



The Westfjords

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Why Go?

The Westfjords is where Iceland's dramatic landscapes come to a riveting climax and where mass tourism disappears – only about 14% of Iceland's visitors ever see the region. Jagged bird cliffs and broad multihued dream beaches flank the south. Rutted dirt roads snake north along jaw-dropping coastal fjords and over immense central mountains, revealing tiny fishing villages embracing traditional ways of life. In the far north, the Hornstrandir hiking reserve crowns the quiet region, and is home to cairn-marked walking paths revealing birdlife, Arctic foxes and ocean vistas. The Strandir Coast is less visited still, with an end-of-the-line, mystical feel, geothermal springs and minuscule oceanside hamlets.

Leave plenty of time for a trip to the Westfjords. Unpaved roads weave in and out of fjords and over pothole-pitted mountain passes. The going is slow, but the scenery is never short of breathtaking, the local life always compelling. You may not want to leave.

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Heimsendi Bistro (p190)
- ➔ Simbahöllin (p192)
- ➔ Húsið (p197)
- ➔ Tjörhúsið (p197)
- ➔ Stúkuhúsið (p190)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Hótel Djúpvík (p206)
- ➔ Hótel Laugarhóll (p205)
- ➔ Bíldudalur HI Hostel (p191)
- ➔ Einarshúsið (p198)
- ➔ Camping in Hornstrandir Reserve (p203)

Road Distances (km)

Pingeyri	129				
Ísafjörður	175	47			
Hólmavík	234	265	221		
Norðurfjörður	333	348	303	105	
Reykjavík	397	405	450	230	334
Patreksfjörður					
Pingeyri					
Ísafjörður					
Hólmavík					
Norðurfjörður					

SOUTH COAST

The sparsely populated south coast of the Westfjords is a tiny version of what's to come on the wild and wonderful peninsulas further north. Remote fjords (in a smaller version here) twist along the coast, and though there's a new road being built to cut across their desolate isolation, its still a bare and dramatic place. It's the primary breeding area for the endangered white-tailed eagle.

The ferry to Stykkishólmur on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula arrives here, or you can enter by car from the historic Dalir region in west Iceland, taking you through deserted rolling hills and agricultural fields, then along salt-encrusted rocky bays.

Reykhólar & Around

Reykhólar sits on the southern edge of the **Reykjanes Peninsula**, a minor geothermal area and gateway to the southernmost section of the Westfjords. Gilsfjörður is an eagle breeding ground, and west along the coast, the key inlets for eagle spotting are: Þorskaufjörður, Djúpiþfjörður, and Vatnsfjörður. There is no bus service to the area.

Sights & Activities

White-Tailed Eagle Centre EXHIBITION
(☎ 894 1011; www.visitreykholahreppur.is; Króksifjardarnes; ☼ mid-Jun–mid-Aug) **FREE** The White-Tailed Eagle Centre highlights the attempts to increase the population of the struggling species, which peaked in 2011 at 66 nests. It also has a handicraft and flea market. The centre is just west of the causeway on Rte 60 that crosses Gilsfjörður.

Norður Salt LANDMARK
(www.nordursalt.com) Norður Salt, on the point in Reykhólar, processes sea salt from the local salt bays. You can peek in their windows.

Reykhólar Tourist Office Museum MUSEUM
(admission 1kr750; ☎ ☎) The well-managed **tourist office** (www.visitreykholahreppur.is; cafe snacks 1kr400-1000; ☼ 11am-5pm Jun-Aug) has a little museum with antique boats, stuffed birds and a movie of local life in the 1950s and '60s. There's a small onsite cafe with wi-fi and an internet terminal, plus lots of Westfjords information.

Reykhólar Sea Baths HOT-POT
(Sjávarsmíðjan; ☎ 577 4800; www.sjavarsmidjan.is; adult/child 1kr2900/1000; ☼ 1-5pm Thu-Sun Jun-

Aug) In windswept Reykhólar, the seaweed baths give you soft skin and a view of the coastal plane, rimmed by salt bays.

Sleeping

Gistiheimilið Álfaland GUESTHOUSE €
(☎ 434 7878; www.alfaland.is; s/d 1kr11,500/15,500; ☎) Gistiheimilið Álfaland offers no-frills rooms, two soothing hot-pots out back, and a guest kitchen. Sleeping bag accommodation costs 1kr6000.

Hótel Bjarkalundur HOTEL €€
(☎ 434 7762; www.bjarkalundur.is; d with/without bathroom incl breakfast 1kr24,900/18,500; ☼ May-Oct) On Rte 60, just north of the turn-off to Reykhólar, Hótel Bjarkalundur is a solid summer hotel in a large farmhouse, with a petrol station and a restaurant serving Icelandic grub (mains 1kr1700 to 1kr4500). Vaðalfjöll, the largest elf palace in the Westfjords (or so says the hotel owner), sits just north.

Djúpidalur to Vatnsfjörður

The 128km of stunningly desolate fjords between Þorskaufjörður and Vatnsfjörður offer remote Iceland at its best. Look for eagles and relish the solitude. At the time of research, the finishing touches were just going in on paving the road from Kollafjörður to Vatnsfjörður, including a couple of causeways that bridge the fjords. The unpaved road from Þorskaufjörður to Kollafjörður will remain rough (but open to 2WDs).

The Djúpidalur geothermal field lies 20km west of Bjarkalundur, on remote Djúpiþfjörður. Amazingly, the welcoming **Guesthouse Djúpidalur** (☎ 434 7853; djupidal@simnet.is; dm 1kr6000; ☼ year-round), on a sheep farm, has the fjord to itself, and offers an indoor **geothermal swimming pool** (adult/child 1kr400/100; ☼ 8am-11pm) that's open to the public, plus good accommodation. Sleeping bag accommodation costs 1kr4000.

Flókalundur

Flókalundur, the junction between the road up to Arnarfjörður and Ísafjörður, and the bumpy Rte 62 to the southwestern peninsulas, sits at the head of Vatnsfjörður. The two-house encampment at Flókalundur was named after the Viking explorer Hrafn-Flóki Vilgerðarson, who gave Iceland its name in AD 860.