

Max Galli & Ernst-Otto Luthardt

Journey through

ICELAND



Stürtz

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First Page:
Of the many species of bird which inhabit Iceland the puffin is the most

colourful, with its huge, triangular beak in yellow, orange, red and black.

Previous page:
Lonely countryside in the sparsely populated northwest of the island

between Hrafnseyri and Þingeyri. The latter has a long history, once providing whalers and fisher-

men from Europe and America with a welcome refuge after long journeys at sea.

Below:
Easy to look after and able to endure Iceland's harsh winters, these

miniature horses are used for both pleasure and work. Unlike its larger counterparts the Iceland

pony can also pace and do a running walk called the tölt.

Page 10/11:
The Godafoss was named a thousand years ago after the images of heathen gods hurled into its torrential rapids. Today the twin waterfall in the north of the country is one of the most popular attractions in Iceland.

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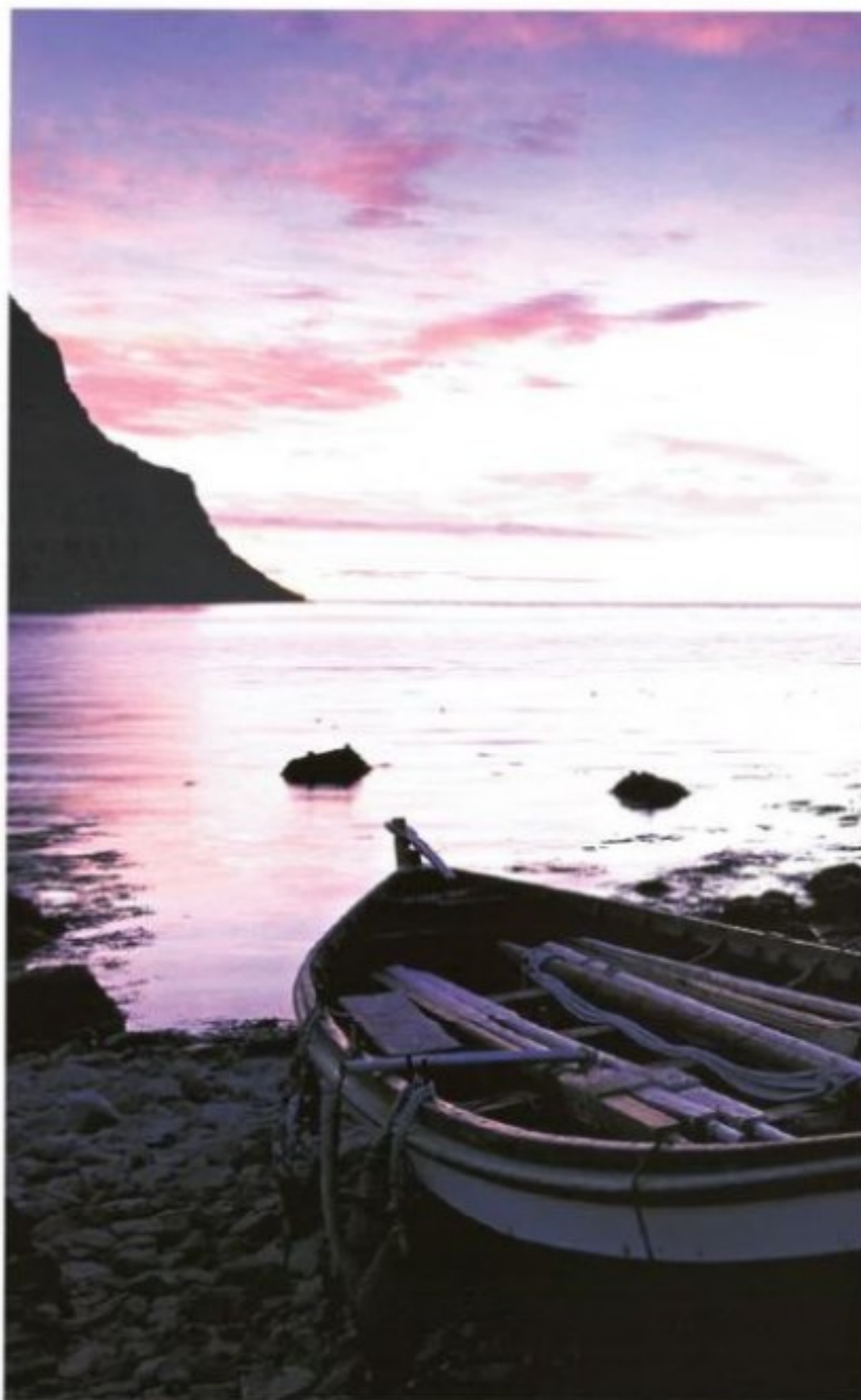
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ICELAND —

Evening light over Bolungarvík, the most northerly and also the oldest settlement in the Westfjords. The 100-year-old Ósvör fishery, recently restored, is well worth visiting, the museum a stark reminder of the hardships the villagers once had to endure.

Money may not be able to buy you love, but it could buy you a holiday in Iceland — providing you've got lots of it. Iceland, with all its dazzling natural attractions, does not come cheap. The cost of alcohol is extortionate. Trying to find a restaurant in Reykjavík serving food at a reasonable price is like looking for a needle in a haystack; elsewhere, don't even bother to try. The holiday season in Iceland is also relatively short; June, July and August are the best times to travel. If you miscalculate somewhat and end up here in May or September, be prepared for frost at night. In the highlands temperatures plunge below zero all year round. Souvenirs? Your standard-issue, itchy fisherman's jumper — which you bought in Norway — lies neatly folded and unworn in the wardrobe. Stones, minerals? They're too heavy for your suitcase, even though you've probably never seen colours like them before. No, Iceland is definitely not the ideal tourist destination — and never will be.

«Thank goodness for that!» cry the 150,000 who — despite or perhaps because of this — are drawn to the island year in year out. This is the one place they are guaranteed raw natural beauty and magnificent unspoilt scenery otherwise not found on our European Continent. The juxtaposition of gigantic glaciers and smouldering volcanoes, of eternal ice and steaming hot springs, of monotonous deserts of lava and volcanic debris and green mossy valleys, of countless waterfalls and long stretches of jagged and sandy coastline, is so incredibly grand that mere words cannot possibly do it justice. Halldór Laxness, the great Icelandic novelist and Nobel Prize winner, once wrote that in his country you could still feel the earth turning, feel it breathing.



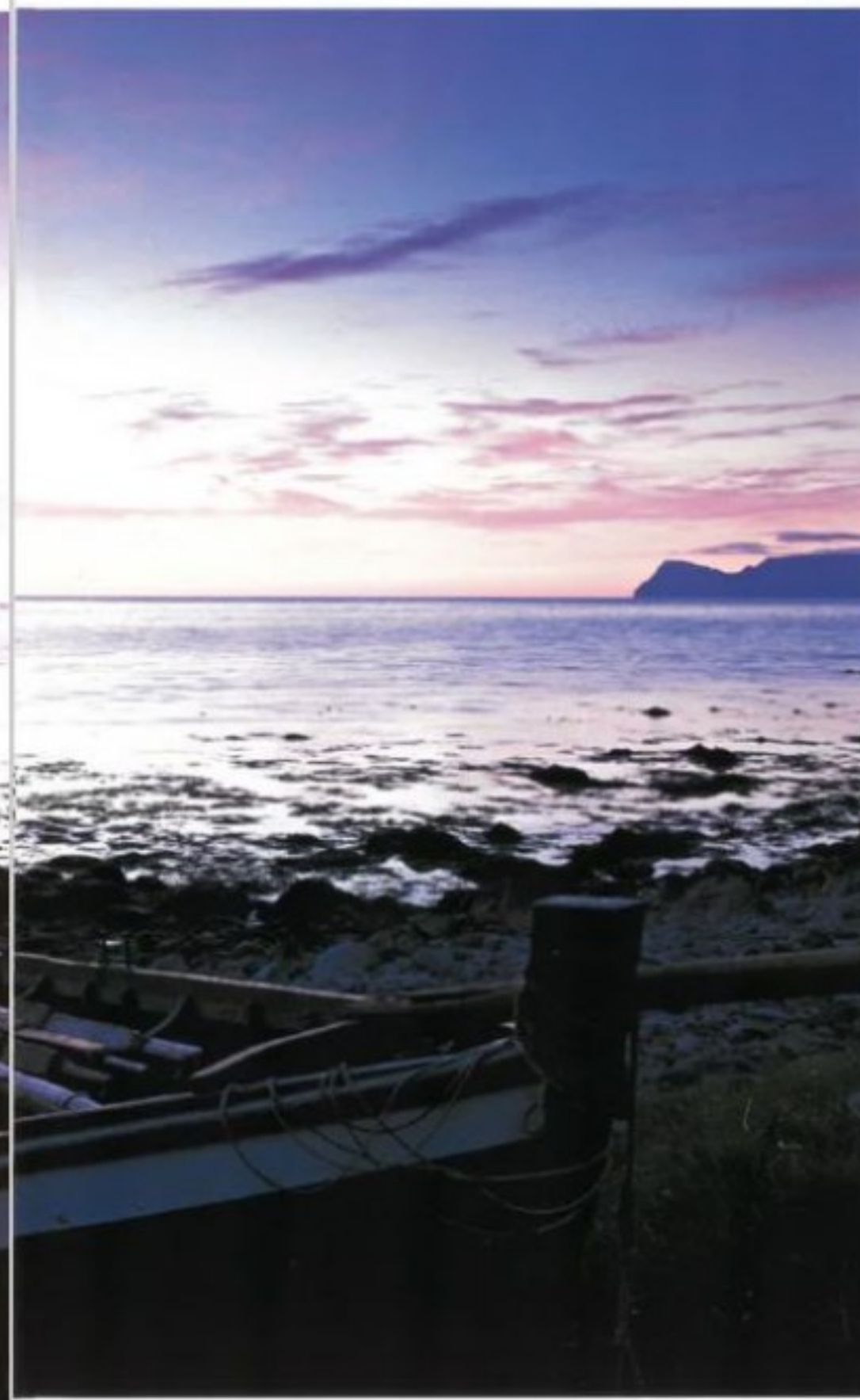
A NATURAL PARADISE

A LENGTHY EVOLUTION

20 million years ago Iceland is thought to have risen up out of the Atlantic. Although many, many years have passed since then, Iceland is still evolving. The country is still growing. Tons of sand hollowed out of the rock by glaciers are washed down to the coast by the many rivers, gradually expanding the shoreline; the fiery elements well below the earth's crust play an even more important role in the remodelling of Iceland. Vestmannaeyjar (the Westman Islands) in the south, for example, is in a particularly active volcanic region. On older maps the island of Surtsey is missing; it suddenly appeared above the waves in 1963. Ten years later, on a dark night in January, the ground split open on the main island of Heimaey and a new volcano catapulted ash and lava into the winter sky. When it finally ceased erupting six months later the land had grown two square kilometres (two-thirds of a square mile) in size. Many homes were destroyed, but thankfully no lives were lost. The main fishing harbour was also spared — thanks to the engineering genius of the quick-witted islanders. When the molten streams of lava threatened to cut off the main access to the harbour, they pitted it against the Atlantic, hosing it down with sea water and bringing the volcanic mass to a solidified halt.

The first man to set foot on the island and erect a home on the turbulent soil is said to be the Viking Gardar Svavarsson. The little town of Húsavík in the north celebrates this event with both its name («house bay») and an annual festival commemorating 870, the year of Svavarsson's alleged arrival. As the valiant seaman failed to remain here long he missed his chance to go down in the annals of history as the first inhabitant of Iceland. This great honour was bestowed upon Ingólfur Arnarson who postdated Svavarsson by two years — and stayed. Many of the 20,000 to 30,000 who followed him over the next few decades came from the west of Norway and the British Isles.

A mighty tome known as the «Landnámabók» lists the names and properties of several hundred of these immigrants. Although the original has been lost, three later versions from the 13th century have survived, providing us with information on the names and lives of approximately 430 families. Drawing up genealogies is still one of the favourite pastimes of the people of Iceland. The island's remote location, the relatively small number of inhabitants and a language which has barely changed in over one thousand years enable people to trace their family trees back to practically the year dot and feel they are related to almost all of their



It's very easy to make friends with the locals. Visitors are addressed as the Icelanders address each other; either in the informal or by their first names, if known.



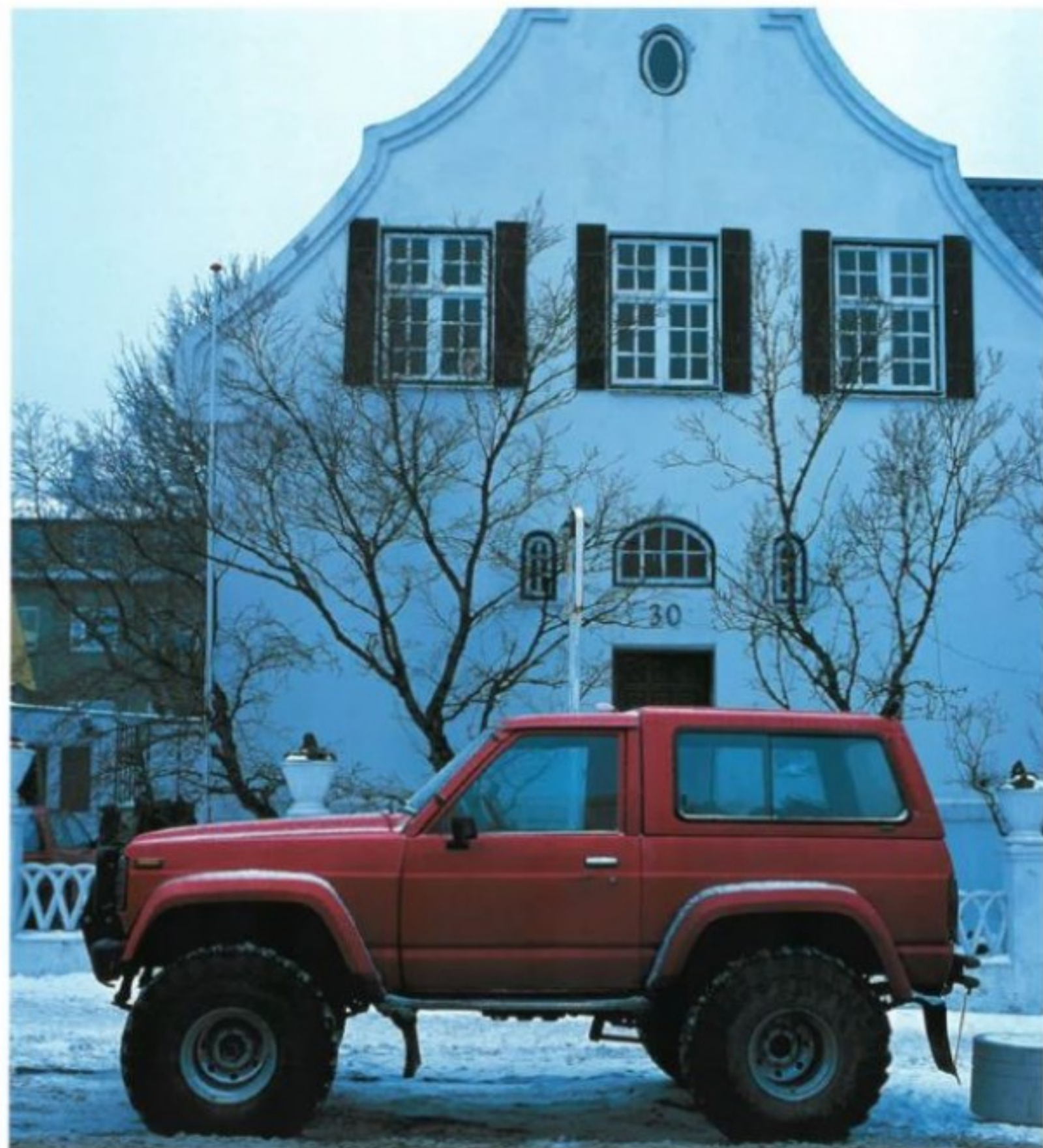
A coffee house in Reykjavik. The people of Iceland are a nation of coffee-drinkers. Their enthusiasm for the bean is so great that it's not unusual to find pots of coffee set out in supermarkets or public buildings for visitors to help themselves to.



Right page: After computers and mobile phones cars are the Icelandic's favourite toys. Every second person has a car - which in the extreme climate admittedly doesn't last that long.



Reykjavik, together with four other towns, was given its town charter by the Domes in 1786. At that time the capital had just 170 inhabitants. Today Greater Reykjavik is home to ca. 165,000, many of whom live in concrete houses which can withstand Iceland's earthquakes better than the city's more picturesque wooden dwellings.



THE FIRST PARLIAMENT IN THE WORLD



The setting couldn't be more spectacular; two deep gorges cut through a fantastic lava landscape, decorated with moss and lichen, wild flowers and tangled shrubs, reflected in the sparkling waters of an enormous lake. This idyllic spot is a mere hour's drive northeast of Reykjavík and is where in the summer of 930 the first Alþingi, Iceland's national assembly, was held and the free state of Iceland proclaimed. Þingvellir, the »holy place of all Icelanders«, covers ca. 50 square kilometres (19 square miles) and was made a national park in 1930. It was also here that



on 17 June 1944, 1,000 years after the birth of the free state, the Republic of Iceland was called into being.

The Alþingi marked the end of the acquisition of Iceland (which begun in 874) and the beginning of a new dawn in Icelandic society. The godords established at the Settlement, communities of temple-goers which later became centres of worldly power, were based on Norwegian models which were no longer suitable under the new system of administration. Wise scholar Úlfljóttur thus spent three years studying the laws of his motherland and adapting them to suit the circum-



Top left: Together with a group of students, in 1845 Jón Sigurðsson re-established the historic Alþingi in Reykjavík. His name has become synonymous with the new, independent Iceland.

Left: Alþingishúsið in Reykjavík, Iceland's houses of parliament, dates back to 1881. The grey basalt building is the work of Danish architect Mehlidal.

Above: Hrafnseyri has a museum dedicated to national hero Jón Sigurðsson whose birthday (June 17) is a national holiday.

Top right: This lithograph from 1845 shows the Almannagjá Gorge which runs along the Þingvellir fault to the west, where from 930 to 1798 the Alþingi convened.

AND THE FREE STATE OF ICELAND



Far right: This poster was printed in 1874 to commemorate 1,000 years of Iceland, one millennium after the first official settler

Ingólfur Arnarson set foot on the island. The map in the centre is surrounded by Iceland's guardian spirits: the giant, dragon, bird and bull.



stances prevalent in his new homeland. On his return he presented his ideas to the assembly at Þingvellir. Announcing his visions to those present from atop a rocky spur (the Lögberg or Law Rock, now marked by a stone plaque and Icelandic flag), Úlfljóttur and all those who succeeded him must have had both a sound voice and a phenomenal memory; until 1117, all laws were recorded solely in the minds of those who were required to recite them off by heart at the annual parliamentary sittings. Parliament was also responsible for any matters of jurisdiction. Sentences were carried out by the victors of the dispute. For a long time banishment was the worst form of punishment; wrongdoers were later hanged, drowned or strangled. Records of various places of execution at the Alþingi have been handed down to us. »Witches« were burnt at the stake in the Brennugjá or burning gorge whereas the Drekkingsrhyllur or drowning place was reserved for women who had either had illegitimate children or had deceived or even done away with their husbands. The Almannagjá (Everyman's Gorge) is named after the members of the first parliament which is said to have met here.

FEASTING AND WRESTLING

The Alþingi wasn't all law and order, however; there was also a lot of fun. People ate and drank, went to market, got married, sang songs and recited poetry, joined in games – and wrestled. The latter in its Icelandic version, »glima«, is still extremely popular. The contestants wear a belt and a band around the thigh. The aim of the sport is to wrestle your opponent to

the floor using just seven permissible holds; the first person to touch the ground with any part of the body above the knees has lost.

Today Iceland is one of the most modern states in the world yet tradition still plays a major role. Until well into the 18th century there were no villages here, just single farmsteads as in the time of the sagas. One such turf holding in the Þórsá Valley, buried under Hekla lava in 1104, was excavated and reconstructed in the last century. Other turf huts documenting what life was like in the days of yore can be visited at Reykjavík's Árbæjarsafn Open-Air Museum and at Glaumbær in the north of the country.

The latter is also linked to the life and times of a certain Þorfinnur Karlsefni, who in ca. 1000 accompanied intrepid Leifur Eiríksson on his journey to America. Unlike this early explorer, who returned home from his voyage of discovery, the almost 20,000 Icelanders who set off to start a new life in the USA between 1870 and 1914 did not. The interesting Museum of Emigration in Hofsós on the Skagafjörður is dedicated to them.

If you ask an Icelander which event in the recent history of his or her country holds the greatest significance, he or she might single out March 1 1989 – explaining with a smile that this was the day on which the long 80-year-ban on beer was finally lifted...





Below:
a farm near Reykjavik.
Iceland's ca. 4,000 farmers
provide enough meat and
dairy products to feed the
entire country. A good
percentage of the approxi-
mately half a million
sheep is exported, with the
number of exported cattle
also on the increase over
the past few years.

Above:
Iceland ponies can easily
survive in the wild; only
those animals used for
riding are stabled over the
winter months. Horses are
broken in at the age of
four or five in a process
which is long and difficult.
Patience reaps rewards,
however: ponies aged 20-
25 are as fighting fit as
their younger relatives.



Lava beach near Dyrhólaey, whose name «door hill island» is derived from the natural arch washed into the cliff by the sea. In fine weather

you can travel under it in a boat – but not between May 1 and 25 June, when visitors might disturb nesting birds.



Dyrhólaey was created by a submarine volcanic eruption around 80,000 years ago. The former island – now linked to the

mainland – is surrounded by black beaches of lava and dominated by its lighthouse, erected in 1910.



Right:
One of the best viewing
points along the south
coast is Dyrhólaey with
its cliffs, not far from
the Ring Road.



Below left:
Each year further sections
of the Ring Road are tar-
macked over. The famous
unmade dirt, lava and
sand tracks are now only
found in the east of the
island.

Below right:
For those taking their
own car to Iceland –
this 2CV has come from
Aschaffenburg near
Frankfurt – the journey is
a long one. Even the
shortest ferry crossing
takes five days.



Below left:
The tarmac sections
of the Ring Road also
require careful driving.
Fairly narrow, with plenty
of steep curves up hill and
down dale, it's imperative
that you read the road and
drive slowly. Would-be
racing drivers would not
be happy here.

Below right:
The icy fingers of the
Silhjúkull feed the mighty
glacial River Hverfisfljót
which flows into the sea
at Hvolsfelli.





Left page:
Abandoned house on
Hvítafjörður in the
northwest of the country.
Emigration to the cities
has always been a

problem in Iceland. As
idyllic as the setting might
seem, the disadvantages
of living in rural isolation
often outweigh the advan-
tages.

Below:
Salmon fisherman in the
Westfjords. The season
runs from June 20 to the
middle of September. Fish-
ing permits are required,
obtained from the National
Angling Association.



This magnificent waterfall
tumbles right down to
Route 61 in the Westfjords.

Below:
Lava rocks on Hestfjörður.
The long, narrow fjord is
the twin of Seyðisfjörður,
the two separated by a
peninsular and the im-
pressive Hestur Mountain.



The best place to catch
salmon in Iceland is the
River Laxá. Other spots,
such as the mouth of the

enormously long River
Blánda in Blálandis,
shown here, also promise
rich pickings.

Below:

Ólafsfjörður on the north coast, riddled with fjords, is dominated by its mighty mountains whose peaks

are capped with snow all year round. Its 1,000-odd inhabitants live from fishing and fish processing.

Top and centre right:

Even Ólafsfjörður's trawlers need repairing now and again. Once seaworthy, the professionals head out to their fishing grounds in the Atlantic, with Lake Ólafsfjörður

just south of the little town reserved for anglers.

The lake mingles with water from the nearby sea, providing fishermen with a variety of salt- and freshwater fish.

Bottom right:

Young women from the Westman Islands. Women have played an important role in the history of Iceland since its begin-

ning; more recently the country has honoured this tradition by electing the first female head of state in the world.

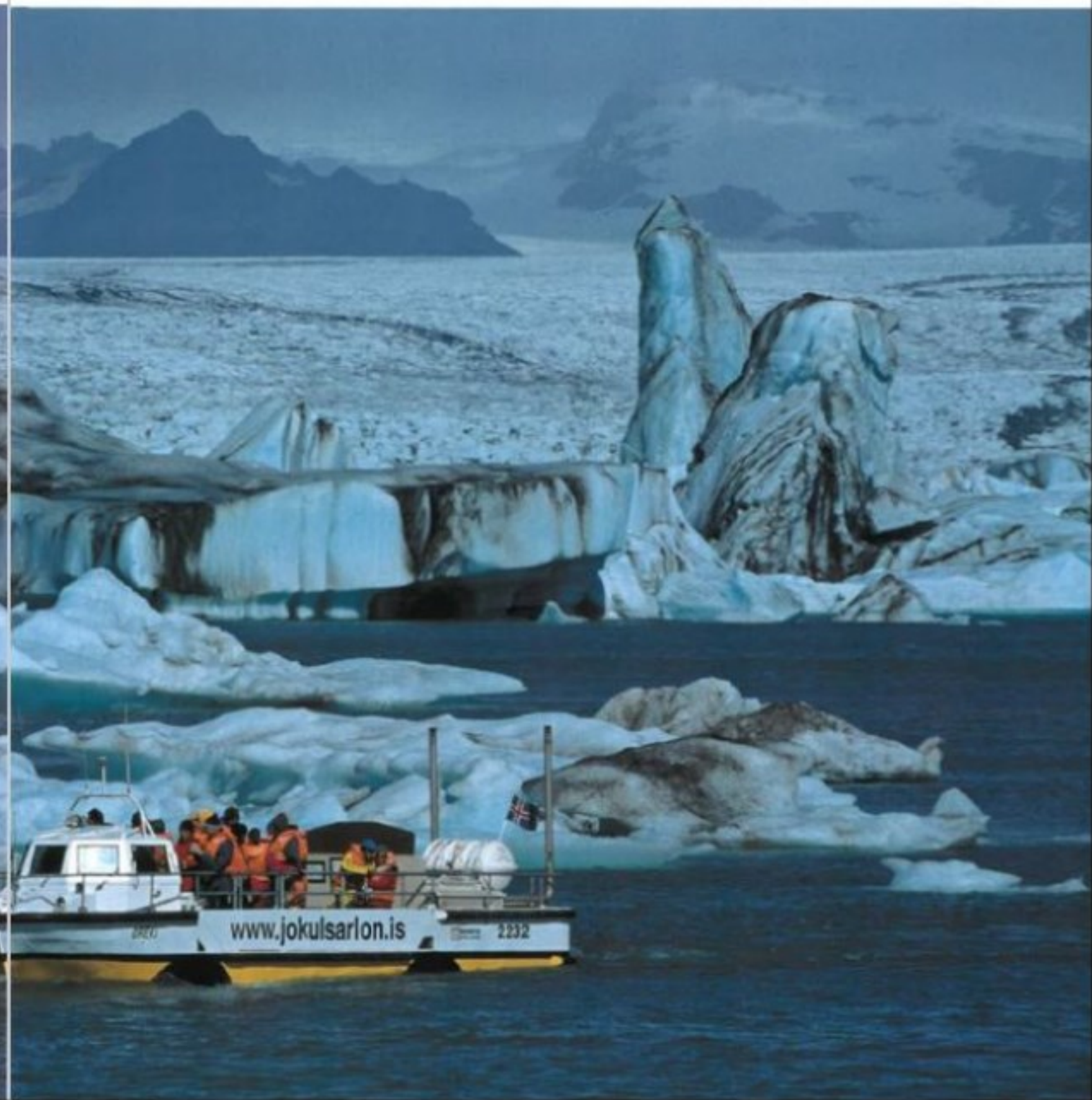


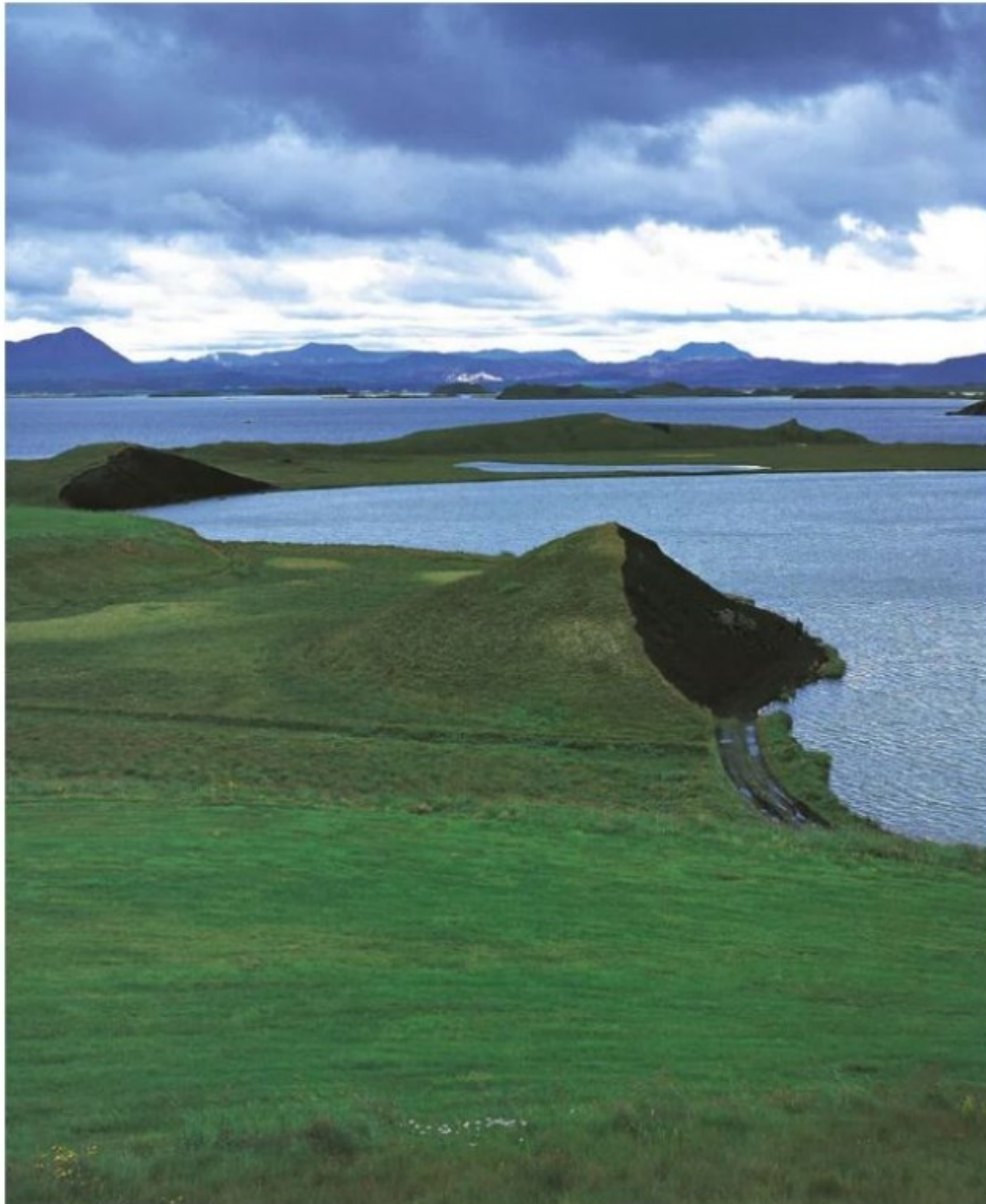
Top left:
One of the highlights
of any trip to Iceland is
a ride in an amphibious
vehicle to the icebergs
of Jökulsárlón.

Centre left:
The icebergs drifting
across the surface of
Jökulsárlón glacial lake
are a breathtaking spec-
tacle, brought within
reach aboard the right
form of transport.

Bottom left:
In case of emergencies the
Jökulsárlón vehicles have
lifeboats in tow. Should
anyone fall overboard,
they must be pulled out
of the icy water as quickly
as possible.

Below:
Sailing past the icebergs
of Jökulsárlón is a feast
for the eyes, with the ice
gleaming white, green,
blue and even black in the
northern light.





Left page:

Although only the fourth-largest lake in the country, Mývatn is undoubtedly the most famous. People come

here in their thousands to take in the fantastic scenery and the many natural landmarks nearby.

Below:

Mývatn was formed in the wake of two volcanic eruptions 3,700 and 2,000 years ago. The lake is relatively shallow, with its deepest section measuring just under 5 metres (16 feet).



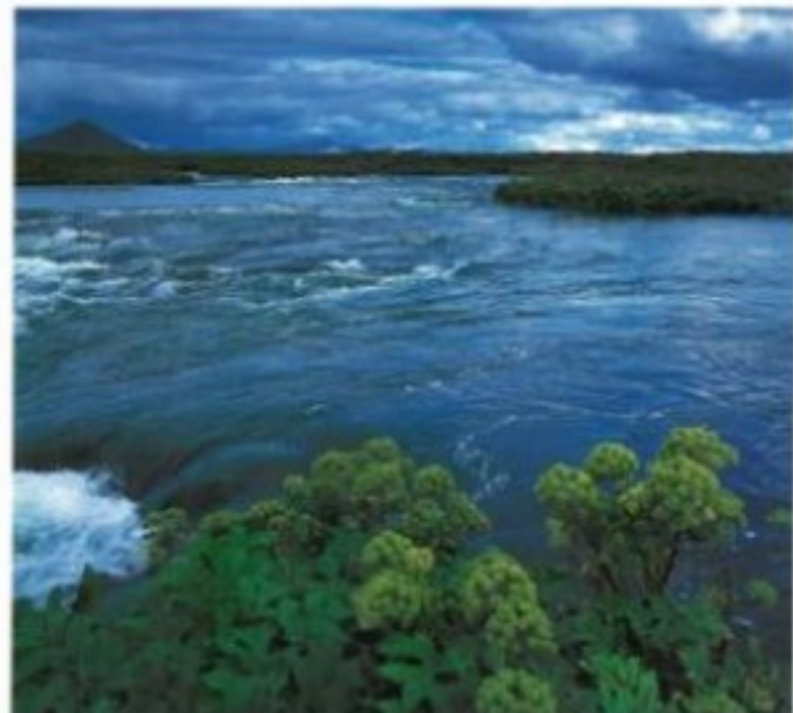
Above:

The many tiny bays and miniature islands of the lake – with Slátanes in the northwest undoubtedly the

most beautiful – provide photographers and painters with an impressive catalogue of motifs and perspectives.

Below:

The name Mývatn or Midge Lake pays homage to its swarms of nasty insects which drive visitors to distraction but provide fish and birds with a vital source of nourishment.



Above:

The Lake Mývatn area in the verdant green of summer. The lush vegetation along its shores provides

many species of bird. The lake is home to all types of duck native to Iceland – with the one exception of the eider.

Top and bottom right:
At the Seyðisfjörður ferry terminal. The tiny har-
bour town on the fjord of
the same name in the east
of the country is where
visitors travelling from
the European Continent
— via the Faroe Islands —
first set foot on volcanic
Icelandic soil. Over 100
years ago Seyðisfjörður
was a busy centre of the
herring industry domina-
ted by Norwegians, who
have left their distinctive
mark on the port.



Right page:
With a population of ca.
15,000 Akureyri is the
second-largest city on the
island and — thanks to its
university — the academic
hub of the north. Founded
by settler Helgi Magri in
the 9th century, during the
short summer nights of
June and July the town at
the end of Eyjafjörður
positively hums.



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ICELAND



The second-largest island in Europe after Great Britain, Iceland has some incredible scenery to offer, with volcanoes and glaciers grappling for power, geysers catapulting jets of water high into the sky, waterfalls crashing down steep cliffs, hot springs bubbling and blue lagoons sparkling, with lush green valleys offering welcome respite from the black monotony of the lava desert. Brightly painted houses cling dizzily to the sheer slopes of the fjords, lonely churches poignantly punctuate the wild countryside and thousands of Icelandic sheep and ponies graze the wind-swept meadows. In sharp contrast to the raw climes of the country the capital of Reykjavík is Iceland in its modern form, positively humming with culture and nightlife.

Over 180 photographs paint a picture of this island on the Arctic Circle, of a land in the making, with its unique landscapes, breathtaking scenery, idyllic hamlets and buzzing city of Reykjavík. Nature at its most spectacular and fascinating entices you to undertake a journey through the land of fire and ice.

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