



# ICE ICE BABY

A quest to conquer the Icelandic Midsummer

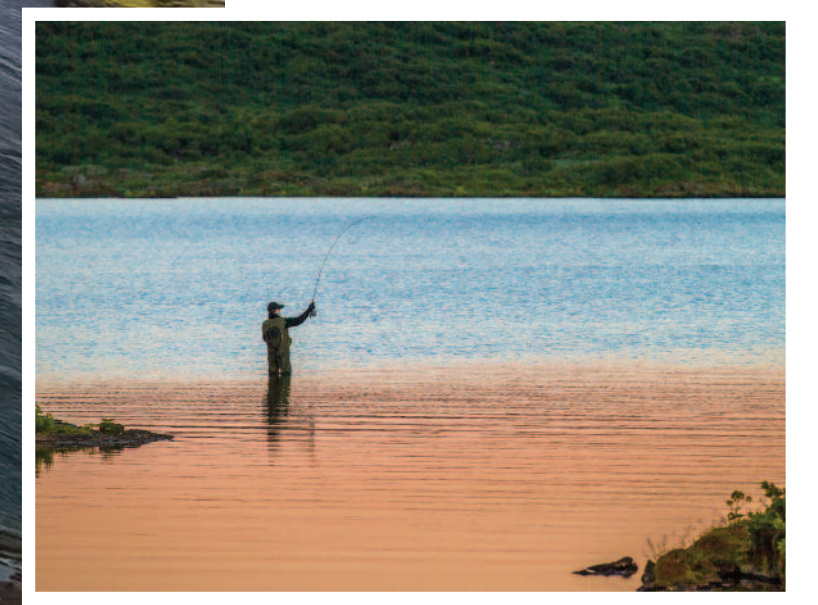
by Laura Brown

As the largest island of Europe, Iceland is also known as one of the youngest landmasses on the planet, and consequently home to some of the world's most active volcanoes. Add to that a landscape characterised by geysers, waterfalls, black sand beaches, steaming lava fields and glaciers with Europe's largest Vatnajökull on the lower-east side of the island, and it seems to be an island concentrated with natural powers at your feet—quite literally.

### Discovered as Snowland

From the sky the rugged terrain of the land below, besides being dramatic, is a constant reminder of the quest against the weather gods. Here, rocky ridges follow the paths where snow turns into crystalclear water, emeraldgreen landscapes disguise the overgrown layers and streams run as veins through flowing meadows weaving through peaks and down the waterfalls, some even reaching the sea below. It is not for no reason that when Iceland was first discovered it was called 'Snowland', and only stumbled upon when the Viking ship with the first settlers had been blown off course. In summer, when fields are covered with colourful wild flowers, peaks of wooden cabins emerge and the sun reveals the island's diverse landscapes that is when the magic truly happens. Many an island saga tells the story there is much more on the island than what initially meets the eye.

This island, risen from the cold Atlantic waters, yet warmed by the Gulf Stream, is a destination with a soft climate in summer and mostly mild winters, although the weather can be quite unpredictable. Many of those visiting feel overwhelmed by Iceland's striking nature. Almost a mistrust of her astonishing natural beauty, thus hard to comprehend. The flowing, mountain ridges, slivers of glacial blue waters, mosscovered boulders and layered lava rocks, the scenery of 🏞️





Iceland comes straight out of a fantasy movie. If a director could stage a background for a fairytale, Iceland would make it to the Oscars for Best Production Design—and all with natural props stealing the show. Indeed the gold plated 'statuette' would be theirs for the taking, with the spouting geysers and steamy waters making for the added special effects.

### The outdoor thrills

Of course, with a landscape like Iceland, hikes, walks and adventures are nearby and for the thrillseekers and nature lovers the destination is a midsummer must. For those enjoying water sports, Iceland offers the finest of wildlife in a concentrated area—head out for glacial river-rafting, a swim and snorkel between two tectonic plates, or experience a dive in the clear glacier waters surrounded by lava rock formations. It is not uncommon to visit an 18-hole golf course at midnight with sweeping mountains, lava surfaces and majestic ocean views characterising its vistas. Alternatively, climb a mountain, hike a glacier or even surf the waves at night, adding to a whole new level of summer sensation.

### Midnight Summer

The warmest months to visit are June through to September, when the Gulf Stream warms the island to a mild, coastal climate. This time, when the sunlit nights are the longest, Iceland features plenty a festival and outdoor activity to make the most of this whimsical midsummer dream. Invigorated by the energy of the midnight sun, the Nordic countries celebrate the summer's longest day of the calendar and Iceland does not stay behind. With Icelandic towns in festive spirit, and urban landscapes forming the backdrops for traditional music and arts extravaganza. According to folklore, seals become human, cows speak in human tongue and elves come out of their hiding places on this magical night—for most islanders though it simply means enjoying a beautiful day of Vitamin D with friends and family.

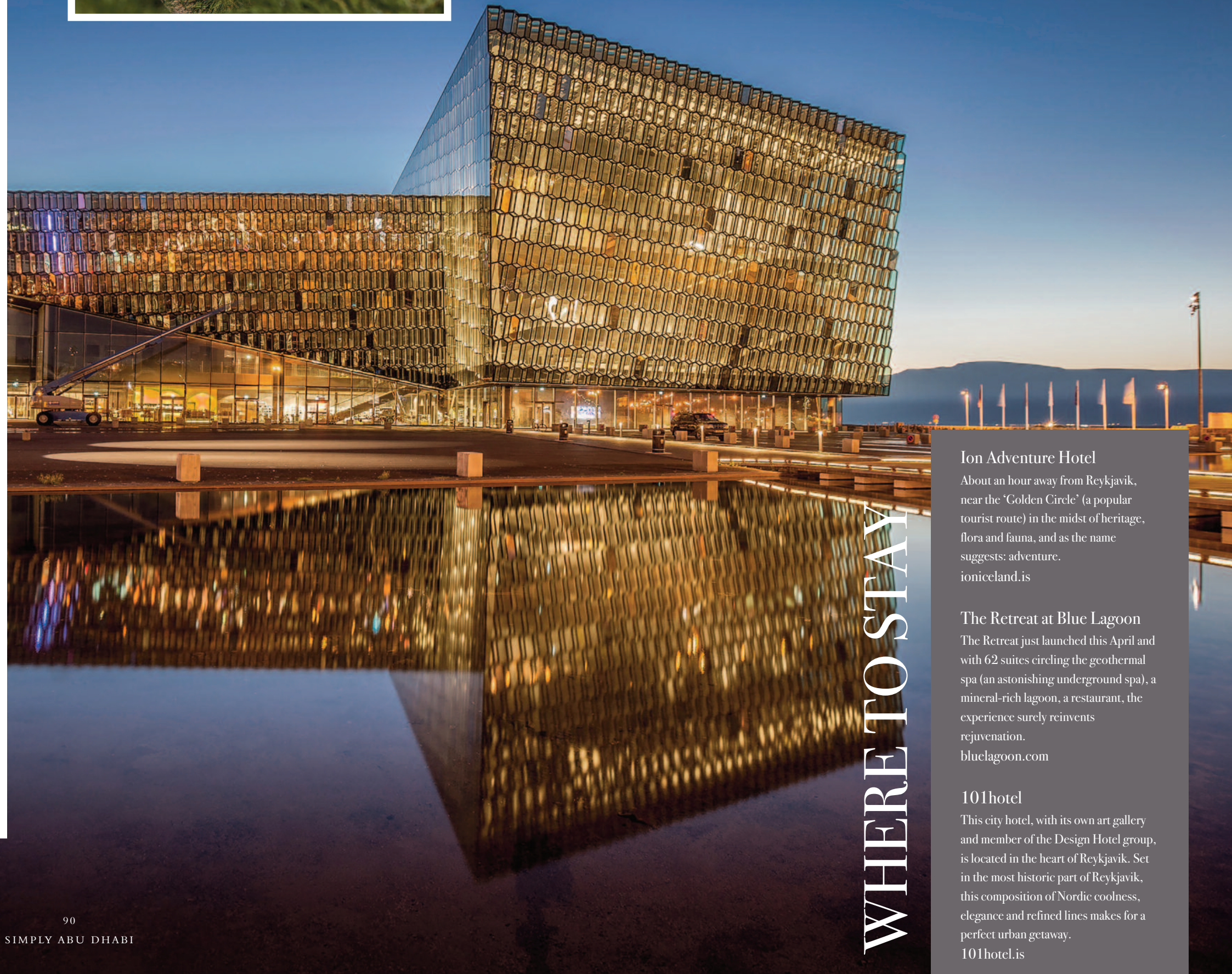
### Designed to withstand

It almost feels as if the rough scenery of the island landscape tones down the stylish buildings in the cities. The colourful houses along the harbour fronts and along the streets mix with the slick, white cubicle shapes within city centres; a peculiar blend of rustic commercial fronts and quaint homes filling urban spaces—marking a pleasant surprise around each corner.

The only building restriction seems that of withstanding the ever-changing weather conditions, as the most striking designs are plotted along the urban landscapes—some build in solitude, preferring to weather the elements alone. These places make for perfect holiday spots away from the inner-city vibes, showcasing the beauty of the remote landscapes and its natural sources.

### Capital Reykjavik

With such an array of natural marvel, the scenic towns are almost forgotten. Reykjavik being the most Northern capital of Europe offers sweeping views of the sea and flowing landscapes absorb creativity; the capital builds on its surroundings, tradition and forward-thinking (and uber-friendly) residents. With futuristic buildings and ever-changing weather conditions, some of its must-see places are just as much a treat on the outside as they are inside the structures. The striking and award-winning conference centre and concert hall Harpa, designed by architectural firm Henning Larsen Architects—



WHERE TO STAY

#### Ion Adventure Hotel

About an hour away from Reykjavik, near the 'Golden Circle' (a popular tourist route) in the midst of heritage, flora and fauna, and as the name suggests: adventure. [ioniceeland.is](http://ioniceeland.is)

#### The Retreat at Blue Lagoon

The Retreat just launched this April and with 62 suites circling the geothermal spa (an astonishing underground spa), a mineral-rich lagoon, a restaurant, the experience surely reinvents rejuvenation. [bluelagoon.com](http://bluelagoon.com)

#### 101 hotel

This city hotel, with its own art gallery and member of the Design Hotel group, is located in the heart of Reykjavik. Set in the most historic part of Reykjavik, this composition of Nordic coolness, elegance and refined lines makes for a perfect urban getaway. [101hotel.is](http://101hotel.is)

internationally known for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building in Riyadh and the Copenhagen Opera House—and the Icelandic architecture firm Batteríð Architects, are worth a visit. A photo moment should be taken at Solfar Sun Voyager, the massive steel structure resembling a Viking ship, or head to Árbær Open air museum to indulge in local history. For the non-thrillseekers with an urge to discover, Perlan is just as informative as it is fun and with the only inner-city ice cave and a 360degree observation deck, it will be an easy tick off of the holiday to-do list.

### Fairy tale food fest

It is here, in Reykjavik, perhaps due to isolation of surrounding countries and influences, where the rarest of edible traditions sprout up. Reykjavik is home to about five Michelin star restaurants; the majority offering a modern cuisine, some with a creative or traditional twist. Being isolated also means scavenging was the main source to find food and with it the tradition of foraging anything edible and conserving it until needed. Luckily these scavenging habits have passed, and the Icelandic cuisine is capable to surprise and astonish as if undergoing a new-age food renaissance. Local delicacies have been upgraded to such high standards: succulent lamb chops, handmade lava salt, delicate mouthwatering chocolates, and it is surprising only Skyr—the organic, thick, soft yoghurt—has made it to the far-away mainland as an instant favourite. Just as much so, midsummer is the perfect time to taste another local delicacy, the farm-to-cone ice cream—just follow the queues! Perhaps, while history and folklore tell a different tale, the name of this fairy tale island was always meant to be referred to its homegrown sweet-treat: ice cream.

