

A trip to Iceland

My name is Maia, 22 years old. I study journalism at Mid University in Sweden, second year out of three. Last week, I had the opportunity to go to Iceland and write a reportage. I chose Iceland because of its beautiful landscape and interesting folklore – my reportage was to be about just that; the folklore, and how the icelandic nature has inspired so many old sagas and stories. Also the phenomenon that many icelanders still believe in the elves and hidden people. It's actually 54 percent of the population, according to a study from 2007. This was later confirmed by Magnús H. Skarphedinsson, who does research on folklore and its relevance in modern times. He also runs an "Elf School", where both tourists and icelanders come to learn more about this topic.

I met Magnús in Reykjavik. He invited me into his school, which has been running for thirty years. Along with mostly americans and one german radio correspondent, I got to hear a lot of different myths, sagas and how Magnús tries to prove the unverifiable – like witnesses to encounters with the elves and hidden people. He told me that he records the witnesses while he makes them tell their stories in detail. Then, maybe three or even five years later, he asks them to repeat the story. If the details are once again correct, he assumes it to be true. *"The truth is in the details."*

Anyhow, it seems hard to prove some sort of existence for the "non believers", the majority of non icelandic people in the world. Although it is a very fascinating subject of research.

I also went to Akureyri, a small town (but actually Iceland's second largest) up north. The nature was stunning - almost like a lunar landscape with its hills, misty mountains and lava fields. One night, I even saw some northern lights.

In Akureyri I met another person to interview for my reportage. Her name was Valgerdur H. Bjarnadottir, she lived an one hour drive from the city in a small cabin without any electricity. She invited me into her home, cooked some dinner and we talked more about mythology. She had a lot of fascinating stories about supposed encounters with the elves. For example, her mother had told her that she used to play with the elves as a young girl, in the woods behind the cabin. Believe it or not. Valgerdur herself, with a masters degree in "Women's Spirituality" from California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, is a skeptic. Still, she doesn't think that her mother would lie to her. It's kind of the same with most icelanders. Very few people have actually seen the hidden people, but they strongly believe in stories told by friends or relatives.

The most interesting insight I got from this trip myself, was that reality is very subjective. You can create your own reality and live by it, particularly in a country like Iceland where the line between fantasy and facts are a little bit more blurred. Since so many people believe in these things, it becomes their truth – no matter what people in the outside world think. It is quite understandable considering how isolated Iceland really is. A low populated island in the middle of the Atlantic, with such inspiring scenery.

The reportage itself turned out okay. I think it describes the mysterious atmosphere on Iceland quite well. I also, of course, got some very nice pictures of the landscape. I met the most odd but interesting, inspiring people. The best thing about this trip, however, must have been the midnight hike I did with some canadian people I met at the hostel in Reykjavik. We were out walking from ten in the evening until five in the morning. It was cold but clear, with a starry sky, and the northern lights showed all night. I think everyone has to see the lights at least once in a lifetime.

I sincerely thank Iceland for this time, and I will definately be back some day.

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