



# Iceland Fljótshérað – Nowhere else



fljotsheraed.is

Egilsstaðir  
Fellabær  
Eiðar  
Hallormsstaður  
Brúarás



## Welcome to Fljótshérað

"Fljótshérað" or "Hérað" as the region is known to the Icelanders, is the broad valley extending and branching southwest from the black sand beaches of Héraðsflói all the way to Vatnajökull glacier. Hérað is the Fljótshérað municipality includes the small towns of Egilsstaðir and Fellabær. Hérað covers the largest area of all communes in Iceland.

Established in 1947 by the national government, Egilsstaðir is one of Iceland's youngest towns. Around 3,800 people live in the municipality of Fljótshérað as a whole. Previously, the spacious agricultural communities of Fljótshérað, traded at the neighboring fjords of Vopnafjörður, Reyðarfjörður and Seyðisfjörður, as Hérað has no harbor. Since the 1940s, this has changed and Egilsstaðir has developed an extensive array of services and become the service and trade centre for most of East Iceland.

Egilsstaðir is a growing educational centre, public services include a good secondary school as well as a wide variety of distance and local life-long-learning opportunities, including university education offered through the East Iceland Knowledge Network. The municipality provides exemplary facilities for sports, operating for example four sports halls and an artificial turf football field. Fljótshérað has two swimming pools, a small one at Hallormsstaður and a thermal outdoor swimming pool at Egilsstaðir, which has a water slide and a special children's splash pool. *Photo 6*

Among Icelanders, the valleys of Fljótshérað have long had a reputation for natural beauty and nice weather. This reputation has been reinforced by natural and cultivated forests, where the trees are gradually providing more shelter from chilly northerly winds. When summertime breezes come from the south or west, crossing the interior highlands they tend to be dry and warm, creating warm temperatures and calm weather. A still evening at Atlavík inlet, overlooking the wave less lake, is unbeatable; it is no exaggeration to call Fljótshérað a weather paradise, whatever the season, with a climate more like that of Scandinavia than the typical oceanic climate of Iceland.

The villages of Egilsstaðir and Fellabær serve East Iceland not only as centers for services but also for transportation, especially through Egilsstaðir Airport. Buses are scheduled to bring passengers to domestic flights or to take them to the main villages, from Breiðdalsvík in the south to Borgarfjörður eystri in the north-east. A scheduled bus runs all year round between Akureyri in North Iceland and the information centre at Egilsstaðir, and Fljótshérað municipality offers free bus rides between its main centers of population. Everyone who takes the exciting opportunity to travel to or from Europe on the ferry Norræna, which uses the port of nearby Seyðisfjörður, has to go via Egilsstaðir, thus ferry days tend to be very lively in the towns markets and excellent restaurants.



## The Lagarfliót Wyrm

The gigantic serpentine monster, or wyrm, of Lagarfliót (Lögurinn) lake is Fljótsdalshérað's most famous creature. As it was already mentioned in chronicles of 1345, it has reached a ripe old age, but to start with the wyrm was merely a little slug that was placed on a golden ring - at that time suggested as a method of getting more gold. However, when the girl who owned the ring opened the box she had put the ring and slug into, she was terrified by the rapid growth of the worm, which was swelling with pride over its treasure, while the ring had apparently not grown at all. In a panic, the girl threw the box and everything in it out into the lake. As time passed, the slug grew into a wyrm that arose whenever people dared to approach the lake shore. When feeling vicious, it sometimes even belched poison over the farmlands. Some say that two Finnish magicians were eventually hired to tie the monster down at its front and hind ends. Others say it was the popular bishop of North Iceland, Guðmundur the Good, who tied the wyrm down in this way, so tightly that even when it gets the urge to appear, it can only arch its back up above the surface. In any case, it is clear that top-notch Boy and Girl Scout knots were applied, because legend declares that if the wyrm ever loosens itself, not only will it raise a ruckus, but it will bring the end of the world in sight.



Despite all this, Fljótsdalshérað residents indicate an incredible courtesy and willingness to forgive, by continuing to hold the wyrm in high esteem. For one thing, a cruiser named after it carries passengers around the lake in the summertime. Also, the Lagarfliót Wyrm is frequently commemorated and discussed, as on various signs located beside the lake.

**The East Iceland Heritage Museum is in Egilsstaðir**, between a park and the sports field. This museum is an excellent place to see articles related to East Iceland culture, industry and everyday life, ever since the beginning of settlement. A visit is thus recommended for anyone interested in the history of the East and the culture of previous generations.

Further information on local attractions can be obtained at:

**East Iceland Tourist Information Centre**  
**Kaupvangur 2-4, IS - 700 Egilsstaðir**  
**Phone + 354 471 2320; fax: + 354 471 1863**  
**info@east.is; www.east.is**



## Interesting sites in Fljótsdalshérað

**Eiðar farm** used to be one of its locality's most important farms, as well as being home to the church. The agricultural school founded here in 1883 makes Eiðar one of Iceland's oldest educational centers, though this school fulfilled various roles until being phased out in 1997. The Eiðar surroundings are attractive and inviting, with hiking trails towards Lagarfliót river and the small lakes and ponds in that direction. Many Icelanders have fond memories of their school days here. Nowadays, the dormitories formerly occupied by the pupils are used by the hotel in summer, and efforts are being made to develop a centre for arts and culture.

**Kjarvalshvammur is an artist cabin.** When Kjarval, the master painter had spent two summers staying in a tent, just before 1950, the farmer at Ketilsstaðir gave him the lot, and Kjarval built the small minimalistic white huts. This was the only real estate Kjarval ever owned. He often stayed here for long periods, producing some of his most famous pictures. The huts remain, the lower one still sheltering his boat. In fact, it was on this boat that he did something no one else has been known to try: rowing and sailing, he went down the river and then by sea to the village of Borgarfjörður eystri.



**The cliff Gálgaás**, just east of Egilsstaðir Church, may seem unimposing, but has been a dramatic location in past centuries. Once a farmer named Valtýr, living at Eyjólfstaðir, was hanged here. The accusations against him were theft and murder, which he steadfastly denied. Fourteen years later, the real murderer was found, also named Valtýr. He was also executed. Both skeletons were left lying below the cliff, which now has a bronze plaque commemorating these events. *Photo ↶*

**Vallanes is a farmer's church** with a long history. Vallanes has often been featured in the Icelandic media, since it has long been a leader in organic farming of barley, vegetables and oils, under the brand name of Mother Earth.

**The farm Klaustursel** is ideal for becoming acquainted with Icelandic animals, including the reindeer, arctic fox, whooper swan and geese species. Inside, one can see and buy various designer goods made of reindeer leather, wool, etc. The bridge for crossing the river to Klaustursel was originally manufactured in the USA for trains and is now Iceland's oldest bridge still in use.

**Aðalból farm**, settled by the hero of Hrafnkell's Saga, is situated in a valley and is isolated from the farms farther down. Those who have read this exciting saga can visit a number of features relating to it, such as Hrafnkell's burial mound. Furthermore, ancient relics found in the vicinity have added to the atmosphere of the saga era. All this puts one in touch with Nordic literary heritage and Icelandic history, and the tourist service staff at Aðalból endeavour to help visitors experience this.

**The farm of Sænautasel**, in a highland area where few tried to live during most of Icelandic history, was inhabited from 1843-1943. Many say this farm served as a model for Independent People, the most popular novel of Iceland's only Nobel Prize winner, Halldór Laxnes. Now rebuilt, the interior and exterior of the turf buildings are on show to visitors, with guided tours that help reveal the conditions of earlier Icelandic generations. Refreshments are also offered.

**Dyrfjöll and Stóruð** is one of East Iceland's star attractions. Stóruð lies below the small glacier west of Dyrfjöll mountains. Stóruð consists of gigantic boulders, charming meadows and picturesque green ponds. This wonderful scene can be reached in 2.5 hours on foot from Vatnsskarð pass and is a must for all nature lovers. *Photo ↷*



**Atlavik in Hallormsstaður** is beautifully situated on the shores of Lagarfliót (Lögurinn), and like other areas in the Hallormsstaður woods provides the shelter of trees, as well as a comparatively continental climate at the south end of the lake, far removed from the sea. Atlavik is a beloved camping site to the Icelanders. In addition to a rental for small boats, regular cruises are offered on the boat Lagarfliótsormurinn on the river-lake of Lagarfliót. *Photo ↷*

**A viewpoint indicator is located in Egilsstaðir**, just above the Sláturhús culture centre. To get acquainted with the landscape of Fljótsdalshérað valley, looking from Egilsstaðir, walk up past the steepest part of Fénaðarklöpp street to where a short trail leads south onto the ridge. *Photo ↶*

**Laugarvellir, the little, geothermal stream** lies by the ruins of Laugarvellir farm, not far west of Jökulsá river below Kárahnjúkar Dam. One can hardly imagine closer contact with Icelandic nature - a contact that is likely to be strengthened when one showers off the day's dust in the warm waterfall where the stream runs into the valley's main river.

**Kárahnjúkar dam and Háslón reservoir** were created as part of Iceland's most massive construction project to date, and have since become a frequently visited site by tourists observing the gigantic structures. The two tuff peaks named Kárahnjúkar stand on the east bank of the Jökulsá river and its canyon, Dimmugljúfur, which is one of Iceland's deepest and most impressive. The long-term use of the water here for turning the powerful turbines down at Fljótisdalur Station began in late 2006. There is an information centre at Végarður, sponsored by the power company, and find out more about the Kárahnjúkar Power Plant.

**Möðrudalur farm**, at an altitude of 469 m, lies higher than any other Icelandic farm. The remarkable, tiny church was built by the farmer himself, Jón Stefánsson, in 1949. The tourist services here operate year-round. Various trails have been marked through the area, which prides itself on wide panoramas and amazing silence. The majestic Mount Herðubreið, looming in the near distance, has long been referred to as the Queen of Icelandic Mountains, but its image was further cultivated in the last century by a self-made painter from Möðrudalur farm, Stefán Jónsson (Stórval). Möðrudalur is also at the access road to Kverkfjöll, the home of Ice and Fire at the edge of Vatnajökull, in the Vatnajökull National Park.

**Hellisheiði pass** is rising between the valley of Fljótisdalshérað and the valley around Vopnafjörður fjord. The 655-m-high Hellisheiði pass provides a spectacular view as you drive up its eastern slopes. Though the road is quite steep and has switchbacks, it is passable in any car during summer. The coast is also spectacular with brightly coloured cliffs worth the short hike.

**Húsey farm** is lying between the rivers of Jökulsá and Lagarfljót, near Héraðsflói bay and is characterized by rich wildlife, among which is the world's largest breeding colony of arctic skua. Accommodation and tourist services are offered here, including short horseback rides and the chance to watch seals in an unusual environment. Nature documentaries have also been filmed at this farm.

**At the farm of Galtastaðir**, you can see a small turf farmhouse from the 19th century. The building exemplifies the sort of housing common Icelanders lived in during previous centuries, heated to some extent by keeping cows under the communal living room or baðstofa, which was also used for sleeping and handicraft. Both the interior and exterior of this small but remarkable showcase of former living conditions are open to the public.

**Skriðuklaustur farm** has long been considered one of the most important farms in Fljótisdalur valley, and is now home to a centre of culture and history. Having become a famous author in Europe, Gunnar Gunnarsson had a beautiful mansion built at Skriðuklaustur. The building is now home to The Gunnar Gunnarsson institute. Also, there are objects on display connected to Gunnar's life and work. Skriðuklaustur houses various cultural events and art exhibitions, and Café Klausturkaffi is located in the dining room. Since 1992, archaeological excavation of The Skriðuklaustur monastery which used to be located just down the slope has yielded exciting results and attracted wide attention. Visitors are allowed to view the ruins. *Photo 8*

**Fardagafoss waterfall** is situated near where the road starts climbing the mountainside of Fjarðarheiði, 5 km from Egilsstaðir. The walk from the parking area to the fall takes about half an hour. On your way you can enjoy the beautiful gorge and views over the whole valley. Legend says it pays to enter the shallow cave behind the fall and make a wish.

**Geirstaðakirkja, the pretty little turf church** on the farm of Litli Bakki is a recent hypothetical reconstruction of a church that had been built in the neighborhood by a farmer a thousand years ago.



**Hengifoss waterfall** is Iceland's second highest waterfall and immensely picturesque. The layers between many of Iceland's Tertiary lava strata are red, and this shows up well in the cliffs around Hengifoss. Moreover, on the way up towards Hengifoss, Litlanesfoss presents impressive stands of basalt columns, on both sides of the gorge. One usually stops climbing well below Hengifoss, at a point where you can see it easily without crossing the river, but if the flow is little, as is often the case in autumn, one can go nearer and even enter a shallow cave behind the waterfall. *Photo 2*

**Hallormsstaður woods**, Iceland's largest woods surround Hallormsstaður. Experiments with imported tree species began here in 1903; in 1938, the first larch grove was planted and demonstrated that timber could be grown in Iceland. The Hallormsstaður arboretum is unique in Iceland, comprising a collection of around 70 tree species. There are in fact well-marked trails throughout much of the surrounding woodland, shown on a clear map published by the Forest Service. The whole woods are a pleasant area, and in late summer one can pick large quantities of mouthwatering berries and mushrooms. *Photo 7*

**Selskógur, the village woods** east of Egilsstaðir contain mainly birch but also numerous rowans. Woodchip trails of varying length invite one to stroll through the peaceful surroundings. A football field and playground are other recreation options.

**Snæfell mountain**, towering to 1,833 m, is the highest mountain in Iceland outside Vatnajökull. Even so, and despite the snow and glaciers always present on the mountain (Snæfell = snow mountain), it is fairly easy to hike onto the summit from Snæfellsskáli hut. While Snæfell is itself beautiful, the view it offers is fabulous, and almost half of Iceland and the oasis of Eyjabakkar. Eyjabakkar is a choice habitat for geese, and reindeer can frequently be spotted west of Snæfell, towards Háslón reservoir, as well as elsewhere in the East Iceland highlands. From Snæfell there is an easy access to Vatnajökull.

**The woods of Eyjólfsstaðaskógur**, which are managed by the East Iceland Forestry Society, have a variety of easy-to-follow trails, leading to diverse scenery. Driving from Ring Road 1, you should continue past the cluster of vacation cottages until arriving northeast of them.

**The historical trading point of Krosshöfði by Stapavík inlet**, lies in a magnificent setting. The trail to get there starts above the farmstead of Unaós, leads to the river Selfljót, follows it to its mouth at Krosshöfði, and continues to the cliffs of Stapavík. In the early 20th century, this trading point was important for the broad valley of Fljótisdalshérað, and goods were landed in the inlet until the 1950s, when a road was built over the mountain range to Borgarfjörður and the harbor there.

**The Fjarðarheiði pass viewpoint**, at an altitude of 620 m between Seyðisfjörður and the valley around Egilsstaðir, will help orient you within the huge panorama. It is possible to drive not only to the indicator but, if the weather is clear, also up onto Gagnheiði mountain to the south, for an even higher vantage point.

**Kverkfjöll is a volcanic massive at the edge of Vatnajökull**, a true home of ice and fire where hot springs have melted a set of caves in the ice. In the winter you can enjoy the unique experience of a bath in the largest ice cave, while the northern lights dance outside. During the summer the hike to the tremendous volcanic caldera is a real adventure.

## Annual cultural festivals

**April - 700.IS Reindeerland** • [www.700.is](http://www.700.is)

Film and video festival with hundreds of participants from all over the world

**June - The Great Woods Day** • [www.heradsskogar.is](http://www.heradsskogar.is)

Celebration in the Hallormsstaður woods, with a varied programme for the whole family

**June - The Egilsstaðir Jazz Festival, East Iceland** • [www.jea.is](http://www.jea.is)

A jazz event that has now been held for two decades and prides itself on increasingly ambitious music

**August - Ormsteiti Area Festival** • [www.ormsteiti.is](http://www.ormsteiti.is)

Ten-day-long harvest festival, extending to both town and country areas of Fljótshálsa

A great variety of additional concerts, plays and art presentations take place at all times of the year.

[www.fljotsdalsherad.is](http://www.fljotsdalsherad.is)



## Distances from Egilsstaðir to other points

Egilsstaðir - Reykjavík: 50 min. by air; 639 km driving via Öxi pass.

Egilsstaðir - Seyðisfjörður: 27 km.

Egilsstaðir - Reyðarfjörður: 34 km.

Egilsstaðir - Neskaupstaður: 71 km.

Egilsstaðir - Höfn: 188 km via Öxi pass.

Egilsstaðir - Vopnafjörður: 91 km via Hellsheiði pass.

Egilsstaðir - Akureyri: 265 km.

Egilsstaðir - Denmark: 2 1/2 hrs by air; 2 days on ferry from Seyðisfj.



## Wildlife, hunting and angling

Fljótshálsa is most famous for reindeer. The region is home to over half of the Icelandic reindeer population, to be seen in the summer near the Vatnajökull glacier, but in winter and spring in the lowlands. The Coastal region along the estuaries of Jökulsá and Úthérað are a must for bird watching. The area is home to the world largest breeding colony of arctic skua. The great skua is never faraway, red-throated divers are very common as are, swans, geese and waders, such as the whimpered and golden plover. On the sand reeves in Jökulsá more than 600 common seals breed in the springtime. With some luck this is the area where you may see reindeer any time of the year.

The region is famous amongst hunters, especially for the reindeer but other game includes ducks, ptarmigans, geese and even seals. Anglers have a wide range of possibilities, in rivers and lakes which teem with Arctic char and/or brown trout throughout the area. Fishing permits are generally moderately priced, even though the chances of catching fish are high. The information centre at Egilsstaðir provides information on permits.

## Walking and hiking

Fljótshálsa is one of Iceland's most inviting areas for walking and other forms of outdoor recreation, with an almost unmatched combination of high waterfalls, still lakes, ever-expanding woods and varied wildlife. For convenience, the towns offer interconnected walking and cycling paths. The local touring club sponsors a wide range of shorter and longer walks. At the information centre you can obtain easy-to-use trail maps with GPS coordinates and helpful, informative descriptions in English. These maps cover the whole region, and can be supplemented by specific maps of the trails around Hallormsstaður and Eiðar and of traditional trails across highland areas.

