

RANGÁ REVIEW

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SEASONAL MAGAZINE

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page 06/07

WINTER WEDDING

Wedding bells are ringing at Hotel Rangá! Read all about a stunning winter wedding featuring a special sighting of the Northern Lights.

page 14/15

STARGAZING

Turn your eyes to the skies... stargazing season is here! Learn what you can see on a guided astronomy tour at Hotel Rangá Observatory.

page 20

WINTER PHOTOS

Happy moments should be shared! We are celebrating winter across our social media platforms with a competition for the best Hotel Rangá Winter Photo.



WINTER ACTIVITIES

TAKE A SUPER JEEP TOUR

The winter months are a fantastic time to visit out-of-the-way spots in the highlands like Þórsmörk and Landmannalaugar on a modified Super Jeep capable of traversing the most rugged landscapes.

TRY SNOWMOBILING ON A GLACIER

Snowmobiling on top of Eyjafjallajökull—the volcano-glacier that erupted in 2010—is an unforgettable experience. Check out page 4-5 to learn more about this once-in-a-lifetime ride.

EXPLORE AN ICE CAVE

Ice caves are beautiful natural formations that grow and change according to seasonal weather conditions. Take a tour inside one of these incredible structures and marvel at the unique colors and textures of the ice.

GO ON A GLACIER HIKE OR TRY ICE CLIMBING

Hike on a glacier with an expert guide who will ensure your safety and share fascinating facts as you explore. Feeling adventurous? Try ice climbing!

DRIVE AN ATV OR BUGGY

Drive an ATV or buggy along a black sand beach or up into the Icelandic highlands. Feel the fresh Icelandic air on your face as you explore back roads and secret waterfalls.

RIDE A HORSE

Taking a horseback ride is the perfect way to see the Icelandic countryside. Icelandic horses actually grow a thick winter coat which keeps them comfortable in all kinds of weather.

READ A GOOD BOOK

Our cozy upstairs lounge is the perfect place to get lost in a good book. See our top recommendations for Icelandic authors on page 16.

RELAX IN THE TUB

Grab a glass of wine and take a dip in one of our hot tubs overlooking the beautiful Rangá river. If you are lucky, you might just get to see the northern lights dancing across the sky.

Picture by Jack Anstey

Front cover photo by Sævar Helgi Bragason.



Picture by Jack Anstey

SMALL LUXURY HOTELS

Excellence and individuality, that is what you can expect time and again at Hotel Rangá, a proud member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World. To learn more about this prestigious affiliation, we sat down with hotelier Friðrik Pálsson, the owner and managing director of Hotel Rangá.

“Before joining the hotel industry, I spent time travelling with my late wife around Europe, and we usually stayed at chateaus or other small hotels,” says Friðrik, who took over Hotel Rangá in 2003. “We loved the smaller hotels because they are individually run and more private -- you feel more at home. So, when Small Luxury Hotels approached Hotel Rangá in 2015, I found it very interesting and after some discussions we decided it was the way to go.”

Founded in 1989, Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH) is a community of over 500 luxury accommodations, from rural resorts to city boutique hotels, in more than 80 countries. For their portfolio of SLH-listed properties, they select only small, independent hotels that offer a genuine, one-of-a-kind experience.

Each year SLH receives over 1,000 hotel applications but accepts only 5 percent. Their criteria are strict, and each property is inspected thoroughly to ensure a consistently high standard. As Friðrik explains, those inspections are not limited to first-time applicants: “They do a mystery visit at Hotel Rangá every year and closely check about 350 to 400 items on their list -- everything from big to small, they leave nothing untouched. They keep us on our toes.”

Friðrik knows a thing or two about meticulous quality standards, as he has 30 years of prior experience with the Icelandic seafood export business and ISO 9001 certification. “That taught me a lot,” he says, “and since then I have been a big supporter of very thorough standardized procedures. Of course, flexibility is also very important to us, and we are always willing and ready to meet whatever challenge there is.”

“Their individually minded approach is another thing I like a lot,” says Friðrik, noting that it mirrors the values of Hotel Rangá. “People are more and more wanting to have something individually made or planned -- they are coming to Iceland and want to experience something out of the ordinary, so we are always working with local activity companies to come up with something new and different.”

In a competitive industry like tourism and hospitality, Friðrik feels strongly that the SLH partnership has been a boon to Hotel Rangá and its guests. “I have always believed in cooperation because alone, you are very small. What they offer us is the opportunity to be part of a much bigger brand name, with more visibility to potential guests, as well as recognition for excellence in the luxury market.”



SNOWMOBILING

Wait, you mean that Eyjafjallajökull? Yes, we are talking about the volcano-glacier that famously crippled European air traffic after erupting in 2010. So, imagine telling the folks back home you snowmobiled on top of it, with photos to prove it. Ready to earn your bragging rights?

“Everyone can do it!” exclaims Sigga Friða Ólafsdóttir about snowmobiling, an activity that is not just part of her job but one of her favourite pastimes. Sigga is the travel designer at Southcoast Adventure, a company now in its tenth year. The small tour operator started not long before the Eyjafjallajökull eruption in April 2010 -- an event that twisted TV news reporters’ tongues all over the world. It is now the destination of their most popular snowmobiling tour.

As a former snowmobile guide herself, Sigga knows all the ins and outs of running excursions on South Iceland’s ever-changing ice caps. Despite the notorious reputation of Eyjafjallajökull, which is actually one of Iceland’s smaller glaciers, Sigga ensures that snowmobiling is safe and beginner-friendly.

“We get questions all the time about being close to the volcanic eruption site,” explains Sigga. “The crater is on top of the glacier and it is like a bowl, so you can see the outline, but covered in snow,” she said, noting it is not allowed to go into the crater or on the rim. “You can snowmobile close to it and you may not see much evidence of the eruption, but you know it is there. It is a powerful feeling.” On a clear day, you can also enjoy sweeping views over the highlands, the coastline and even to the Westman Islands.

WILDERNESS ADVENTURES IN CAPABLE HANDS

Safety on any glacier, of course, is paramount. Southcoast Adventure has their own in-house safety manager to monitor the glacier conditions and weather. As part of protocol, he traverses the glacier on foot at least once a year to check crevasse development and map any cracks in his GPS – information that determines the safest routes for the tours. The guides are also equipped with GPS systems on their sleds, as well as two-way radios to communicate with each other and with the office.

Along with the technological expertise, the guides are all highly experienced with South Iceland’s backcountry. “About 95% of our staff is on the search-and-rescue team,” says Sigga, the pride coming through in her voice. Landsbjörg, called ICE-SAR in English, is Iceland’s search-and-rescue organisation, composed of local volunteers who undergo rigorous training in Iceland’s most challenging terrain in all types of weather conditions.



Pictures by Soutcoast Adventure



For the safest and most enjoyable experience on the glacier, the company strictly limits the number of passengers on each tour. “A small group is so much easier to control for the guides and much more personal for guests”, explains Sigga, noting that about 50% of all guests are first-time snowmobilers. “You have to have a driver’s license of course to control a sled, but we have all ages in our groups, including children who can ride with parents or a guide.”

SNOWMOBILING 101: WHAT TO EXPECT

“When guests arrive to our basecamp, not far from Hotel Rangá, we go over how everything works: how to control the sled, what you need to do to go, how to stop, what hand signals to make if you have a problem, and anything else,” says Sigga. Then the group departs on their glacier safari, following the lead guide in a single file line, never exceeding about 30 km/h (19 mph) for safety reasons. Of course, there are multiple breaks for photos. (Pro tip: freezing weather quickly drains phone and camera batteries, so go with a full charge.)

On zooming across a glacier for the first time, Sigga explains, “It is all about the adrenaline, the kick you get when you’re controlling the vehicle yourself. It is just so much fun, you are busy doing so many things, then suddenly it is like... ‘I drove up there, I did it!’ Once people try it, they want to do it again and again.” As for staying warm, the snowmobiles

feature heated seats and heated hand grips. “It is luxury in snowmobiling, I would say!” says Sigga.

The regular Eyjafjallajökull tour is about 3 hours (1 hour of snowmobiling) and makes a great add-on to other south coast tours. For more experienced riders, Sigga notes that more advanced tours are available, from full day to multi-day programs. Private tours can also be arranged, including evening departures (weather dependant). Planning a special occasion? Sigga mentions that it is not uncommon for guests to get engaged on a tour, with a little behind-the-scenes help from the guides and office staff.

For Sigga, her job has a lot of rewards. “The thing that always keeps me smiling is the people with us on tour. When you say, ‘I did this, it was a lot of fun,’ it means the world to us!”

Do not hesitate to reach out to our front desk for further information or to book the right tour for you.



LOVE UNDER THE AURORA

Amy Elizabeth Mansfield and David Michael Loveridge were married at Hotel Rangá in October 2018. Their intimate ceremony was held in Oddi Church, a historic and romantic place of worship located close to Hotel Rangá. We loved hosting this couple and are thrilled to share a glimpse of their special day which included a magical sighting of the Northern Lights. Below, Amy and David share their engagement story and the story of how they decided to be married in Iceland.

“For my 30th Birthday in October 2017, David arranged a surprise trip to Iceland—a place that had always intrigued both of us because of its beautiful scenery, incredible weather and potential of the Northern lights. David had planned a few day trips out to visit some spots along the south coast. One of the stops was at Seljalandsfoss waterfall where you can walk right behind the falls. Whilst walking around in a secluded spot, David got down on one knee amongst the rocks and popped the question.”

WHY ICELAND?

“Before we visited, we had talked about getting married in Iceland already, and about an hour after we got engaged, we stopped at Hotel Rangá for a coffee. We immediately fell in love with the hotel and knew straight away we would love to get married there and picked up a wedding brochure to show people at home. After checking with our closest family and friends that they would fly out to join us, we contacted Hotel Rangá to start the booking process.”

“We found the planning process to be flawless. We were in touch with Hotel Rangá’s wedding coordinator, Eyrún via email and as well as being very patient and flexible with us, she provided us a thorough walkthrough of each stage and answered all our questions really quickly. One of the biggest worries of the planning process for us was how could we plan a wedding in another country? This was taken care of for us by Eyrún as she managed the whole process. This meant we were able to enjoy the buildup and get excited for the big day.”

CHOOSING A PHOTOGRAPHER

“We found James Frost in an unexpected place, as part of an article naming an annual selection of Best Destination Photos. James was mentioned in the article for a photograph of a wedding couple in Iceland. James is from the UK, so he flew over to Iceland to photograph our wedding and we are so pleased that we found him. James photographed through the wedding day capturing us getting ready, the ceremony and the reception and for a few photos at a less known waterfall near to Hotel Rangá which was beautiful and remote, creating a much more intimate setting than some of the popular waterfalls. He is very passionate about Iceland and has lots of experience of wedding photography on the island.”

THE BIG DAY!

“We really liked the idea of getting married in a sweet Icelandic church and decided on Oddi Church, a short ten-minute drive from Hotel Rangá. We met with the priest the day before the ceremony and talked through all the details so we both knew what to expect, and it really helped put our minds at ease. This was also the first time we had seen the inside of the church in person and it was perfect. So cozy, quaint and beautifully kept, we knew at that point that we had made the right choice. It was the perfect size, and our wedding party filled the seats and produced the most warm and intimate atmosphere that was just right for our wedding. It also provided a beautiful backdrop for our wedding photos which was a real bonus.”

“After the ceremony, our guests went back to Hotel Rangá whilst we ventured out in the Super Jeep. The Super Jeep was a great addition to the wedding day and one that we both really had been looking forward to. Our chauffeur took us off the beaten track to a little known, but stunning waterfall where we took some more wedding photos and took a little bit of time for ourselves after the ceremony.”

“We then headed back to Hotel Rangá to join our guests for the reception where we were greeted by the hotel staff who offered us drinks and made us feel really special. We went upstairs to our private function room which had the most gorgeous decorations which exceeded our expectations, we were very impressed.”

FLOWER POWER

“We did a lot of research into the flowers. We wanted simple and neutral colors, with lots of greenery. As with all the decorations and planning, after sharing a few pictures we put our trust in Eyrún and the room looked stunning, as did my bouquet. Hotel Rangá was able to provide some of the table decorations and we were also lucky enough to be able to bring a small amount of room decorations and favors with us, which helped to give a personal touch and was exciting to arrange in the buildup to the wedding. We gave personalized drinking glasses to our guests as favors, accompanied by a miniature bottle of Icelandic vodka.”

“We sat down for dinner and the whole wedding party received impeccable table service and we all tucked into the most amazing three course meal. It was our first experience of real Icelandic food, and what an experience it was! The hotel also made some special exceptions to the menu for some of our guests who had very particular dietary requirements. Another brilliant feature of the reception venue was how private it was. We had several small children in our wedding party and the fact we could close the doors and allow the children to play in the knowledge that they were safe and could not get into any trouble, enabled us to relax and enjoy our evening.”

“Hotel Rangá’s wedding cake maker, Gina Christie made our cake and did not disappoint. Eyrún asked us what we wanted and despite just giving a brief idea of what we had in mind, the cake Gina made was absolutely perfect. It was simple, elegant, perfectly decorated and tasted incredible.”

LUCK UNDER THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

“The most memorable part of our wedding day was without a doubt, seeing the Northern Lights. Just after our guests had headed back to Reykjavik and we were tidying away the last few things, the Hotel Manager came through to let us know that the northern lights were showing! We were invited onto the office balcony with our bridesmaid and best man which gave us a fantastic view of the dancing lights. We will never forget that moment – it was magical! Our photographer had just left to go back to his hotel but as we were still in our wedding outfits, he came back to get some photographs of us with the northern lights behind us. It was so cold but so special and we felt very lucky!”

“After the reception, we returned to our room to find that the hotel staff had made over our room with fresh rose petals, a bottle of champagne and even some gifts to help celebrate our wedding which were a perfect keepsake. We took the opportunity to use the hotel’s outdoor hot tubs with a glass of bubbly which really did finish the day perfectly.”

JUST DO IT

“For other couples considering a wedding in Iceland, we say, do it! For us, the photographs were a big part of our wedding, so finding the right photographer was key. We love the scenery in Iceland and wanted to encapsulate this with some beautiful images. We recommend spending the time to find the right photographer for you, and someone who knows the country well to get those once-in-a-lifetime photos of your big day!”



Pictures by James Frost



Pictures by Ása Steinarsdóttir

THE SALMON FROM OUR MENU

Iceland is an island nation covered by freshwater rivers, and fish has always been an essential component of Icelandic cuisine. Fishing enthusiasts travel to Iceland from far and wide to try and land a catch, often visiting the excellent salmon river East-Rangá from which Hotel Rangá takes its name. Our menu features a delicious and inventive salmon dish created by Hotel Rangá's head chef Bragi Þór Hansson. The winning combination of salmon, broccoli and sweet potato with a delightful topping of apples, mustard seeds, homemade granola and white wine sauce is sure to please. Bring a taste of Hotel Rangá to your home with this mouthwatering recipe.

RECIPE FOR 2

SALMON

INGREDIENTS:

- 400 g Salmon
- Salt
- Olive oil
- Half a lemon

METHOD:

At Hotel Rangá, we slow cook the salmon, sous-vide. If a sous-vide machine is not available, we recommend pan frying the salmon for 2-3 minutes on each side

Sous Vide:

1. Place the salmon in the sous vide bag and season with olive oil, salt and squeeze half a lemon into the bag. Vacuum pack and cook at 45°C for 15 minutes.
2. Carefully remove salmon from the bag. Lightly brown the salmon using a blowtorch or preheat the oven to 200°C. and cook for 2 minutes before serving.

GRANOLA

INGREDIENTS:

- 10 g Sesame seeds
- 10 g Sunflower seeds
- 10 g Pumpkin seeds
- 10 g Flax seeds
- 2 tsp Brown sugar
- 1 tsp Honey

METHOD:

1. Preheat the oven to 170°C.
2. In a medium-size bowl, mix the seeds and sugar together. Stir to blend.
3. Bake until lightly golden, about 25 minutes, stirring every 5 minutes.
4. Let the granola cool completely.
5. Stir in the honey.

SWEET POTATO PURÉE

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 medium-sized Sweet potato
- 100 g Butter
- Salt
- Few drops Apple cider vinegar (optional)

METHOD:

1. Bake the potato in the oven at 200°C for 1 hour.
2. Purée with butter and season to taste with salt and apple cider vinegar.

BROCCOLI

INGREDIENTS:

- 60 g Broccoli
- Oil
- Salt

METHOD:

1. Slice the broccoli into small pieces.
2. Fry in hot oil for two minutes.
3. Season to taste.

WHITE WINE SAUCE

WHITE WINE SAUCE

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 large Onion
- ½ bulb Fennel
- 4 cloves Garlic
- ½ Leek
- 500 ml White wine
- 600 ml Cream
- Xantana (corn starch or any thickener of your choice)
- Salt, lemon juice, honey

METHOD:

1. Cut the vegetables into small pieces.
2. Place the vegetables in a frying pan. Sweat the vegetables in oil so that they soften without browning, takes around 5 minutes.
2. Add wine and reduce by 75%.
3. Add cream and boil for 30 minutes.
4. Thicken the sauce to the consistency you like.
5. Season with salt, lemon juice and honey. The wine you choose will determine if the sauce will be more sour or sweet - we use sweet wine.
6. Strain the sauce and discard the vegetables.

TO SERVE:

Once all elements of the dish have been completed, plate the salmon atop the sweet potato purée and fried broccoli. Garnish with granola, apples and mustard seeds and white wine sauce.

APPLE WITH MUSTARD SEEDS

PICKLED MUSTARD SEEDS

INGREDIENTS:

- 20 g Mustard seeds
- Water
- 2 tbsp Vinegar
- 30 g Sugar
- 60 ml (0.25 cup) Water

METHOD:

1. Place mustard seeds in a small pot. Add enough water to cover.
2. Bring to boil, whisking constantly. Strain seeds. Repeat 4 times to remove bitter tannins, rinsing the seeds each time.
3. Add vinegar, sugar and 60 ml water to the mustard seeds and boil for 5 minutes.

APPLES

INGREDIENTS:

- ½ Green apple
- 30 g Dill
- 100 g Oil
- 20 g Spinach
- Pickled mustard seeds

METHOD:

1. Put oil, dill and spinach in a blender mix on high speed for 5-7 minutes, or until the oil is hot.
2. Strain the oil using cheesecloth or a coffee filter, so you will have a clean dark green oil.
3. Let the oil cool completely.
4. Peel and deseed the apple, and cut into small dices.
5. Mix the apples with the oil and pickled mustard seeds.



Picture by Ingibjörg Friðriksdóttir

HOW IT ALL WENT DOWN

While you may not have heard of Sólheimasandur before you have almost definitely seen it. It is a black sand beach stretching along the Southern Coast and home to an abandoned DC-3/117 plane that features heavily in commercials and music videos shot in Iceland, most notably Justin Bieber's „I'll show you.“ It even made an appearance in a recent Bollywood film.



Picture by Anthony Bogdan

The plane is no prop. It is a real DC-3/117 plane, originally used for cargo transport by the United States Navy. November 21st 1973 the plane was on the way from southeastern village of Höfn í Hornafirði to Keflavík Airport when the weather suddenly turned. The temperature dropped, the plane was hit with strong wind and then both engines gave out due to icing. Captain James Wicke sent out a distress call as he desperately tried to get the engines going again.

LANDING ON THE MOON

There were five people aboard the plane. The first officer, Gregory Fletcher, took over command, deciding to go south and try to land the plane in the North Atlantic Ocean. He knew the freezing water would lead to hypothermia in seconds but then again plummeting into an icy mountain would kill them instantly.

As the plane dropped below the clouds, Fletcher saw something that “looked like the moon”. It was Sólheimasandur. Minutes later, he managed to land the plane on the frozen black sand beach about six meters from

the ocean. The landing left the plane wrecked but all five crew members emerged unscathed. One of them, Howard Rowley, later remarked that it was the most “comfortable” landing he had ever experienced. They were rescued by a navy helicopter about an hour later and the navy immediately removed everything that could be saved from the wreck. In fact, the local farmers had seen the plane go down and immediately jumped in their (albeit very slow) tractor to see what was going on. When they arrived the crew had been flown out and demolition was already under way. The farmers used the wreck to store driftwood for some years and allowed their friends to use it for target practice - it has a few very noticeable bullet wounds. As Iceland gained international attention as a destination, so did the plane.

HOW TO VIEW THE PLANE TODAY?

The DC-3/117 plane is located about 2.5 miles (four kilometers) away from the main road. While the distance is walkable there are also special shuttles and tours that can take you there in comfort. Contact our front desk for more information and guidance.



Picture by Lucas Raven

THE STORY OF HRAMMUR

One of Hotel Rangá's most popular staff members and certainly the fuzziest is Hrammur the resident polar bear. Hrammur, who is originally from Greenland, has the special role of greeting each and every one of Hotel Rangá's visitors as they enter into the lobby.

He is not shy, but he is quiet, so we asked hotelier Friðrik Pálsson to share the story of how Hrammur came to live at Hotel Rangá. It all started with a visit to Manuel's Taxidermy Parlor on the outskirts of Reykjavík.

“As we are looking around at birds and foxes and so on, I notice a picture of the polar bear from the Nanoq in Kringlan mall,” says Friðrik, referencing the outdoor sporting goods store that opened in 1999 but went bankrupt in 2002. At the time, the polar bear was one of the mall's main landmarks along with a 49 feet tall, fully functioning climbing wall.

“I asked Manuel if the polar bear was his work. He said yes, so I asked where he was now but he did not know,” Friðrik says. “I can not remember how I found him but I finally learned that he was holed up in a warehouse owned by Baugur group, the investment company behind Nanoq.”

He contacted one of the company's directors, Finnur Árnason, who said the bear was not for sale but Friðrik wouldn't budge. He had made up his mind so he pleaded with the director to at least let him borrow the bear.

“Finnur asks me if I even realize how big it is. I reply that of course I know he is quite big but I ended up going to the warehouse to see him in the flesh,” Friðrik says. “I will admit, his height was a bit of a shock, but I got to measure him and took the measurements back to Hotel Rangá.”

This was before the west end of the hotel, where Hrammur now lives, was built. According to Friðrik's measurements, he would just barely get into

the foyer where the Iceland Quilt now hangs, and he would almost touch the ceiling.

“So, I went back to Finnur and said: I have a space for him.”

In the end, Friðrik got his wish. The bear arrived in a large moving truck and even though the staff had to remove a ceiling light to get him in, Hrammur found his new home at Hotel Rangá. But of course, he was not named Hrammur then – in fact, he did not have a name at all.

Hrammur means “paw” in Icelandic, and today Hrammur stands with his two front paws and huge grin in a new part of Hotel Rangá's lobby, specifically designed for his 13 feet stature. He is happy to be photographed and especially enjoys selfies. If you share any on social media, remember to use the hashtags #Hrammur and #HotelRanga so he can add them to his own collection.

Hotel Rangá decided to get the local children involved and invited them to partake in a naming competition.

“There were dozens of excellent suggestions and one girl suggested Hrammur,” Friðrik says. “There was a very distinguished panel of judges and we invited all the kids to come celebrate with us.”

Do not hesitate to reach out to our front desk for further information about sights in our area.



Picture by Hreinn Magnússon

FACTS ABOUT STARGAZING

With the endless summer days of the midnight sun behind us and with the winter darkness creeping in, stargazing season is in full swing at Hotel Rangá. Grab a mug of hot chocolate and find out what the cosmos has in store for you in Iceland this winter with some fun stargazing facts.

GOT MILK?

The Milky Way galaxy gets its name from Greek mythology. As the story goes, Zeus had a son with a mortal woman and tried to trick Hera into breastfeeding the child. She was not so keen on the idea, of course, so her breast milk sprayed into the heavens and... well, you get the picture.

IT'S ALL GREEK TO ME

Thanks to modern science, we now know that the Milky Way galaxy is not the doing of an angry Greek goddess. Instead, our celestial home is composed of about 400 billion stars, about 5000 of which we can see with the naked eye.

THE WINTER WAY IS THE ONLY WAY

You won't see those stars in the middle of summer in Iceland due to the nearly 24-hour daylight from the seasonal tilt of the planet. Perhaps that is why in Iceland the Milky Way is called Vetrarbrautin, or "The Winter Way", as it is mainly visible to us at night from September to April.

DARKNESS IS GOLDEN

Another thing blocking you from seeing all those twinkling stars? Light pollution. According to the UN, 55% of the world's population lives in urban areas, a proportion expected to grow to over 65% by 2050. Thankfully for city and suburb dwellers, Hotel Rangá's secluded countryside setting offers a glare-free view to dark, clear night skies.

CREATURES IN THE SKY

There are 88 officially recognized constellations, of which 50 to 56 can be seen from Iceland. The groups of stars in constellations act like a map of the sky, forming patterns and shapes – such as lions, birds, monsters and, of course, mythical Greek gods - that help us to locate planets and other deep space objects.

BELTS: THE BEST WINTER ACCESSORIES

One of the easiest constellations to see in Iceland is Orion, with its 3 easily identifiable stars that form Orion's Belt. As for Northern Lights seekers, you will be pleased to know that Iceland sits squarely in the Aurora Belt, an area of the northern hemisphere with intense aurora activity.



Picture by Sævar Helgi Bragason

HOTEL RANGÁ OBSERVATORY

In Iceland, the night sky truly comes alive in wintertime. Whether you are on a quest to view distant galaxies or trace the outlines of constellations, the high-tech Hotel Rangá Observatory is the perfect place to stargaze with an expert astronomer's assistance.

"We all share the same sky, which is beautiful," muses Sævar Helgi Bragason, one of the regular guides at the Hotel Rangá Observatory. Nicknamed Stjörnu-Sævar ("Star Sævar") in Iceland, his curiosity and enthusiasm about the night sky is infectious.

Sævar is a popular science communicator in Iceland, like a young David Attenborough for space science. He is one of Iceland's leading astronomy experts and space weather specialists, with TV shows, radio programs, websites and best-selling books under his belt, covering a range of topics in science, astronomy and environmental issues.

He has been involved with the operations of the observatory since it opened in early 2014. Designed in collaboration with The Amateur Astronomical Society of Seltjarnarnes, the observatory was the first of its kind in Iceland. Boasting state-of-the-art astronomical telescopes and a roof that rolls back to reveal a 360-degree view of the night sky - with virtually no light pollution - the structure has garnered a lot of attention by stargazers far and wide.

MILLIONS OF LIGHT YEARS AWAY

"It was bigger success than we had anticipated," explains Sævar, "so we have since upgraded the telescopes in the observatory." One is a 160-millimeter diameter refractor, while the other, bigger telescope is a celestial 14-inch HD reflector. Both are computerized, featuring excellent optics for viewing objects in stunning detail, and are set on advanced mounts to follow the movements in the sky. They are also perfectly suited for astrophotography.

The observatory is located just 150 meters (492 feet) from the main hotel building, making it a convenient and unique winter experience for Hotel Rangá guests. To stargaze, we need clear skies with no chance of high clouds or rain, as moisture and high winds can damage our telescopes while high clouds blur out otherwise spectacular views. We open our observatory when the forecast shows that the sky will remain clear for several hours. During this time, the guide - either Sævar or another

local expert with an equally fascinating background - points out planets and far away galaxies while talking about the legends and history of the constellations.

"We can point our scopes at different galaxies to show people they are just like the system we live in, only much, much further away. And if there is anyone else over there looking back, they see us as we looked like in the past and they have a similar view of our galaxy that we find so incredibly big," says Sævar. "The furthest object I have seen is a group of galaxies called Stephan's Quintet, about 300 million light years away, which means the light left the galaxies 300 million years ago before the dinosaurs even existed."

A LITTLE CLOSER TO HOME

Sævar emphasizes that such far away objects tend to look like faint blobs to the untrained eye, so the guides mostly show objects that are "close to us and hopefully beautiful to look at", like Andromeda, the closest galaxy to The Milky Way. Guests can also see dense, cloudy nebulas, the places where the stars are being born, for example, the Orion Nebula, which is part of the Orion constellation roughly 1,350 light years away from Earth.

The moon is another popular subject, and people like to find out where the Apollo landing site is located. "We can magnify the images a lot so we can easily see things like valleys and mountains on the moon," explains Sævar, noting that the exact landing area itself is far too small to see. He also says that full moons, surprisingly, do not provide the best viewing. Rather, it is easier to see the contours in the moon's terrain during waxing or waning phases.

Of course, it is not all science talk during the tour. "The thing I kind of like when I am showing people the stars is to mix mythology and cultural references with the science," says Sævar, "because then the sky really becomes alive."

BOOKS & BIRTHDAYS

We have been celebrating our 20th birthday this year with all kinds of special events and festivities. From advertising 20 real free rooms on April Fool's day, to delivering birthday cake to local retirement homes and holding a poetry competition across our social media platforms, it has been an exciting year filled with lots of fun.

As part of the celebration, we are launching our new Icelandic Master Suite which features traditional Icelandic décor and design. We recently asked our Icelandic Facebook friends to recommend books for a little library that will go inside the suite and received over 700 comments. Winter at Hotel Rangá is the perfect time to cozy up with a good book, so take a look at our top recommendations and maybe you will find a new favorite.

KARITAS ÁN TITILS / KARITAS UNTITLED

The most popular recommendation was *Karitas án titils* or *Karitas, Untitled* (2004) by Kristín Marja Baldursdóttir. The novel follows a young girl with artistic interests growing up in rural Iceland in the 20th century. Struggling against financial hardship and limited opportunities, *Karitas* strives to pursue her dreams and a different way of life.

SJÁLFSTÆTT FÓLK / INDEPENDENT PEOPLE

Sjálfstætt Fólk or *Independent People* (1934) by Halldór Kiljan Laxness is one of Iceland's most well-known works of literature. Laxness tells the story of Bjartur of Summerhouses, a sheep farmer who struggles for independence in the early twentieth century. Bjartur's desire to be self-sufficient is tested by abysmal poverty, misfortune resulting from unfavorable weather and economic instability as a result of World War I.

ENGLAR ALHEIMSINS / ANGELS OF THE UNIVERSE

Translated to over twenty languages *Englar Alheimsins* or *Angels of the Universe* (1993) by Einar Már Guðmundsson tells the story of Páll, a young man living in Reykjavík who begins to suffer from schizophrenia as he matures into adulthood. In the novel, Guðmundsson manages to meld light and dark by using humor to explore the difficult subject of mental illness.

ÉG MAN ÞIG / I REMEMBER YOU

Are supernatural thrillers more your style? Why not try *Ég man þig* or *I Remember You* (2014) by Yrsa Sigurðardóttir. Weaving together multiple perspectives, this novel tells the tale of a vanished child, a trail of mysterious deaths and a house that just might be haunted. This edge-of-your-seat thriller set in the Icelandic Westfjords is certain to keep you turning pages late into the night.

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KARITAS ÁN TITILS / KARITAS UNTITLED

“Ég var að lesa blað sem kom að sunnan og þar stendur að nú verði konur að fara að fylgjast með stjórnmaladeilum landsins, lesa allar stjórnmalagreinar og þess háttar, koma á fundi og halda ræður, og allt þetta verði þær að gera milli þess sem þær mjalti, búverki, matreiði, gæti krakkanna, spinni og saumi.”

“I was reading in the southern paper that now women have to start following political debates, read all the political articles, attend meetings and give speeches, and all this they will have to do while they milk the cows, attend to the farm, cook, look after the children, spin wool and sew.”

SJÁLFSTÆTT FÓLK / INDEPENDENT PEOPLE

“Frjáls maður getur lifað á soðningu. Sjálfstæði er betra en kjöt.”

“A free man can live on fish. Independence is better than meat.”

ENGLAR ALHEIMSINS / ANGELS OF THE UNIVERSE

“Sjálfsagt botna ég jafn lítið í raunveruleikanum og hann í mér. Að því leyti erum við kvíttir. Hann skuldar mér þó ekki skýringu á neinu og ég stend mín reikningsskil frammi fyrir honum.”

“Maybe I understand reality, as well as reality, understands me. In that regard, we are even. Reality doesn't owe me an explanation of anything and I don't owe a dime to reality.”

ÉG MAN ÞIG / I REMEMBER YOU

“Eitt skaltu samt vita. Það er betra að vera án maka ef hann hefur dáði heldur en að vera skilin eftir vegna annarrar konu”

“But you should know one thing. It is better to lose your husband because he died than because he left you for another woman.”



Picture by Brent Darby

INSIDE THE ICELANDIC SUITE

Many of Hotel Rangá's unique suites are modeled after continents around the globe, but the Icelandic Suite draws its inspiration from closer to home. Because of this close connection, the construction of Hotel Rangá's Icelandic Suite has been a passion project for hotelier Friðrik Pálsson. Featuring traditional design and elegant décor made by local artisans, he has created a luxurious space that truly embodies the spirit of Iceland.

“I had specific ideas about what it should look like for a while,” Friðrik says. “For example, I wanted to have the bathroom in a cave outside the room itself, but it proved too complicated. Instead we moved the bathtub to the middle of the suite.”

The bathtub is actually molded after the tub Friðrik has had in his family home for over 40 years. Its outside is lined with columnar basalt and the inside features pebbles from a black sand beach.

“We chose a type of panel for the walls that used to be extremely common around Iceland and then I spent quite some time trying to figure out if there were any typical Icelandic ceilings, but no one could point me to one,” Friðrik says. “I went hunting for inspiration in the churches of Oddi and Skógar and ended up with square panels, and then of course it was incredibly important to find the right colors for the whole thing. They needed to be very delicate – almost sensitive – pastel colors.”

Friðrik enlisted elder craftsman, Ólafur Sigurjónsson of Forsæti farm, to design and make the suite's furniture such as the cartwheel dining table and the master bed. The bed also features wood carvings by local artist Sigríður Jóna Kristjánsdóttir and is dressed in what is probably the largest hand knitted Icelandic wool sweater, or *lopapeysa*, ever made.

The most exciting part however, is the rotating dining/living room.

“It was such a fun project and we had input from so many people on how to make this happen,” Friðrik says. “Now, guests can rotate the floor and have a view of the river while at the breakfast table and while sipping wine on the couch at night!”

The Icelandic Suite has been open to guests since 2017 and Friðrik is slowly polishing its details. If the first cut is the deepest, the last suite is the sweetest.

For a sneak peak of the Icelandic suite ask one of Hotel Rangá's reception staff.



ÓLI Í FORSÆTI

Ólafur Sigurjónsson of Forsæti farm is a man of many talents. He is a pilot, a master builder, an organist and a true artist when it comes to woodworking. In fact, it was Ólafur who single handedly build all the furniture in the Icelandic Suite.

“Friðrik was visiting me in my workshop one day some time ago and saw an old mahogany cart wheel hanging on my wall,” Ólafur says. “I remember it so vividly. He told me: Don not let this one go because I am going to buy it from you. I have no idea what to do with it yet but someday I will!”

Some years later, Ólafur turned the wheel into a dining table for the Icelandic Suite and then the ball was rolling. He made a bench to go with the table and some chairs. Next there was the dressing table against the wall and then a bar table for the corner. He made two coffee tables and then came the most important piece of them all: the bed.

“We discussed it at length,” Ólafur says. “I can not remember which one of us pointed out how the curved sides are the most distinguishing feature of old beds, but we figured it would give it an aged appearance.”

Ólafur got his neighbor and friend, artist Sigríður Jóna Kristjánsdóttir or “Sigga á Grund” to decorate the bed with delicate wood carvings. The last pieces he made for the suite were the two nightstands on either side of the bed, which is dressed in a jumbo sized Icelandic wool sweater.

“At one point, Friðrik asked if we should make the furniture out of driftwood,” Ólafur says.

“I wanted to keep working with mahogany but he was concerned with its authenticity. I told him that in this part of the country, people had built even the lowliest of ram sheds out of mahogany – there were so many English ships loaded with the stuff that stranded in these parts. They even had loads of copper for casting, all from the ships.”

Ólafur laughs a bit at the memory of Friðrik’s face.

“He just lit up! And we decided to stick with mahogany.”

All in all, Ólafur says he is very grateful for the chance to take part in making the Icelandic suite a reality.

“It is by far the most enjoyable project I have taken on and there have certainly been many through the years. I’m honored that I was trusted with it.”



THE EYE OF THE HORSE

The photograph is striking. It is certainly not something one would expect to find in a bathroom, let alone in the shower but there it is; a black and white, close-up shot capturing the corner of an eye, a wisp of blonde hair, and the coarse cheek of a grey Icelandic horse.



Nina Zurier created the backlit photograph for Hotel Rangá especially. Nina first came to Iceland in 2002 for a six-day riding tour from Geysir to Varmahlíð and fell head over heels in love with the Icelandic way of life.

“The horses, the landscape, and especially the people, as well as the music and the history, everything about Iceland was so... I felt like I should have been born here.”

Now, Nina splits her time between Reykjavík and Berkeley, California, riding Icelandic horses as often as she can. She captured the image, which hangs on the Icelandic Suite’s bathroom wall, on the horse breeding farm Héraðsdalur in Skagafjörður.

“I was out in the field with the mares and foals, just sitting on the ground with my camera,” Nina remembers. “This mare came up to me, her name is Hríma frá Dalandi— Hríma means rime or frost in English and Daland is the farm where she was born.

The image reminds me of that place and the moment, but I am also interested in the formal quality of the composition, especially the curve of the mane and how it echoes the shape of the eye,” she continues.

That being said, she wants viewers to make up their own mind. She does not try to elicit certain feelings or ideas through her work but rather leaves room for interpretation, for people to find whatever they can.

The placement of this particular piece, Grey Horse, is particularly interesting; a piece of Iceland’s nature to be enjoyed in a very different context. Nina for one, thinks it is great.

“I love the idea of people being naked in a stall with a really big horse, taking a shower!”



See Nina Zurier’s books, installations, photographs and more on her website www.ninazurier.com.

THE BEST WINTER PHOTO

Happy moments should be shared! We are celebrating winter across our social media platforms with a competition for the best Hotel Rangá Winter Photo.

THE ONLY THING YOU NEED TO DO

- Post a beautiful photo from your stay
- Tag: @Hotelranga and mark the location as Hotel Rangá
- Hashtag #rangaexperience

THE WINNER WILL RECEIVE A GIFT CARD FOR:

- Two nights in a suite
- Breakfast
- Evening meals and wine selected by management

Picture by @merrymeintravel



CHRISTMAS AT HOTEL RANGÁ

Christmas at Hotel Rangá is a magical time. The hotel gets dressed in its holiday best with decorative garlands and ornaments festooning every nook and cranny. Even our resident polar bear Hrammur fancies up for the festive season with a new scarf and special hat.

December is one of the darkest months of the year, but that just means more time to see the Northern Lights dancing across the sky. Winter weather is unpredictable, but snow usually appears sometime during the month and we will be crossing our fingers for a white Christmas. Temperatures average around freezing (0 °C or 32 °F), and it is a good idea to dress for the weather with a proper coat, gloves and hat.

Christmas in Reykjavík, and the joyful sounds are broadcast on the radio all across the country. Icelandic families then gather for a festive dinner and open presents afterward. December 25 is a day of relaxation and rest—families often spend the day together and enjoy a special dinner of traditional hangikjöt with green peas and potatoes in white sauce.

HOTEL RANGÁ'S CHRISTMAS BUFFET

The weeks before Christmas are all about celebration, and nothing better encapsulates the season than the decadent tradition of jólahlaðborð or Christmas buffet. With over 80 courses, Hotel Rangá's Christmas buffets are a sight to behold. Guests can sample delicious holiday treats from smoked and cured meats, to caramel glazed potatoes and homemade cakes. In Iceland, Christmas is celebrated on the night of December 24. At 6 o'clock in the evening, Hallgrímskirkja's church bells ring in the start of

THE YULETIDE LADS

The Yuletide lads, or Icelandic Santa Clauses, are a mischievous lot, born to a troll mother who eats ill-behaved children. In the thirteen days before Christmas, they come down from the mountains one by one and bring presents to children who leave a shoe in their windowsill. From the 11th to the 24th of December we encourage our younger guests at Hotel Rangá to leave a shoe outside their door at night and see if a Yuletide lad will pay them a visit during the night.



CHRISTMAS IN OUR KITCHEN

'Tis the season to eat your weight in festive food and the best way to do just that at Hotel Rangá is to attend the Scandinavian Christmas buffet.

There are over 80 dishes included in the buffet and according to head chef Bragi Þór Hansson, 12 of those are different types of cured salmon.

"We also serve smoked salmon," he says with a laugh, explaining that the dishes are a nod to the Rangá: the famous salmon river the hotel derives its name from. "It's fun to have that connection." Among the 12 cured salmon dishes there are the classic dill, fennel and anise, blueberry and even one made with malt extract and orange soda – a concoction central to the holidays in most Icelandic homes.

REINDEER MEATBALLS

"My favorite dish is the reindeer-meatballs," Bragi says. "I really like cured salmon too of course, but I try not to eat all the different assortments every day." He says the holidays are always a special time for the kitchen staff. While the chefs usually hang out in the kitchen, they get to roam the halls during the buffet.

"We serve the hot entrees and explain the different dishes to guests when they have questions. It's a great change from the everyday life in the kitchen," Bragi says. You can try your hand at Bragi's simple citrus cured salmon recipe.



RECIPE FROM HOTEL RANGÁ'S CHRISTMAS BUFFET: CITRUS CURED SALMON



INGREDIENTS:

- 1 Fillet of fresh salmon, weighing about 900g
- 200g Salt
- 250g Brown sugar
- Zest of 2 Lemons
- Zest of 2 Oranges
- Zest of 1 Lime

PREPERATION:

1. Rinse the salmon fillets, and pat them thoroughly dry. Stroke your hand along the salmon fillet to check for any stray bones. Use tweezers or pliers to pull out any pin bones, if necessary.
2. Grate the lemon, oranges and lime, creating zest.
3. In a small bowl, combine the salt and brown sugar with the zest.

4. Put third of the mixture on a baking pan that is big enough to lay a fillet flat. Lay the fillet skin-down on the mixture.
5. Spread the rest of the mixture on the flesh side of the fillet.
6. Cover the fillets and baking sheet with foil or plastic wrap.
7. Let the salmon chill about 2 days (or no longer than 4 days).
8. Remove from the fridge, unwrap, and rinse under cold water.
9. Cut into thin slices without getting too close to the skin, so the dark salmon is included.

Serve and enjoy!



Back cover photo by Ása Steinarsdóttir

CHECK OUT OUR BLOG

We post regular articles, updates, tips, tricks, offers and recommendations on our blog. Whether you want information on how to photograph the northern lights or inspiration for your dream elopement we got you covered.

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