

VEILLE TOURISTIQUE ISLANDE

1. Les effets du tourisme de masse en Islande (en anglais)

Iceland's tourism boom — and backlash — Financial Times

The first two months of this year were up 59 per cent on the same period of 2016 and the economy is buoyant, but at what cost?

If the targets are hit, Iceland will be entertaining 6m annual visitors by 2030.

March 8, 2017 by: Tim Moore

Last summer, I stood at the head of a deep, dramatic rip in the fabric of Iceland and gazed down at Thingvellir, site of the ancient Viking parliament and the tectonic divide between Europe and America. At least I tried to, because between me and the plunging walls of volcanic basalt lay a forest of selfie sticks and extended Goretex-clad arms. The sightseeing hordes had disembarked from a great fleet of coaches parked by a new visitor centre, muttering animatedly in many languages with one common English phrase: Game of Thrones, the global TV phenomenon in which Thingvellir has starred as a regular location.

It was very hard to square this scene with my first visit in 1987. Touring the country in her mother's Daihatsu Charade, my Icelandic wife-to-be and I bumped up to Thingvellir on a desolate unmade road, and walked through that terrific chasm alone. Indeed it often felt as if we had the entire extraordinary country to ourselves. Even the fabled "golden circle" sights in day-trip range of Reykjavík — the cataclysmic Gullfoss waterfall, and Geysir, eponymous home of boiling water spouts — lay deserted.

The Blue Lagoon, now a popular geothermal spa where a swim costs between Ikr5,400 (£40) and Ikr26,500 (£200), was then an untamed site for guerrilla bathers: you got changed in the car, then shuffled gingerly into the milky hot water at your own risk. Since that first trip I've been to Iceland at least once a year, and seen its alien panoramas populated by an ever-growing cast of visitors. Adventurers conquering the Arctic-deserts on mountain bikes. Britpop era hipsters taking a left-field minibreak in the land of Björk.

Then, suddenly and in ratcheting profusion, the mass-market travelling everymen. In 2009, Iceland welcomed 464,000 tourists. By last year, that had shot up to nearly 1.8m and the growth is accelerating. The first two months of this year were up 59 per cent on the same period of 2016 and by the end of the year the nation expects to hit 2.4m visitors. "The graph of tourist numbers is currently almost vertical," says Professor Edward Huijbens of the Icelandic Tourism Research Centre. *When I first came, there were two Icelanders per tourist; the 340,000 natives are now outnumbered by the annual tally of US visitors alone.* In the words of Paul Fontaine, news editor of English-language The Reykjavík Grapevine, "It's got to the point where even the tourists are complaining about too many tourists." This explosion, aptly enough, was set off by a volcano.

The 2010 eruption of Eyjafjallajökull disrupted flights around the world, bringing newsreaders out in a cold sweat and putting Iceland in the spotlight. Fearing negative publicity, tourist authorities responded with an international publicity campaign.

But the eruption intrigued prospective visitors rather than deterring them. This thrillingly elemental, out-there destination was, it transpired, within easy grasp. Icelandair had long been offering transatlantic stopovers, and budget airlines were being lured to Keflavík — the capital’s international airport — by cheap landing fees. Since the nation’s financial collapse in 2008 the krona had halved in value, making an Iceland holiday markedly less ruinous. The “tourism bomb”, as it was christened locally, seemed a miraculous shot in the arm for the nation’s shattered economy and wounded pride. Marooned in the north Atlantic, Icelanders have always nurtured a fixation with how the world sees them. Interactions with any visitor would begin with the query: “So how do you like Iceland?” But with Reykjavík’s harbour full of whale-watching tour boats and cruise ships, and its streets alive with the rustle of Berghaus and North Face, the question soon seemed redundant. Everyone liked Iceland.



The land of my in-laws is a compact and homogenous community, a socio-economic hothouse where trends that would elsewhere take a generation to evolve can rise and fall in a couple of years. When something gains traction — anything, from tattoos and kiwi fruit to banking bubbles — everyone instantly piles aboard the bandwagon. This latest phenomenon mushroomed with particular vigour due to its concentration: two-thirds of the population live in the south-west, where more than 90 per cent of tourists spend most of their time. Every summer I found more of my in-laws renting out spare rooms on Airbnb, or driving tour buses, or watching whales for profit. Hotels began to spring up on every other street corner in Reykjavík. My wife’s aunt Elín, a tutor at the Tourist Guide School, found her classes stacked with high-end career shifters — among them Kári Jónasson, a former TV news editor. “Tourism simply transformed our economy,” he tells me. The industry was soon bringing in more foreign currency than any other sector, and providing a sixth of all jobs. Unemployment, at an unprecedented 10 per cent in greater Reykjavík after the financial meltdown, dropped below 3 per cent.

But bandwagons tend to go off the rails, and the tipping point for this one can be traced to summer 2015. Just before my family arrived for our annual pilgrimage, a coach party of tourists had been spotted taking an al fresco “comfort stop” behind a church near Thingvellir. Full-blown national outrage took hold: the churchyard was the hallowed resting place of two of Iceland’s greatest poets.

In typically native fashion, the tables seemed to turn overnight. Airbnb was now castigated for pricing young Icelanders out of Reykjavík. Locals complained overcrowded pavements and rental-car traffic jams had put them off downtown. My wife's nephew, a chef at one of the top restaurants, told us they hadn't served a native customer in a month.

A 2015 news report on tourists taking 'comfort breaks' beside the hallowed resting place of two of Iceland's greatest poets Visitors have always underestimated Iceland, and as their numbers swelled so these underestimates grew more costly in every sense. Last winter, a party of young Britons attracted national opprobrium after being expensively rescued three times during a hike across the interior. Three tourists have drowned at a single beach in the past decade, swept from the black volcanic sand by thunderous waves. Asian holiday drivers seem especially ill-prepared for the icy and sometimes gravelled roads, contributing disproportionately to a toll of serious injuries that has doubled among foreign motorists in the past two years. Last September, a Chinese visitor was killed after wandering out into the road while staring up at the Northern Lights.

The healthcare system was struggling to cope, and the pummeling of tourist buses and 20,000 rental cars began to take its toll on the roads. Yet few seemed ready to suggest that all these infrastructural shortcomings — right down to the dearth of toilet facilities that had triggered the backlash — might be addressed by ploughing back some of the windfall. One theory is that this reluctance stemmed from Iceland's long history of boom and bust, and a subsequent focus on making hay while the sun shines at the expense of investment. Sudden good fortune has not been a regular caller to this spartan, wintry land. In eloquent testimony to centuries of hardship, the Icelandic phrase for a manna-from-heaven windfall is *hvalreki*, or beached whale — a miraculous trove of dead blubber to harvest. The tourism bonanza was seen as just another here-today-gone-tomorrow *hvalreki*, like the fishing and finance booms that have washed up on the beach over recent decades. "It's the herring adventure all over again," one of my wife's cousins memorably suggested. Huge catches in 1960s led to herring accounting for half of Iceland's export income but the bonanza led to excitable over-exploitation which in turn brought inevitable collapse — in 1969 the herring disappeared. "I have literally heard this from many key figures in the tourist industry," says Professor Huijbens. "It's like the herring, so let's just process the catch before it rots." In some ways, I don't blame them. As a pioneering tourist it seemed to me that Iceland's draw was its unpeopled otherworldliness, which could never survive an inundation. "But that's a very European perspective," says Huijbens. "We're now seeing a different kind of visitor, often from east Asia. These aren't usually tourists who want to go out and explore a virgin wilderness or whatever — it's more about ticking things off a bucket list: see a volcano, or a whale, or the Northern Lights. To be blunt they might not fully appreciate what we have, but there are an awful lot of them." Meanwhile the gung-ho aviation authority is aiming to transform Keflavík into what some in the industry are calling the "Dubai of the north" — an international hub and "aerotropolis" to rival the world's busiest. If the targets are hit, Iceland will be entertaining 6m annual visitors by 2030.

Projections like this have belatedly roused authorities into action. Attempts have been made to regulate and restrict Airbnb rentals, and in January Iceland appointed its first minister of tourism — Thórdís Gylfadóttir, a 29-year-old lawyer. The towering summer-season peak is being progressively flattened by the promotion of winter attractions from the Northern Lights to Reykjavík's apocalyptic

New Year fireworks. But little has been done to address the stifling concentration of tourists in the capital region, which everyone but the aviation authority sees as the main problem. Akureyri, Iceland's second city in the north, has a long-haul runway and an embarrassment of waterfalls, geothermal bubbling and all the other requisite national attractions. Gylfadóttir tells me her ministry is establishing a fund to subsidise direct flights to the city. But no details have yet been released, and Huijbens, an Akureyri resident, says that not a single purpose-built hotel has been opened there since the 1950s. In Reykjavík, a degree of resentment festers. Fontaine says everyone knows someone who's been evicted by a landlord who realised they can make a lot more money putting the property on Airbnb. Even in the capital, basic infrastructural issues are nowhere near resolution. Last summer, I spotted one downtown local advertising his toilet facilities for Ikr300 — more than £2. Wages on the industry's lower rungs have sunk below levels acceptable to most Icelanders: you're increasingly likely to be handed a room key or served a drink by a young eastern European. One party in the ruling coalition has suggested imposing limits on visitor numbers; more moderately, there are moves to sharply raise the negligible nightly tourist tax. Huijbens hopes for a shift in the quantity/quality balance, moving away from the box-ticking masses to eco-tourism and academic "study tourism". "We have become a tourism economy, so it's up to us to manage how it develops." His main concern, though, has nothing to do with commerce. "If things continue as they are, I can see tourism as this isolated processing industry, with Polish workers serving Chinese guests and very little interaction with us Icelanders." On my debut trip in 1987, Iceland's defining sense of enclosed detachment was reflected on its streets. Everybody seemed to know each other, even in downtown Reykjavík. I remember a group of children politely transfixed by a passing black serviceman from the US-run Nato base at Keflavik, simply because of his novelty. "On a human level," says Huijbens, "this should be a great opportunity to share all kinds of cultural knowledge and experience." He pauses, before settling on an unimprovably Icelandic metaphor. "Tourists are people, and people are not herring." Tim Moore is the author of 10 travel books, the first of which, 'Frost on My Moustache', recounted a trans-Icelandic journey Iceland less travelled — where to escape the tourist hordes The upside of the concentration of tourists around Reykjavik — and in summer — is that much of the rest of the country remains crowd-free. In July 2015, hotel occupancy throughout the capital region was 90 per cent; but in the eastern region in January, just 6 per cent of beds were filled. Tim Moore picks five favourite places beyond the tour-bus route.

A geothermal pool is almost a municipal birthright in Iceland, and the 200 residents of Hofsó — a fishing village in the north — are especially blessed. Their infinity pool, funded by two local businesswomen, is a pocket masterpiece of concrete and steel dropped into the soft, damp coastal grassland. Through the rising steam, bathers can look across the fiord to Drangey, and sympathise with Grettir the Strong, the Saga outlaw who swam to the distant, cliff-edged island. Strandir Iceland's west fiords — the 'ear' that sticks out from its top-left corner — are the nation's most remote and loneliest outpost. Strandir, a stretch of its eastern coastline, is the motorist's final frontier: route 643 is a panoramic cul-de-sac that winds through largely deserted old fishing villages. Djúpvavík, 70km from the nearest proper settlement, has seven remaining houses and a tiny hotel that was once the accommodation block for a herring factory whose mighty ruins dominate the seafront. The dramatic canyon of Asbyrgi Asbyrgi A short drive east of whale-watching capital Húsavík, this dramatic canyon is thought to have been formed in a few apocalyptic days, by meltwater from a huge subglacial eruption. Standing among the house-sized boulders piled up in what was the plunge-pool of a thunderous, horseshoe waterfall, it feels like Niagara with the taps

turned off: a compelling disconnect between the elemental ferocity that shaped this place and the deafening silence that fills it now. Snæfellsnes The glacier-topped volcano that embellishes the distant background of a million sunset-over-Reykjavík tourist snaps was the starting point for Jules Verne’s Journey to the Centre of the Earth. But the peninsula that hosts Snæfell is further away than it looks in the clear Arctic air, and after a three-hour drive on ever emptier roads you’ll find yourself on vast, deserted beaches backed by Tolkienesque crags, the sands strewn with driftwood logs and fragments of shipwreck. Neskaupstaður Few outsiders make it to Iceland’s eastern extremity. This fishing port was largely left to its own devices before a single-track tunnel was bored through the Oddskard mountains in 1977, and today exudes the marooned, homespun quirkiness of a Scandi-noir drama. A tradition of diehard socialism bestowed Neskaupstaður with the nickname “Little Moscow” — two clocks in the town’s swimming pool show the local time alongside that in the Russian capital.

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2. Depuis 2013, le tourisme est le premier secteur d’activité devant la pêche et l’aluminium

Iceland's Fishing Industry Is Starting to Stink

by Omar Valdimarsson

9 mars 2017 à 02:00 UTC+1 9 mars 2017 à 15:22 UTC+1

Iceland has fought wars to protect its fishermen, most recently against the U.K. in the 1970s. Now, a record inflow of foreign tourists is threatening the industry that once built this tiny north Atlantic country.

The flood of sightseers, volcano watchers and glacier trekkers is lifting the national currency, pushing up the price of Icelandic fish. It’s the latest blow to a business that has already lost its status as the biggest exporter to -- you guessed it -- tourism.

But tourists can be fickle, and a growing dependence on visitors risks adding to an already volatile situation (the [current boom](#) follows the ruinous collapse of Iceland’s three biggest banks in 2008). Its fishermen, by contrast, are used to weathering storms, so no effort should be spared to defend Europe’s largest fish producer after Norway, said Konrad S. Gudjonsson, an economist at Reykjavik-based Arion banki hf.



That won't be easy. Heidrun Lind Marteinsdottir of Fisheries Iceland, the industry's lobby arm, says there's already talk of Icelandic companies outsourcing some of the less profitable parts of their operations, placing thousands of jobs at risk.

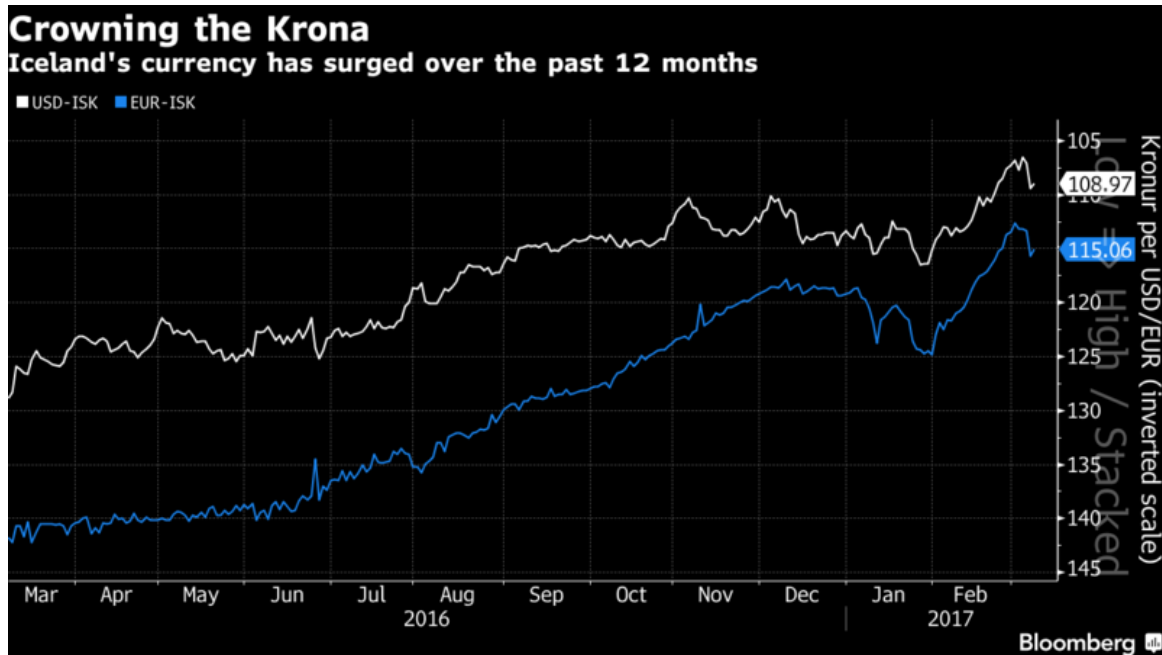
Unappreciated Appreciation

Iceland's currency has gained nearly 19 percent against the euro and around 15 percent against the dollar over the past 12 months and is expected to continue to rise this year, according to Arion banki.

"If the appreciation of the krona continues we'll reach the point where people will start to wonder whether it makes sense to fully process fish in Iceland," Marteinsdottir said in a telephone interview on Feb. 28.

That would be a worrying development for Iceland's fisheries, which employ nearly 5 percent of the island's workforce and whose main export market is about a thousand miles south, in Britain.

Add to that the devaluation of the pound and the potential aftershocks of Britain's departure from the European Union, and it's easy to see why the industry may be concerned.



One way fishing companies in the Nordic nation are combating the krona's gains is by financing themselves in foreign currencies or hedging against further krona appreciation. Although hedging has been mostly banned in Iceland due to capital controls, the country's central bank said on Feb. 24 that it would be willing to grant some exemptions.

However, hedging alone is unlikely to salvage some of the smaller companies, according to Marteinsdottir.

Peg Talk

A better solution from their point of view would be to "have a more stable environment when it comes to the currency," she said. The government is looking at proposals to revise its monetary regime, including a possible peg to the euro or a basket of currencies.

For now, the Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture says Icelandic fish production has a strong enough brand to survive the krona surge. Still, given that the U.K. currently absorbs a fifth of fish exports, "securing a mutually beneficial post-Brexit trade deal between the two countries will be a priority," Fisheries Minister Thorgerdur Katrin Gunnarsdottir said in a written response to questions Wednesday.

In the meantime, shifting processing to eastern Europe or China is still seen as a "measure of last resort" by Marteinsdottir. It would certainly spell disaster for the around 3,700 people employed in the processing industry.

During World War II, Iceland's fishermen [braved foreign mines and submarines](#) to supply fish to the continent, kick-starting an economic transformation that would eventually turn its people into some of the [world's richest](#). Today, many of the menial jobs have been taken over by migrants, whose numbers have surged to [record heights](#).

"I like working for this company and they pay me well -- I make about twice what I'd make in Poland," said Katrzyna Staszek, a 29-year-old employee of Grandi hf, one of the country's largest seafood companies. "I don't know what I'd do if this industry were to be moved."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-03-09/for-iceland-s-fisheries-krona-appreciation-is-starting-to-stink>

3. De plus en plus de touristes en photographies



Look at that glacier beauty



Climbing up for aerial views

<http://jessieonajourney.com/south-coast-iceland/>