

## Iceland cultural and wilderness small group tour

### Reading List

#### **The History of Iceland**

by Gunnar Karlsson

Iceland is unique among European societies in having been founded as late as the Viking Age and in having copious written and archaeological sources about its origin. Gunnar Karlsson, that country's premier historian, chronicles the age of the Sagas, consulting them to describe an era without a monarch or central authority. Equating this prosperous time with the golden age of antiquity in world history, Karlsson then marks a correspondence between the Dark Ages of Europe and Iceland's "dreary period", which started with the loss of political independence in the late thirteenth century and culminated with an epoch of poverty and humility, especially during the early Modern Age. Iceland's renaissance came about with the successful struggle for independence in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and with the industrial and technical modernization of the first half of the twentieth century. Karlsson describes the rise of nationalism as Iceland's mostly poor peasants set about breaking with Denmark, and he shows how Iceland in the twentieth century slowly caught up economically with its European neighbors.

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#### **The Sagas of Icelanders**

by Various

A unique body of medieval literature, the Sagas rank with the world's greatest literary treasures--as epic as Homer, as deep in tragedy as Sophocles, as engagingly human as Shakespeare. Set around the turn of the last millennium, these stories depict with an astonishingly modern realism the lives and deeds of the Norse men and women who first settled Iceland and of their descendants, who ventured further west--to Greenland and, ultimately, the coast of North America itself.

The ten Sagas and seven shorter tales in this volume include the celebrated "Vinland Sagas," which recount Leif Eiriksson's pioneering voyage to the New World and contain the oldest descriptions of the North American continent.

For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and

contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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### **The Vikings: A History**

by Robert Ferguson

A comprehensive and thrilling history of the Vikings for fans of the History Channel series, now on its fourth season.

From Harald Bluetooth to Cnut the Great, the feared seamen and plunderers of the Viking Age ruled Norway, Sweden, and Denmark but roamed as far as Byzantium, Greenland, and America. Raiders and traders, settlers and craftsmen, the medieval Scandinavians who have become familiar to history as Vikings never lose their capacity to fascinate, from their ingeniously designed longboats to their stormy pantheon of Viking gods and goddesses, ruled by Odin in Valhalla. Robert Ferguson is a sure guide across what he calls "the treacherous marches which divide legend from fact in Viking Age history." His long familiarity with the literary culture of Scandinavia with its skaldic poetry is combined with the latest archaeological discoveries to reveal a sweeping picture of the Norsemen, one of history's most amazing civilizations.

Impeccably researched and filled with compelling accounts and analyses of legendary Viking warriors and Norse mythology, *The Vikings* is an indispensable guide to medieval Scandinavia and is a wonderful companion to the History Channel series.

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### **Why Iceland?: How One of the World's Smallest Countries Became the Meltdown's Biggest Casualty**

by Asgeir Jonsson

As late as the mid 1980s, Iceland's economy revolved around little else than a semi-robust cod-fishing industry. By the end of the century, however, it had transformed itself into a major player in world finance, building an international banking empire worth twelve times its GDP. The tiny island nation of 300,000 was one of the global economy's great success stories.

And then everything came crashing down.

*Why Iceland?* is the inside account of one of the economic meltdown's most fascinating and far-reaching tragedies. As Chief Economist of Kaupthing Bank, the country's largest bank before the collapse, Ásgeir Jónsson is perfectly suited to examine Iceland's collapse in painstaking detail. He witnessed behind-the-scenes events firsthand, such as an intriguing meeting in January 2008 when a group of international hedge fund managers gathered in a bar in Reykjavik to discuss Iceland's economy—an informal affair that eventually became the center of a criminal investigation by the

country's Financial Supervisory Authority.

This inside account examines the pressing issues behind history's biggest banking collapse:

How did Iceland transform itself from one of Europe's poorest to one of its wealthiest countries?

What happened to cause the destruction of the nation's banking industry during a single week of October 2008?

Was it the result of a speculation "attack" by hedge funds on the nation's currency?

Iceland remains the biggest casualty of the economic downturn, and the ramifications of its catastrophic failure reach deeply into the economies of Europe, the United States, and other global markets. Ásgeir Jónsson offers a unique perspective and an expert's insight into the rise and fall of this once-proud banking giant.

Why Iceland? provides the who, what, where, and when of Iceland's demise, serving as a fascinating read and providing the understanding necessary for forecasting when and where the aftershocks will shake up markets in other parts of the world.

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### **Wasteland with Words: A Social History of Iceland**

by Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon

Iceland is an enigmatic island country marked by contradiction: it's a part of Europe, yet separated from it by the Atlantic Ocean; it's seemingly inhospitable, yet home to more than 300,000. *Wasteland with Words* explores these paradoxes to uncover the mystery of Iceland.

In *Wasteland with Words* Sigurdur Gylfi Magnússon presents a wide-ranging and detailed analysis of the island's history that examines the evolution and transformation of Icelandic culture while investigating the literary and historical factors that created the rich cultural heritage enjoyed by Icelanders today. Magnússon explains how a nineteenth-century economy based on the industries of fishing and agriculture—one of the poorest in Europe—grew to become a disproportionately large economic power in the late twentieth century, while retaining its strong sense of cultural identity. Bringing the story up to the present, he assesses the recent economic and political collapse of the country and how Iceland has coped. Throughout Magnússon seeks to chart the vast changes in this country's history through the impact and effect on the Icelandic people themselves.

Up-to-date and fascinating, *Wasteland with Words* is a comprehensive study of the island's cultural and historical development, from tiny fishing settlements to a global economic power.

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### **The Almost Nearly Perfect People: Behind the Myth of the Scandinavian Utopia**

by Michael Booth

The Danes are the happiest people in the world, and pay the highest taxes.

'Neutral' Sweden is one of the biggest arms manufacturers in the world.

Finns have the largest per capita gun ownership after the US and Yemen.

54 per cent of Icelanders believe in elves.

Norway is the richest country on earth.

Michael Booth has lived among the Scandinavians, on and off, for over ten years, perplexed by their many strange paradoxes and character traits and equally bemused by the unquestioning enthusiasm for all things Nordic and *hygge* that has engulfed the rest of the world.

He leaves his adopted home of Denmark and embarks on a journey through all five of the Nordic countries to discover who these curious tribes are, the secrets of their success and, most intriguing of all, what they think of each other. Along the way a more nuanced, often darker picture emerges of a region plagued by taboos, characterised by suffocating parochialism and populated by extremists of various shades.

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## **Names for the Sea: Strangers in Iceland**

by Sarah Moss

Sarah Moss had a childhood dream of moving to Iceland, sustained by a wild summer there when she was nineteen. In 2009, she saw an advertisement for a job at the University of Iceland and applied on a whim, despite having two young children and a comfortable life in Kent. The resulting adventure was shaped by Iceland's economic collapse, which halved the value of her salary, by the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull and by a collection of new friends, including a poet who saw the only bombs fall on Iceland in 1943, a woman who speaks to elves and a chef who guided Sarah's family around the intricacies of Icelandic cuisine. *Names for the Sea* is her compelling, beautiful and very funny account of living in a country poised on the edge of Europe, where modernisation clashes with living folklore.

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