local and international shoppers to benefit from Mikado's impeccable curation. Whereas the other shops on the list are Scandi, Mikado is Japandi, stocking wares of Japanese and Scandinavian aesthetics that highlight just how beautifully the two sensibilities complement each other. Plus, they have some truly whimsical items for sale. Do we need a knife shaped like a whale? No. Are we getting one? Yes.

## Previous Winners

**2022: Rammagerðin**  
**2021: Rammagerðin**  
**2020: Akkurat (RIP)**

## Best Fashion Boutique



### KIOSK

Grandagarður 35, 101 Reykjavík

Our Best Goddamn Store also takes the cake as Best Fashion Boutique. We'd wear nothing but the designs they stock if we had it our way, but on our Grapevine salary we'll settle for working a few pieces into our wardrobe here and there. The Icelandic designs at KIOSK are all so unique and special, you'll be making a statement in them no matter the occasion. Plus, it's not unlikely that the person in the store looking after you is the same person who designed the silk pant set you've been ogling for months and are finally buying.

## Runners-up



### Andrá

**Laugavegur 16**

Andrá was a breath of fresh air when it landed on Laugavegur a few years ago. "All the pieces are so beautifully curated, it feels like having a personal shopper," said one panellist. Whether you're shopping for an every day (though elevated) t-shirt and jeans look or something to make a splash on a night out, you'll find that special something at Andrá.



### Yeoman

**Laugavegur 7**

The patron saint of Icelandic fashion, Hildur Yeoman is known for her dreamy patterns, lush textures, spacey body-cons, and beautiful tailoring. Walking into her Laugavegur storefront feels like walking into an art gallery, with every suspended dress the masterpiece of a great artist. Buying a Yeoman creation is an investment in your closet's longevity — it just never goes out of style.

## Previous Winners

**2022: Andrá**  
**2021: Yeoman**  
**2020: Kvartýra No49 (RIP)**

# Shopping

Stop spending money on crypto and buy some real shit

## Best Men's Clothing



## Kormákur & Skjöldur

Laugavegur 59

This men's clothing mecca is the place for the discerning gentleman to outfit himself. The tailor and haberdashery in the basement below Bonus has a wide selection of button downs, blazers, suits, slacks, accessories and more — basically everything you need to be the best dressed in any room. It's all impeccably high-quality, so you'll have these pieces in your closet and in rotation for years to come.

## Runners-up



**ORG**  
Laugavegur 46

Once upon a time, Org was downtown. Then it was in the Kringlan shopping mall. But now, in addition to Kringlan, it's back downtown in a beautiful space and serving looks for men and women. "It's the go to for my husband's clothing needs," said one panellist. "When in doubt for a gift for him I always end up there, be it for pants, men's under garments, cozy socks, fragrances. All sustainably made, and a wonderful staff to boot."



**Húrra Reykjavík**  
Hverfisgata 18a

If Reykjavík street-style is catching your eye, it's very likely pieces picked up at Húrra Reykjavík. It has all the trendy and minimalist casual and athliesure wear you need to fit right in with the cool kids, plus Crocs. Because Crocs are a thing.

## Previous Winners

2022: N/A  
2021: Húrra Reykjavík  
2020: Geysir (RIP)

## Best Second Hand Store

Joint Winners



## Verzlanahöllin

Laugavegur 26, 101 Reykjavík

Verzlanahöllin is such a treat for second-hand shoppers, browsing addicts and Marie Kondo late adopters. If you're looking to sell some of your lightly-loved clothes and small items, the premise is simple: book a booth for the timespan of your choosing, set up said booth and then walk away while your items find new bodies to adorn or homes to occupy. The premise is even simpler if you're a shopper — just go and find something amazing. It's the eco-friendly way to shop.



## Hringekjan

Þórunnartún 2, 105 Reykjavík

Just like Verzlanahöllin, Hringekjan functions on a model of individuals booking space in the storefront (for up to four weeks at a time), and then standing back and waiting for the money to flow in. What the panel loves about Hringekjan specifically is the likelihood of finding something truly chic. Plus, their catalogue of merch online makes it easy to browse before making the trip to Þórunnartún.

## Runner-up

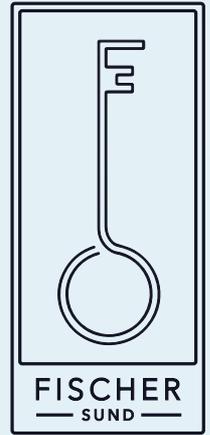


**Lóla Flórens**  
Garðastræti 6, 101 Reykjavík

Why make second-hand shopping a hurried, singular affair, when you can combine it with a luxe lounge moment? You don't have to choose between the two at Lóla Flórens. "After you've sipped a glass of pink champagne you can wander downstairs and find some amazingly curated nuggets," one panellist shares. "Best of all though is the selection of vintage children's clothing."

## Previous Winners

2022: Hringekjan  
2021: Wasteland  
2020: Extraloppán



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**BEST OF REYKJAVÍK 2023**

# Shopping

Fill that void in your soul and that space on your shelves

## Best Jewellery Store



## Aurum

Bankastræti 4

Aurum has consistently been crafting unique and inventive jewellery collections for decades and we are fans. Inspired by Icelandic nature, Aurum's creations have such range that you can find pieces to suit the exact mood you're trying to evoke. "The blend of subtle goth and raw nature is all one needs to get that boost of edginess for a night out," one panellist said. The breadth of each collection manages to capture the very essence of the animal or natural setting after which it's named. The cherry on top is that Aurum uses only recycled metals and ethical lab-grown diamonds, and their truly stunning packaging is crafted from sustainable mulberry paper.

### Runners-up



#### Orrifinn

#### Skólavörðustígur 43

Orrifinn has earned a loyal following for its raw and delicate jewellery. From their classic anchor design to their braided metal creations, Orrifinn sets its wearer apart as someone with on point accessories that transcend occasion. We also love that all Orrifinn jewellery is marketed as unisex, so everyone can mix and match and swap and look fabulous.



#### Hildur Hafstein Klapparstígur 40

Hildur's Klapparstígur storefront is a vibe we want to envelop ourselves in. Luckily it's very much the same bohemian and eclectic feeling of her jewellery, so we can adorn ourselves with her earrings, necklaces and bracelets instead. Working with natural semi-precious stones and bronze, silver and gold, Hildur makes pieces that are eye-catching and fun. They're also great for layering to create a unique statement look.

### Previous Winners

2022: Orrifinn  
2021: Orrifinn  
2020: Orrifinn

## Best Bookstore

### Joint Winners



## Bóksala Stúdentanna

Sæmundargata 4

After years of little movement in the bookstore category, we were surprised by the vim with which the panel backed this shop at the University of Iceland. "Bóksala Stúdentanna is of course the best one," one panellist exclaimed. "It has good coffee and the best variety. Óttarr Proppé from the band HAM is in charge of the buying and he's pretty on point." Even if your student days are behind you, Bóksala Stúdentanna is the best place to peruse Icelandic and international titles and buy a few more to add to that "to read" stack.



## Eymundsson Austurstræti

Austurstræti 18

There's something special about visiting the Austurstræti location of Eymundsson. Tourists will find a wide selection of photo books and illustrated guides to the sagas, while readers of all ages and interests will find the latest Icelandic and international releases, and a wall of magazines for taking home and flipping through. One panellist drew particular attention to Eymundsson's third floor cafe. "Just get there before 16:00 on a summer day if you want to catch the sun on the terrace."



## Hús máls og menningar

Laugavegur 18

The smell of this place will really win you over. That classic aroma of used bookstore that just feels cosy and inviting. Elevating Mál of Menning from run of the mill used bookstore to "best" status is its efforts to position itself at an intersection of bookstore and bar, with regular live readings and musical performances to boot. So order a Pastis, pick a book of the shelf and settle in for a magical time.

## Best Record Store



## Lucky Records

Rauðarástigur 10

You don't have to have particularly good fortune to make a great find at Lucky Records. This Reykjavík staple is huge and packed with records new and old. Whether you're looking for the latest release from an Icelandic musician or international superstar, the soundtrack to Jesus Christ Superstar, or the release of some one hit wonders who you firmly believe should have been superstars, you'll find it among the crates at Lucky. Can't find what you're looking for or not entirely sure what you're looking for? Just ask the incredibly knowledgeable staff on hand. They'll steer you right.

### Runners-up



#### Space Odyssey Skólavörðustígur 22b

We're way past 2001, but we can still experience a Space Odyssey on Skólavörðustígur. Run by the creative minds behind the long-running Extreme Chill festival, Space Odyssey is where you can expect to find some rare gems from the electronic and ambient scene. You might even catch a live performance, we they have a running lineup of soundsmiths appearing in house.



#### Smekkleysa Hverfisgata 32

Icelandophiles and audiophiles will both find their happy place at the Smekkleysa record store on Hjartatorg. The shop iteration of the record label and art collective founded by Icelandic icons, including Einar Örn Benediktsson, Sigtryggur Baldursson and Björk Guðmundsdóttir. It's a great place to browse a carefully-curated collection of Icelandic and international indie albums

### Previous Winners

2022: Lucky Records  
2021: Lucky Records  
2020: Lucky Records

# Shopping

Inflation can't get you if you've spent all your dough

## Best Place To Buy A Wool Sweater



# Handprjóna-samband Íslands

Skólavörðustigur 19

Let's be honest, the only real competition in this category is between the runners up. There's simply no better place in Reykjavik to buy a wool sweater than Handprjónasamband Íslands, or the Handknitting Association. Walking into their store on Skólavörðustigur is like walking into a warm hug. The shelves are piled high with plush Icelandic lopapeysa in a seemingly infinite number of colour and pattern combinations, and the walls are adorned with displays of woollen mittens and hats to keep you cosy and warm. Plus, as the association's name implies, it's all knitted by hand right here in Iceland.

## Runners-up



**KIOSK**  
**Grandagarður 35**  
Among the Icelandic designers that KIOSK stocks, you just know at least one of them works in wool — it is Iceland, after all. Our go-to choices for a wool sweater that is warm, cosy and stylistically on point has to be BAHNS. By now, the coded raised pattern on BAHNS' signature knitwear — interpretations of the symbols flashed by bouys for north, east, west and south — are as iconic among Reykjavik's fashionable residents as the yoke of a lopapeysa.



**Farmer's Market**  
**Laugavegi 37 and Hólmaslóð 2**  
If you want the look of a lopapeysa, but with a more modern cut and less bulk, then the wool sweaters at Farmer's Market will tick all your boxes. They Farmers & Friends storefronts stock sweaters with updated interpretations of classic lopapeysa yokes, as well as chunky cable knits to keep you in style all winter (and autumn and spring ... and sometimes summer) long.

## Previous Winners

**2022: Handprjónasambandið**  
**2021: Handprjónasambandið**  
**2020: Handprjónasambandið**

## Best Grocery Store



## Krónan

Skeifan 19, Fiskislóð 15-21 and Hallveigarstigur 1

So here's the thing. The panel could not decide between three locations of the same store to crown "Best", so we're just going to go ahead and give it to the Skeifan, Grandi and downtown outposts of beloved grocery chain Krónan. That yellow winking coin makes us happy. What also makes us happy is Krónan's app that allows us to scan and bag our items as we walk around the store, pay right on our phone and then book it without waiting in line or wrestling with the self check-out machines.

Grandi's the biggest of the three and therefore has its wealth of options tipping the scales in its favour. The downtown location is, well, downtown, so it's perfect for popping in on the walk home for those last bits and pieces to make your dinner sing. As for the perks of the Skeifan location, one panellist explained: "Do your usual shopping, grab lunch at Tokyo Sushi in the back of the store and then realise that you're in Skeifan, so you can go get all the other shit done you've been meaning to do."

## Runner-up



**Vegan Búðin**  
**Faxafen 14**  
For those who have adopted a cruelty-free, plant-based diet there's a real sense of comfort in knowing that you can shop without poring over the fine print on every package in the store. That's Vegan Búðin, which markets itself as the world's largest all vegan supermarket (and there's nothing per capita about that boast) has all the components of your standard grocery store — dry goods, cans, freezer section, etc. — but it's all vegan. They also have cosmetics and an aisle of bulk soaps and cleaners so you can refill your own bottles. Love it!

## Previous Winners

**2022: Krónan Hallveigarstigur**  
**2021: Krónan Hallveigarstigur**  
**2020: Krónan Grandi**



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Open Monday-Friday, 9-17, and around the clock in our online store, [boksala.is](https://boksala.is)

# The Grapevine's Great Big Icelandic Design Shopping Bag

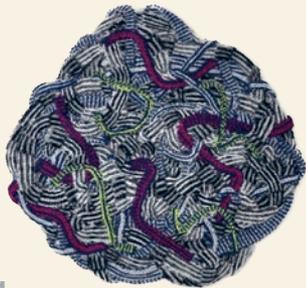
Stocking up on all the gorgeous goods of the hottest Icelandic designers

Words: **The Reykjavik Grapevine** Photos: **The Internet**

*Reykjavik is a vibrant place to be for a lot of reasons. There's an active music scene, delightful culinary offerings and vibrant nightlife. Then there's the design! Oh, all the wonderful design!*

*In an effort to deck out our homes with the most eye-catching, quirky and just plain fun pieces, we went on a little shopping spree, stocking up on all the goods we've been coveting from some of the many designers making their mark on the wild world of design.*

- 1. Þæfingur/Felt #3** — a wall hanging made by Yrurari in collaboration with studio Flétta — €290, available from yrurari.com
- 2. Geisli II** — mahogany cutting made by Lúka Art & Design — 13.900 ISK, available from lukaartdesign.is
- 3. Living Objects Special Edition No. 3** — Vase from Fólk Reykjavík — 35.000 ISK, available from folkreykjavik.is
- 4. Nourishing Soap with Arctic Thyme** — Soap from Urð — 2.300 ISK, available from Urd.is
- 5. The Wave Top in Sequin Printing** — Top from Hildur Yeoman's Breeze Collection — 34.900 ISK, available from hilduryeoman.com or Hildur Yeoman's boutique at Laugavegur 7
- 6. Embrace Cotton Blanket** — Throw blanket from Anna Thorunn — 13.558 ISK, available from Epal at Skeifan 6
- 7. Vindur (black) & Dropar (gold)** — Hand-painted porcelain cups from Inga Elín — 6.000 ISK & 12.000 ISK, available from Inga Elín Gallerí at Skólavörðustígur 5
- 8. Minute Candle Holder** — Hand-crafted candle holder from studio Flétta — 32.000 ISK, available from Rammagerðin at Skólavörðustígur 12



1.



4.



7.



2.



5.



8.



3.



6.

KRÓNAN



# Proud to be crowned!

We are thrilled to receive Grapevine's 2023 Best of Reykjavík Shopping awards for our discount grocery stores.

**First place:** Krónan, Skeifan

**Second place:** Krónan, Hallveigarstígur

Stop by our stores for low priced groceries! You'll find them in various locations in Reykjavík and the capital area, and also on your journey around Iceland.

Krónan offers a great selection of top-quality, fresh products, including a wide selection of vegetarian and vegan options.



26 stores across Reykjavík and Iceland with low prices!



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