



Foreword
by the President of Iceland
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REYKJAVÍK – CITY OF CULTURE 2000

The ancient Icelandic Book of Settlements – Landnámabók – describes the quest by the viking Ingólfur Arnarson for a promising place to make his home. He threw overboard his high-seat pillars, symbols of his gods and faith, for them to be washed ashore where he should settle, and they led him to a beautiful site with a majestic view to the mountains and glacier, with hot springs and bounteous fishing grounds.

Reykjavík is the starting point of the settlement of Iceland and Ingólfur himself “the most renowned of all settlers, because he arrived in an uninhabited country and first settled it,” as the ancient book says.

Few capitals occupy such a distinctive position in the history of their country and nation. Icelanders have always sought inspiration from this tale of destiny about the founding of Reykjavík and the settlement by Iceland’s first family.

Today, Reykjavík is the nation’s artistic and cultural centre, a true powerhouse of innovation and diversity. There is a choice of 20-30 theatre performances in the city every week, along with numerous concerts. At weekends from autumn to spring, so many new art exhibitions are opened that even the most devoted lovers of culture cannot manage to visit them all. The selection available at Reykjavík’s impressive bookshops is reminiscent of that in major metropolises, reflecting the fact that more novels and poetry, academic works, biographies and translations of world

literature are published in Iceland than in countries with populations many times the size.

A friend of mine once pointed out that an ideal way for people to find out how sophisticated culture could thrive in small cities such as ancient Athens and Rome would be to visit Reykjavík. Such is the fermentation of arts and culture, music, literature, drama and visual art to be found in Iceland's capital.

And a further dimension is added by being able to discuss this experience and recall fond memories over a fine meal at Reykjavík's many quality restaurants. Iceland's unique seafood and highland lamb are so exquisite that many people promise themselves to visit the country again – just for a meal!

Nature itself, the mountains and the ocean, the magnificent colours of the lava and heaths, walks in the vicinity of the city to relish the glories of creation at first hand, alone or in good company – all these are a bonus that makes a stay in Reykjavík into an unforgettable experience.

We welcome Reykjavík's role as a European City of Culture for the year 2000. That nomination is not only a confirmation of the everyday experience of life in Iceland's capital, but also an opportunity to give visitors an even more special welcome.