



POSTCARDS FROM ICELAND –

Inspired by Iceland

Eruption of travel awards for Iceland from *Lonely Planet* and *National Geographic Traveler*

Iceland looks set for a bumper 2012 after scooping two prestigious accolades in the *Lonely Planet's* annual reader's choice 'Best in Travel' feature. This comes just weeks after being included in *National Geographic Traveler's* 'Best of the World 2012' list.

Iceland was a clear winner in two categories of *Lonely Planet's* 'Best in Travel Reader's Choice Awards'. In the 'Top Ten Countries' category, 32 per cent of readers voted for Iceland. This was 19 per cent more than Italy in second place. In the 'Top Ten Cities' sector Iceland's capital, Reykjavik, was streams ahead of all other cities with 27 per cent of reader's voting for it.

According to *Lonely Planet's* readers Iceland's main attractions are considered to be its untouched landscape and rugged beauty, shaped by glaciers, waterfalls and volcanoes. Other attractions highlighted include the bustling nightlife and the country's geothermal activity.

Iceland was also included in *National Geographic Traveler's* pick of the 'Best of the World 2012' stating that it was "a final relic from the world's last ice age" with its "knife-cut valleys, gargantuan fjords, monumental cliffs, black-sand beaches, thundering waterfalls, and silent white glaciers." It was voted as a top destination alongside Croatia and Thailand.

<http://www.iceland.is/the-big-picture/news/iceland-tops-polls-as-most-attractive-destination-in-2012/8333/>

Latest tourism campaign sees Icelander's inviting visitors into their homes- and even the president joins in!

The newly launched *Inspired by Iceland* campaign encourages visitors to see the country the Icelandic way by spending time with its citizens. This follows 2010's *Inspired by Iceland* campaign, which was initiated in response to the effect on flights and tourism due to the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull, and won prizes for its innovation.

The campaign kicked off in October with President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson making a public speech inviting tourists into his own home for pancakes, whipped cream and rhubarb jam. Other Icelandic citizens followed suit and began opening their doors to visitors.

Invitations can be viewed and replied to at www.inspiredbyiceland.com. Examples include ice climbing and glacier walking with a professional guide, having a geothermal foot bath with the Minister of Tourism, an authentic Icelandic dinner cooked by locals and a Northern Lights photography workshop with a professional photographer.

The campaign lasts until December and has already won one of the 'IPA 2011 Effectiveness Awards' which celebrate 15 examples of effective communication. The judges were inspired by the incredible feat of galvanising a nation to create a campaign and the power of using people as brand advocates to drive results.

John Lennon themed meals on Videy Island

As Yoko Ono's Peace Tower on Videy Island is turned on for its annual tribute to John Lennon, Icelanders further celebrate his life by putting on special tribute evenings in the island's Gallery Restaurant.

The restaurant's chef showcases a carefully selected menu of Lennon's favourite ingredients based on his lyrics and lifestyle. This is accompanied by actress and singer, Þórunn Lárusdóttir, taking visitors through Lennon and Ono's history and their campaign for world peace and renowned singer Jón Ólafsson and his band playing a musical tribute. After dinner, guests will be taken to the Imagine Peace Tower for a closer look at the work of art.

The tribute evening takes place on 18 November and tickets can be booked at www.midi.is.

Day trips to north Iceland will be more accessible next summer with increased domestic flights and packages

Eagle Air will run seven flights a week to northern Iceland between April and September 2012. The flights will go from Reykjavik to Husavik and can be offered as a day trip package which will make the stunning volcanic north much more accessible.

The day tour packages, which include flights from Reykjavik, are 'Whale watching and Lake Myvatn' and 'Natural wonders and Lake Myvatn'. The 'whale watching day' trip involves a whale watching tour from Husavik and a trip to Lake Myvatn. The 'natural wonders' trip visits Krafla Volcano, lava fields, hot springs and Detifoss waterfall which is considered the mightiest in Europe.

www.eagleair.is

New trips emerge as the brightest Northern Lights in 50 years put on a spectacular show

Photography masterclass

With the brightest Northern Lights in 50 years showcasing themselves to visitors, specialist tour operator, **Tatra Photography** has put on two Northern Lights photography tours from 28 February- 4 March and 6-11 March 2012.

Guests will be based in the Thingvellir National Park, which is an area known for offering good views of the Northern Lights. The group (maximum size of ten) will receive professional tuition from landscape photographer Nick Jenkins on topics such as image composition, how to approach landscape photography with the eye of a pro and using a camera to its full potential to achieve the 'wow factor'.

www.tatraphotographyworkshop.com/ 0161 408 8988

New family Northern Lights Adventure

Families can travel to Iceland to see the Northern Lights with **The Adventure Company** on its newly released family orientated tour. Over the five day adventure families will be based in Reykjavik and taken into the countryside at night to get the best views of the Northern Lights. They will be accompanied by an astronomy expert who can explain the science behind the lights.

During the day, families are taken to the Reykjanes Peninsula, Golden Circle and along the south shore to see the snow shrouded Hekla volcano and the ice capped stratovolcano Eyjafjallajökull.

Departure dates are 12 and 14 February 2012.

www.adventurecompany.co.uk/ 0845 287 6170

Northern Lights Tour on a boat

Special Tours has started to hunt for the Northern Lights by sea with its new luxury boat, Rósin (the Rose). With this fast boat visitors can escape the Reykjavik city lights in a few minutes making the hunt for the Northern Lights easier and more beautiful. Boat trips depart every Thursday or Saturday from Reykjavik Old Harbour at 9pm.

www.specialtours.is/ +354 892 0099

‘Vox’ head chef wins Icelandic Chef of the Year 2011

The head chef at the Hilton Nordica Hotel’s Vox Restaurant in Reykjavik has won the Chef of the Year 2011 award. The chef, Sigurdur Haraldsson won first place and two other restaurant staff also won prizes.

The restaurant focuses on seasonal Nordic cuisine and changes its menu with the time of year to offer diners the best of Icelandic cuisine. The chefs also source organic produce wherever possible and only use native Icelandic ingredients. An example of an autumnal dish is lightly smoked puffin from Mánareyjar in Skjálfandi with walnuts, baked beetroot and beurre noisette.

<http://vox.is/en>

Iceland voted to be the best country to be a woman

Iceland came out top in a survey carried out by American news site, *The Daily Beast* on gender equality. The survey analysed the data of 165 countries to determine which ones offer women the most expansive rights and best quality of life. Iceland scored 100 out of 100 based on women's access to justice, healthcare, education, economics and politics. On top of this Iceland has come first in the World Economic Forum's report on equality between the sexes in the last two years.

Iceland has made enormous progress in closing the gender gap. This is fronted by its female prime minister who is the world's first openly lesbian head of government. The country is also fast becoming a world leader in feminism with dramatic rules against gender inequality such as banning strip clubs.

Source: <http://bit.ly/so4CLv>

Dates for the diary Upcoming festivals and events

Imagine Peace Tower- *October 9 - December 8 2011*

The Imagine Peace Tower is an outdoor work of art by Yoko Ono on Videy Island which features peace prayers in 24 languages. The artwork is dedicated to John Lennon and has been illuminating a shaft of light into the sky since October 9 (Lennon's birthday). This will be lit until December 8 (Lennon's anniversary).

Unglist, Young Arts Festival, Reykjavik

5-13 November 2011

This annual festival in Reykjavik showcases an array of young Icelandic talent in the arts. The programme consists of music, design, fashion and photography reflecting current trends within the country.

The Yuletide Lads (Jólasveinar)

12 December

The Yuletide lads including Gully Gawk, Window Peeper, Bowl Licker, Pot Scraper, Door Slammer descend from the mountains on December 12 each year to make mischief! Icelandic children enjoy the fun for 13 days as a different elf visits each night. Visitors should remember to leave a shoe in the window overnight and hopefully, the 'Lad' of the day will leave a small gift!

Jól, Christmas

24 December

In the Christmas period restaurants around the country offer lavish buffets serving traditional Icelandic foods such as succulent lamb, *hangikjot* (smoked lamb), venison, goose, fresh seafood, and *laufabraud* (deep-fried paper-thin bread). Communities illuminate the long dark nights with thousands of Christmas lights.

Gamlárskvöld, New Year's Eve

31 December

New Year the Icelandic way starts with dinner, before huddling around a blazing bonfire to join in a chorus or two of some traditional folk songs. Across Iceland almost every family sets off colourful fireworks at midnight to welcome in the New Year, but Reykjavik is the place to be if you want to party long into the early hours.

-Ends-

For further press information contact:

Jenny Groutage or Amelia Astley Birtwistle at The Saltmarsh Partnership

Tel: 020 7928 1600 Fax: 020 7928 1700

E-mail: jenny@saltmarshpr.co.uk / amelia@saltmarshpr.co.uk