

Iceland On Horseback . . . With A Little Gourmet Dining As Well!

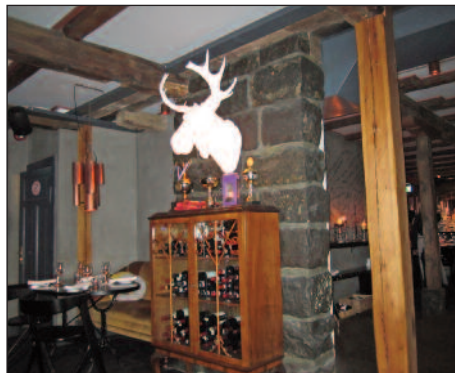
Marilyn McNamara, Vice-Chargée de Presse, Bailliage de Victoria

It was a dark, dismal, dreary day in Victoria when I received a call from Sally Jorgensen. We graduated from university together many moons ago. Sally was a bit tired of the harsh Ontario winter and decided to go on a riding holiday in Iceland with her friend Ann Hedberg. Well, it had been far too many years since I had any sort of adventure so I volunteered to come along.

Sally knows how to travel — we went directly from the airport to the Blue Lagoon Spa. We were cocooned and massaged while floating in a hot spring lagoon, watching the sky shift from fog to rain to sun — the ultimate antidote to jet lag. The next few days were spent whale watching and walking — and walking. It seemed every street in Reykjavik only went up. It is clear the city had struggled at one time, as many houses were made of unusual building materials but it is charming and very safe. The Icelandic people were considerate and kind as well as artistic and enterprising. Stores carried a wide variety of unique products, often designed by the shop owner — a great place to shop. It is hungry work, walking and shopping, and Sally, determined to eat the best food Iceland could offer, diligently checked each restaurant. We viewed many excellent menus but we walked on until I spotted a sign, Fiskfelagid (Fish Company) whose posted menu had us salivating on the sidewalk. We peered into a rather dark cellar and boldly asked if indeed their meals were as depicted. We were assured that they were, so we ordered well-earned pints and perused the menu. We crooned and sighed our way through a gourmet meal where each dish was a visual as well as gustatory work of art, with service to match. Icelanders take their food very, very seriously, civilized people that they are.



Blue Lagoon.



One and only moose in Reykjavik.

The next morning we were off to Eldhestar, where the horses would do the walking. These horses — they are horses, not ponies, and it would be a grave error to refer to them as such — are direct descendants from hardy stock introduced by the original Vikings. Tough but well cared for, these winter-woolly little horses had an incredible work ethic. They stoically picked their way over lava fields, across streams, and through meadows and valleys, often utilizing centuries-old riding paths. They also had a specific gait, very fast and smooth, called a “tolt”. It could take a bit of a knack to get the horse to tolt, but when you got it, you could have sipped tea without spilling it was that smooth. There is no better way to experience the eerie, haunting landscape of the country. It was so odd to discover rivers of hot water but so wonderful for a good soak on a cold, wet day. We saw a lot of spectacular country in our five days of riding and Eldhestar took good care of us. The scenery and the experience were unforgettable.



A well-earned pint (Sally and Ann).



The intrepid travelers: Sally Jorgensen, Ann Hedberg, and Marilyn McNamara.



Ancient valley bottom where Icelanders used to race their horses.

Wonderful dishes at Fiskelagid (Fish Company).



Eldhestar guide holding horses while we soak in a hot pool.



Hot water rivers.



Following old trails.



Beautiful lakes; few trees.



Clear views.



Blue Lagoon.