

**Monday 13 September 2010.**

Coming from Toronto, Canada, we touch down at Keflavik airport in Iceland on time at 0625. Cabs are plentiful so we take one the 40 minute drive to downtown Reykjavik – it's expensive though at 12,000 Kronor (a bit more than USD\$100). We head to Radisson Blu at the harbour for a great buffet breakfast and to fill in time prior to boarding the M/S Fram this afternoon.



Security at the waterfront is friendly and welcoming and Fram crew pointed us in the right direction to board the ship and head to the check in desk on Deck 3. We showed our passports and had our photo taken for our ships I.D. card which acts as our room key and charge card.

We're in an Outside Superior Cabin on Deck 5, cabin number 518. It's spacious and has a great ambience. There is ample wardrobe space with a personal safe within; the luggage cases fit easily under the bed; there is a mini-fridge, LG flat screen TV, writing desk with private tea & coffee making facility and the bed has side tables which provide an extra bedside drawer and personal reading lights.

In the evening we have an open seating buffet dinner after which we move up to the Observation Lounge for the Captain's welcome and introduction of the technical and expedition crew. Tonight we'll be sailing out of Reykjavik at 10pm.

**Tuesday 14 September 2010**

Today is totally lost in seasickness! (Not everyone suffers from this but I am hopeless!)

As with our crossing to Antarctica in previous travels, to witness the sheer beauty of this great planet you sometimes have to endure some wild water – in this case, the Denmark Strait. Even at the welcome dinner the night before, the Captain had clearly advised anyone who suffers from motion sickness to start their medication straight away in preparation for the next day's passage where Gale Force 8 winds were predicted (using the Beaufort scale).

Overnight the winds approached Gale Force 10; only super humans would not feel the effects of seasickness! Over the years I've worked out the best thing to do (for me) is to 'write the day off' – stay horizontal, eat little if anything and keep taking the tablets!

One positive is that, being such a young, modern ship with stabilisers, the M/S Fram didn't suffer the grinding/creaking sounds of others I've been on! Although seasick, I was not at all frightened as the ship was handling the bad weather so well.

(As a side note: this was the only weather we encountered in the entire ten days – it was smooth sailing from the very next morning until we steamed back in to Reykjavik on the last day!)

**Wednesday 15 September 2010**

When we arise this morning, we are just 90 nautical miles from the south/east coast of Greenland – soon to be entering Scorebysund – which we are told is the largest fjord in the world.

We went down to the comfortable lecture theatre on Deck 4 where the expedition team was explaining what we could expect on our landing this afternoon.

We were lucky enough to be invited to visit an Inuit settlement in this remote part of the world and the 450 or so population of this tiny community were very much looking forward to meeting us. We learned that this community survives the winter by hunting; the waters around here are only open to visiting ships just three months per year in summer – the rest of the year, completely frozen in. We could expect to see brightly coloured wooden clap-board style homes and the settlement also has a small museum, a tourist store, a hospital and a police station. We were told we could wander the settlement at our leisure but we were not to venture outside the 'city limits' due to the hungry polar bears around!



We would be loaded in small groups into the \*Polar Circle Boats (PCB's) for the short trip over from the mother ship to the shore. The expedition team explained the Fram had not been to Ittoqqortoormiit for some years so we would be advised once they had reconnoitered the landing site about whether to expect a wet or dry landing from our PCB's.

Our expedition lecturer also took great pains to explain about the numerous sled dogs that we would encounter in Ittoqqortoormiit – these are working dog sled teams, not pets. They do not work the dogs in the summer and as human's supplies start to run out, the food is rationed for everyone including the dogs. They may only get fed on every third day; they will no doubt look skinny and miserable so we should prepare ourselves for this. Apparently as winter nears, they are fed more often with higher fat food (whale blubber) so they can fatten up and their winter fur breaks through to make them hardy again to pull the sleds for the hunting.

\*Polar Circle Boats – this brand of boat is used as the tenders for M/S Fram. They are a bit like a cross between an Australian tinny and a rubber Zodiac. We found them to be very comfortable, stable and safe, with entry/exit either from the bow or the side. As we've found before on other expedition cruises, the (usually) Filipino crew who so often skipper the tenders are expert skippers and the 'seaman's grip' assistance into and out of the tenders means no one is going to fall in the icy cold water!

Whilst all 128 cabins are booked, Fram is carrying just 220 passengers on this voyage. We are to go ashore in groups of 32 at a time. They have four tenders that can each take eight passengers. We are in the last group today but each day the first group out will rotate, giving everyone a chance to "go first." Coming back to the ship is whenever we like as long as we all know that last tender leaves Scoresby at 1900.

When our turn comes, we finally step ashore on Greenland for the first time! The landscape at Ittoqqortoormiit is more like a moon-scape! Rocky and relatively barren, it has a lunar look but with some snow capped hills around it is still strangely beautiful. The brightly coloured houses of the village stand out – pink, aqua, yellow, turquoise, maroon, green and blue. We see a huge satellite dish (strangely for one of the most remote towns on the globe, apparently the kids do have access to Facebook!)

At first we didn't find the locals overly friendly but we soon worked out they were actually quite shy. They hardly ever have any visitors or tourists here, and the few that do come can only do so in the three month summer gap. We decided to make more of an effort so we kept saying Hi or Hello a little more loudly – then we got a great smiley response (yet still a bit shy).

Two of the younger girls had dressed in traditional Greenlandic outfits and were very happy for us to take pictures of them – (don't forget well mannered tourists always ask permission to take a photograph of a local person first!). Cheekily they had learned to hit us up for a dollar for having their picture taken – so we thought maybe they're not so shy after all!



Most of the houses had their sled dogs tied up around the house on short chains. Indeed they were skinny and looked a bit miserable as we had been warned – however as a tourist in someone else's country it is hard to criticize anyone for the life they lead and certainly the dogs are crucial for these people's survival.

We were told then about Gary Rolfe. We're told he lives in a little green house just near the old cemetery and will be exhibiting the "feeding" of his dogs at 5:30 pm if anyone wanted to go and watch and have a chat with him. This guy seems to love his dogs just that little bit more than anyone else – they all have a little wooden kennel, a huge pale of fresh water each and he's wandering among them giving them affection. Once we got talking to Gary,

we learn a lot more about him and his town. He's originally from the UK and 'followed his dream' to run dogs sleds in a remote destination. (Gary tells me the 'purity' between himself and his pack is what it's all about). His dogs are mostly male plus one female – she's his lead dog and breeder. He keeps the pups he wants from her litters; the others he gives away. Only the fittest dogs survive this harsh existence. I ask Gary about the other dogs around the town – he said if a dog can't survive the winter that's just how it is – only the fittest survive. They have to endure sleeping uncovered in -50° and their winter coat has to be strong, waterproof and thick. In fact Gary's dog's summer fur is shedding – he grooms his dogs daily at the end of summer – he can get up to 20kg of hair from them which he on-sells to a London fashion house for fur trim on garments! As winter approaches Gary feeds his dogs a much higher fat content each day, up to 80% saturated fat in the form of walrus and whale blubber – to fatten them up for their forthcoming working winter.

Gary often goes out sledding during winter "just to go" – up to five weeks in solitude sledding over the frozen ice around Greenland. I ask would he take a tourist on such a trip (even though I would think someone was stark raving mad if they wanted to do this sort of extreme adventure!) – well Gary will take a tourist and he has in the past! So if anyone reading this really wants and "out there" adventure let us know!

Gary tells us he's just back today from a five week stint away with just one of his dogs – they were contracted by geologists who were conducting surveys – their job was to guard them against polar bear attacks whilst they were working. While he's away, Gary's girlfriend tends to his remaining dogs and she also runs the guest house here...(there's a guest house?).

Gary tells us more about the town: there's a warehouse where everything from tobacco to coffins are shipped in – they need everything bought in. I ask how you get through nine months of winter without fresh fruit and veggies: he says 'frozen'. All fruit



and veggies have been stored frozen, there will be no chance of a delivery anytime during winter!

After our excellent ground tour of Ittoqqortoormiit, we zoom back to mother ship Fram on our PCB's, have a hot shower, head up to the Observation Lounge for hot toddy prior to dinner. Our first day has been a huge success!

### **Thursday 10 September 2010**

We've had an overnight steam north to Kong Oscar Fjord. All smooth sailing now that we are in the protection of the land. Today's shore visit takes us to Nyhavn – the harbour for the mine and military outpost in Mestersvig. The view into Kong Oscar Fjord is spectacular.



Again, we are to go ashore in small groups as only 100 passengers at a time are permitted on this military base. Even waiting your turn on Hurtigruten ships is interesting – from the comfort of the Observation Deck we can view our fellow passengers being transported speedily across the sea to the shore in the PCB's – whilst listening to some soothing jazz from Diana Krall and enjoying a complimentary hot coffee, tea or hot chocolate. Passing time whilst waiting to go ashore has never been more pleasant!

When it's our turn to go ashore, again, we are struck by the lunar landscape. Rocks, spongy moss and beautiful red, grass-like foliage interspersed among them. We had a lot of space to walk but we did have boundaries where the expedition team was stationed with rifles to eliminate any danger from unexpected polar bears.

The view from the top of the ridge was amazing. We could also see the runway that was, in 1954, the access for the now disused mine. A two man station still exists today – to look after this large section of the fjord and the associated national park (like park rangers). One of their duties is to maintain the runway, keeping it clear of snow in winter and keeping it accessible. One of our expedition leaders, Bjarki, used to be a station leader here and had invited the current two station leaders down to meet the Hurtigruten passengers. They brought along his old sled dog, Lola. She is now seven years old so she's retired. She won "most photographed monument in Mestersvig" today with everyone taking pictures of her reuniting with her "ex" dad.

After our return to the ship we steam further up the fjord to Alpenfjord where, weather permitting, we hope to do a PCB cruise around icebergs.

It turns out that we are able to have our PCB cruise from 1600 so again, our groups are called by number, eight passengers per PCB. Today was another great example of how Hurtigruten handles the expeditions extremely well – minimizing waiting times and the whole 'mudroom' layout is the best plan we've seen – ensuring the expeditions are seamless. All the energy goes into the excitement of what you're about to see, rather than the pain of queuing for a long period in your cold weather gear waiting to get out to the ice. We're taken the five minute PCB ride from Fram to the Viking Glacier, one of the largest we've ever seen. Whilst this late in summer it wasn't calving, it was still spectacular to be this close to such majestic beauty. Our Expedition Leader Jean-Louis stood toward the rear of the PCB explaining the geology behind such a glacier. A stunning day was topped off by our first seal sighting – he was playing energetically alongside Fram on our return, allowing us time for some great pictures before disappearing.

As we celebrate the end of the day with a Gin & Tonic back on Fram, the view in the Observation Lounge is a 270° view of the incredible glacier and it's surrounding 'Bergy Bits!'

### **Friday 17 September 2010**

We arrive at 0800 into Blomsterbukta and embark on the usual easy boat shuttle to the land. It's rocky and steep but a nice walk with a reward awaiting at the top of the cliff with spectacular views and photo opportunities. The only thing here is a small Norwegian trappers hut called "Varghytten" – it was built by Olaf Kjelbotn on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1930 and still contains original matches, small pot belly stove and firewood. Back on board we spend a few hours relaxing in the Observation Lounge surrounded by the beauty of this fjord.

This afternoon we enjoy a Polar Bear lecture – "The Giants of the North" – by one of the expedition team Jean-Louis Imbs. We learn that Polar Bears and Grizzly Bears are related. Polar Bears evolved over millions of years and natural selection meant that as the bears got fairer in colour they were more successful at surprising prey in the snow and hence more successful at hunting so they evolved to become white. Interestingly, their actual skin is black, meaning they have better warmth absorption and insulation.

The rest of our afternoon is spent cruising through the Franz Joseph Fjord with viewings of more icebergs, spectacular mountains and an amazing glacier.

Before dinner we enjoyed two more fascinating presentations, the first by Jean-Louis Imbs again on the bear community in the Arctic, and most importantly the impact that human development and pollutants are having on their number. (In addition to his life as a lecturer and expedition team member on voyages such as this, Jean-Louis has raised funds to open a bear interpretive centre in his hometown community in Stewartson, British Columbia.)



The second lecture is from Expedition Team Member Bjarki Friis, to give us information about tomorrow's shore excursion. Bjarki's lecture provided us with a two year insight into the life of a member of the Sirius dog sled team that patrols the 160,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the North East coast of Greenland. It's presentations like this that give you at least a small understanding of the challenges of existing in these polar regions (and makes you feel more than a little guilty heading off to your gourmet dinner and a nice bottle of wine in the warm comfortable surrounds of our luxury expedition vessel, M/S Fram!)

### **Saturday 18 September 2010**

At 0800 we arrive at Daneborg, 74°N 20°W – it's the furthest north we have ever been! We transport to the shore the usual way to be met by Morten Petersen, who is a member of the Sirius sled patrol and who will be our escort through this military base. Morten has been here since July, so is a relative newcomer and will be stationed here for 26 months in total as part of his contract with the Danish military. He tells us it is a privilege and a dream come true to be selected as part of this 12 man dog sled patrol. They have over 100 applicants every year and only six "newies" are chosen each year. They join the six "oldies" to create the 12 man team. The oldies teach the newies the extra skills required to service the patrols that are run November & December and January through to June each year. They patrol the 160,000 km<sup>2</sup> national park to protect Danish sovereignty.

Each member of the 12 man team will build their own sleds at the Sirius Base. The reason they build their own sled is because, should some component break, they need to be able to dismantle, repair and re-assemble the sled 'in the field.' The sled carries their supplies including food for themselves and the dogs, a two man tent, a warming stove for within the tent, repair supplies and their Sat-Nav.

The men also have to learn to become impromptu veterinarians; should any of their dogs become sick or, as they often do, have a dog fight, the sled guys have to be able to stitch them up! One would ask why the Danish Government choose to keep these teams when, in a global communications sense, with satellite information available, they could save the cost – but Morten proudly explains it is necessary to

ensure the Danish are making every effort to protect their sovereignty; it is tradition; they also act as Park Rangers and are a friendly base available to help with scientific research. They also keep the various protective huts up and down the coast supplied and in good repair.

Our excursion takes us to the tiny 'museum' – called "Hotel Karina" – which is a replica trapper's hut indicative of the only dwellings in this area in past eras. Next we walk up the hill past a memorial for a Danish trapper who froze to death in the early 1900's and the burial site of Eli Knudsen who was shot by the German's in WWII. Apparently the story goes something like this: in WWII the German's sent workers to set up weather stations in North East Greenland, the reason being the weather patterns predicted from Greenland will eventuate in Germany, allowing them to plan more tactical air strikes. The Allies (including the Danish) had to reclaim Greenland and sent troops and trappers back to this area. Eli Knudsen was a member of these troops and was shot dead in 1943 at this site.



Before we return to Fram we spent some time 'up close & personal' with one of the dog teams. As tough as they must be to do what they do, it was really like playing with big, goofy domestic pets – they craved the attention and you couldn't pat them enough!

Even though it's a magnificent, sunny, clear day, this was by far the coldest morning we've had, but it was worth every minute of it to have the opportunity to learn about this last bastion of Danish sovereignty and to meet the remarkable young men who find it a privilege to uphold this tradition. Then, as all good "soft" adventurers do, we return to the warmth and comfort of Fram for a hot shower and a delicious lunch to which the Sirius team had been invited to join.

After enjoying a relaxing afternoon reading and napping on and off, we then enjoyed dinner before the Filipino crew put on a fruit & ice carving display in the Observation Lounge. After this Captain Rune Andreassen presented all of us with our certificate of .....\*\*\* (being so far north??)

### **Sunday 19 September 2010**

Today we arrive early to Myggbukta where again we go ashore in the PCB's to visit a disused trappers hut. The highlight today is the sighting of our first Polar Bears on the trip. Although they are far in the distance and binoculars were required to spot them, our guides were not taking any chances and had their rifles at the ready and formed a sentry around our small group. The main objective of course is to let us observe the surrounds and life of a Polar Bear without actually confronting one, leading to any unnecessary use of the rifles! We are told to keep our life jackets on whilst wandering the area and, should any of the Expedition Leaders advise us to urgently return to the boats, we must do so quickly and not loiter or take 'just one more photo!' Whilst all the warnings are obviously for our own safety and to avoid any human/beast confrontation – it all creates an element of excitement for us on the day!

### **Monday 20 September 2010**

Having cruised through Sofia Sound overnight, today we visit Ella Island named by AG Nathorst in 1899 after his wife. Ella Island is located in the middle of magnificent scenery and houses a Danish scientific station built in 1931, and since August 1941 has been the headquarters for the Sirius dog sled patrol. Just like yesterday's shore excursion, our Expedition Leaders are stationed at intervals around our exploration area to keep a look out for Polar Bears. This is particularly relevant in light of the obvious visit last week from a hungry Polar Bear who raided the external recycling bins, sniffing out used jars of marmalade and tins of food, strewing them about the place. There was also evidence that he tried to break in to two of

the huts; timber was ripped off the exterior and insulation ripped out. Another repair job for the young men of the Sirius sled patrol!

There is also a useable runway strip here on Ella Island – it is short, maybe only \_\_ metres in length and extremely uneven and rocky – however we are assured a Twin Otter aircraft can easily handle such a short landing strip and the Twin Otter pilots are very talented airmen!

When everyone is back on board we 'up-anchor' and cruise just 30 minutes further south to the Arctic version of Antarctica's "Iceberg Alley" – magnificent icebergs, serenely existing in this quiet, untouched fjord. Anyone who has a camera is clicking away happily today. Our Captain expertly manoeuvres this 12,000 tonne ship in and out of the bergs and there is zero pollution in the air – meaning that whether you have an instamatic camera still requiring film or the latest, most powerful digital media, your pictures will be pristine and clear!

The rest of the afternoon is at leisure. Some people soak up the sun on Deck 7, albeit wrapped up in the toasty blankets the ship provides) and the rest of us head to the Observation Lounge where the scent of freshly cooked waffles lures us – waffles served with blackberry jam and fresh cream! The special cocktail of the day is a Greenlandic Coffee – this being a lovely hot coffee with a dash of Kahlua & Grand Marnier and topped with a little whipped cream – perfect!

### **Tuesday 21 September 2010**

A full day at sea today, as we cross Denmark Straight (this time like a millpond!) on our return journey to Iceland. We are not without anything to do though, in fact a full program is offered! We have a choice of lectures to attend, ranging from the affects of global warming on Greenland and Iceland to the habits and habitats of seals. A bridge tour is also offered – for the German speaking guests in the morning; for the English speaking guests in the afternoon.

We're really looking forward to this afternoon's presentation by Janus, who was born and bred in Nuuk, about living in a Greenlandic settlement. This presentation has been highly recommended to us by a number of the other Expedition Leaders.

Finally, as has been the case each day throughout the voyage, the final presentation will be providing information to prepare us for our final stop tomorrow at Isafjordur, on the North West coast of Iceland. The crew is all buzzing in preparation of tonight's Filipino banquet.

During our passage today we were reminded of the ongoing training and professionalism of our crew and Hurtigruten in general when a "crew only" fire and evacuation drill was conducted at sea. Sometimes you tend to forget that as well as looking after our requirements for food, comfort, education and sightseeing, these crew are all highly trained safety professionals!

### **Wednesday 22 September 2010**

This morning we have our regular workout on the excellent equipment in the gym whilst we watch the arrival into this beautiful little port. Isafjordur is situated in remote North West Iceland and is primarily a fishing town; it's population about 4,000 including surrounding settlements. Isafjordur is surrounded by snow capped mountains; very picturesque. One guest is enjoying the arrival whilst luxuriating in the hot Jacuzzi on Deck 7 – enjoying 30°C warm water in an outdoor temperature not more than 5°C.

A pilot boat pulls alongside so Fram can take on a pilot to show us the best way in. We will also clear customs this morning, however no action is required from the passengers for this.

There are three optional excursions available for the guests in Isafjordur. A three hour hike over beautiful mountains, a town tour or a 45 minute small boat ride to an abandoned settlement. (The settlement was

an old whaling station and when the ban on whaling was auctioned in the early 1900's, the people left the town as there was no longer employment).

We opted to walk the town ourselves and found it to be one of the prettiest, friendliest towns we have visited – although at just 4°C maximum in early autumn, we agreed we couldn't live here!

The town and in fact all of Iceland is known for their divine, handcrafted woollen knitwear; the patterned designs are very distinctive. A lot of the shops here sell these beautiful knits. Isafjordur also has a couple of fantastic bakeries where the smell of the freshly baked Danishes lured us in from the cold! Walking along the waterfront showcases the fishing industry that is still the main source of employment here – lots of colourful fishing boats.

When everyone is back on board at 1600 we depart this beautiful little town for an overnight steam to Reykjavik. During the evening we have fun with a children's charity fundraiser – a simple auction with only two items – a signed Hurtigruten Expedition Leader's jacket and a Captains chart with our journey hand-charted on it. Hurtigruten prides itself on educational tourism and 'giving back' to the remote communities we visit. In this case, the funds raised will go 50/50 to a children's hospital and towards educational equipment for a children's school in a remote town in far North West Greenland. Whilst everyone had fun at the auction encouraging the bidding, we were not in any way made to feel pressured into giving anything at all – just offered the opportunity. The chart was eventually purchased by a German man for 3,500 NOK (about \$750 AUD) to the hearty applause of everyone in the Observation Lounge! The man was thrilled with his purchase and was going to frame it for his library as the ultimate memento of this fantastic trip.

After the auction the Captain hosted a small, casual cocktail party to propose a toast to our great crew and to the passengers, wishing us all safe onward travel and hoping to see us again sometime soon on M/S Fram. We enjoyed our last dinner with new found friends on calm seas.

#### **Thursday 23 September 2010**

We arrive in Reykjavik at 0800 exactly as planned – Hurtigruten is very punctual!

After a final buffet breakfast and our goodbyes to crew, expedition team and new friends, we are free to leave Fram and start our exploration of Reykjavik!

END OF CRUISE COMPONENT

#### **Thursday 23 September 2010 (continued)**

After disembarking M/S Fram, the rest of our day is free to explore Reykjavik and, as we envisaged from our short three hour exploration prior to boarding Fram ten days ago, it is a seriously upbeat, up market, elegant town. There isn't a major shopping mall as such, rather a long street, Laugavegur, and several surrounding streets that embody the words boutique, eclectic, touristy, high street and even 'pre-loved'.

We walk the short distance from the Harbour to our Hotel for the next two nights – Hotel 101. Luckily for us, even though it was only 9.30 am, our room is ready. The Manager who processed our check-in was super friendly and helpful, giving us tips on what to do, recommending a hire-car company and calling them for us to organize a car. The hotel is what you would call designer boutique and arty – in fact the eclectic, modern yet welcoming foyer and bar house art, books and curiosities that invite you to just hang around in that environment having a few warming drinks looking at everything – of course that's the intention anyway! Sometimes in the past though, we have found that 'designer boutique' doesn't necessarily come with a friendliness factor – but not here. Everyone from the wait staff to the cleaner vacuuming the foyer welcomed us with big smiles and wishes us a pleasant day.

Our room was spacious, modern and funky in that wonderful Scandinavian way, with everything a guest would need including hair dryer, safe, free internet and mini-bar. Hotel 101 is central to the shopping and harbour precinct, it has great amenities and a small but well equipped gym. We couldn't fault it for our needs and preferences! (Hotel 101, Hverfisgata 10, 101 Reykjavik, Iceland. Tel: +354 5800-101. E-mail: 101hotel@101hotel.is)

Tourism is certainly welcomed with open arms and smiley faces here in Iceland. We found everyone in the restaurants, cafes and retail shops to be super friendly and all of them (whom we encountered) spoke excellent English. There are Tourist Information Centers on almost every block with all the usual Icelandic fridge magnets, postcards, spoons, scarves, beanies, cups & mugs – it doesn't matter which one you go into, you should find helpful, friendly, English speaking staff.

That night, we had made a booking at the Lobster House based on the recommendation of a Hurtigruten passenger. We were so impressed with this beautiful, establishment restaurant. The complimentary starter – gravlax salmon topped with the tiniest drop of mango puree and a couple of caviar eggs with a celeriac mousse, the most scrumptious flavours in one small hit. This was served with a small crusty white bread roll and a slice of gingerbread. We found the Icelandic lobster to be a taste sensation – they are smaller and sweeter than your regular lobster. The house specialty is to have the Icelandic lobster grilled with garlic, so that's what we ordered and it was sensational. Finally we finished with a rhubarb tart panacotta & white sour milk ice-cream plate and a Spanish Muscat sticky – the perfect end to a sumptuous taste sensation! Please do take our recommendation and try this restaurant if ever in Reykjavik. (The Lobster House, Amtmannsstíg 1 101 Reykjavík. Tel.: (+354) 561 3303 [humarhusid@humarhusid.is](mailto:humarhusid@humarhusid.is))

### **Friday 24 September 2010**

Having the whole day free without plans, we hired a car from Procar who delivered the car to our hotel. We headed off to the Geyser, a natural hot water spring erupting about every five minutes. The geyser, called Strokkur ("the churn") can shoot water up to 66 feet into the air and is an amazing natural wonder. Only another ten minutes along the same road, the two-tiered falls called Gullfoss ("Golden Falls"), are spectacular. The River Hvítá drops over a cliff, changes direction, and plunges over another into a 1.5-mile ravine, for a total drop of 105 feet. Absolutely stunning scenery and well worth the hour long drive to get here.

From here we decide we'd like to take the southern road down to Blue Lagoon, so we start the drive and soon realize that the suggestion from our hire car company to take out "gravel insurance" was sage advice! Most of Iceland's remote roads are gravel!

We finally arrive at Blue Lagoon which is a hot pool/spa sensation that regularly wins awards including being in the top ten of the 2009 Conde Naste Traveller Readers Choice Spa Awards. We found it to be one of the best operations of a spa/tourist attraction that we've been to so far. For the €28 admission (plus €5 towel hire) you can spend as long as you like floating in the therapeutic white/blue water. The average temperature is hot – 37-39°C – and full of silica which apparently is very good for the skin! There are even silica mud boxes around the pool and guests are encouraged to take a ladle of the white mud and plaster it all over their face for ten minutes as the ultimate rejuvenating mask!

The pools are man-made and the by-product of the pollution free water from the nearby electricity plant. The mix is 2/3 salt water and 1/3 fresh water and renowned for its silica content. In fact all the volcanic rock that surrounds the pool is coated in the silica, making the rock at the lapping edge bright white and smooth, much like inside an oyster shell. The water is a cloudy white/baby blue colour and hot – it's just so inviting!

For a more indulgent visit, you can pay €100 and use the private pools including towels, robe and complimentary drinks and food.

The public use areas of Blue Lagoon are excellent – it's a huge, modern, timber and cement building with a great casual café overlooking the pools and a more up market restaurant available as well. When entering the pools you are given a waterproof band to wear as a wristlet or anklet. The band has a chip inside it, acting as your own personal key to lock and unlock the lockers, as well as to make purchases at the pool bar where you can buy beer, wine, sparkling, soft drinks, coffee and a whole range of extra mud masks and skin treatment products to apply in the pool.

We floated happily and enjoyed a drink for about 45 minutes and felt totally energized afterwards.

Once out of the pools the facilities include relaxing chairs overlooking the pools and great hot showers, shampoo and conditioner and blow dryers all in ample supply in separate dressing rooms (male/female segregated).

Finally, when leaving you can sample (and purchase) a huge range of Blue Lagoon specialty products ranging from mud masks to silica anti-ageing serums and hand and body lotions.

We rated the experience 10/10 and would definitely go back next time we ever find ourselves in Iceland!

For our last meal here in Reykjavik, we find our way the short distance from Hotel 101 to the recommended 'Fish Market' Restaurant. Again, we find the restaurant to be world class. The restaurant is close to fully booked and we don't have a reservation, so we're offered a seat at the bar overlooking the kitchen which was so fascinating, we both agreed if we ever came back we would ask for the same seats. More like watching an uber cool cooking demonstration with everything being prepared right in front of us whilst we enjoyed a bottle of wine. We decided to share four dishes: Monkfish chop with an accompanying hot pot of cauliflower, broccolini & scallops; Cod fillet with ginger & flash fried Enoki mushrooms; King Alaskan Crab Claw and a watermelon, almond, feta and tomato salad. Each was a taste sensation and the service was efficient and friendly. We would highly recommend this restaurant!

(Fish Market, Adalstraeti 12, Reykjavik. Tel: +354 578 8877) and finally their website has this spiel: "Taste the freshness of a farmer's market. Named by both Condé Nast Traveler and Food & Wine as one of 2008's hottest spots to dine in the world, Fish Market is housed in one of central Reykjavík's oldest buildings. Its modern yet cozy surroundings are the perfect setting for an unforgettable meal. Head Chef Hrefna Rósa Sætran, a member of the Icelandic national culinary team, has created a menu using ingredients sourced directly from the nation's farms, lakes, and sea to create Icelandic dishes with a modern twist."

We were planning on finishing our wonderful Arctic Adventure with a good night's sleep prior to our long journey home tomorrow – but hadn't counted on the locals playing on a Friday night! Reykjavikians know how to party – and there are numerous nightclubs in the downtown area, apparently for the super cool people! (We don't fit into that bracket so opted for a final drink back at Hotel 101.)

For a relatively small population of about 200,000 people, we thought they all must have come out to party during the night as we heard revellers partying in the streets well into the night, in fact even at 7 am there were plenty of them walking home from the clubs, singing (terribly) and obviously intoxicated but having loads of fun.

It didn't matter to us though; we were reminded of the incredibly friendly hospitality we had received in Iceland and Greenland and wouldn't have had it any other way!