

ANOTHER WORLD

DINING AND DRIVING ALONG ICELAND'S RING ROAD

WRITTEN BY KELLY JORDAN



*A trio of factors sparked my insatiable desire to see Iceland—the movie *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, the musings of *Flavors*' copy editor Ellen Glass, who had visited before me, and jaw-dropping low fares from WOW Air*. Yet, despite months of planning and a building anticipation about the magical destination, I was still astounded by what I found when I arrived.*

**In June, we paid less than \$1,100 for two WOW Air round-trip tickets to Reykjavík from Boston, including charges for upgraded seating, checked bags, trip cancellation protection, taxes and fees.*

MY HUSBAND, Jason, and I began our adventure with a world-class dinner at Dill, a new-Nordic restaurant in downtown Reykjavík, Iceland. We were the first guests to arrive, and, though it was 8 p.m., the sun still blazed overhead (and would for another four hours, since summer brings Iceland a “midnight sun”), and filled the intimate dining room with a warm, friendly light.

Dill, the brainchild of acclaimed Chef Gunnar Karl Gíslason (and now overseen by Chef Ragnar Eiriksson) is often regarded in the same breath as Copenhagen's Noma, the exemplar of new-Nordic cuisine. We booked our reservation in the cozy eatery two months in advance and opted for

the seven-course tasting menu—it started with six tiny bites followed by seven deconstructed courses. Three hours later, I was convinced it was among the best dining experiences of my life. We ate whipped lamb fat on wood-fired rolls (made in-house, of course); a beetroot, liver and roasted yeast amuse-bouche that resembled a tiny heart; arctic char with butter and birch; salted cod with parsnip, apple and fried cod cream; and various other gorgeous fishes and meats garnished with flavorful foams and personally delivered by the restaurant's host of sous-chefs and even the head chef himself.

This meal was leagues above any food we consumed in Iceland during the rest of our stay (the small



PHOTO: ANTHONY BACGALUPO

(opposite) The best part about staying at the Kíðafell farmhouse, outside of Reykjavík, was the horseback ride the next morning. (above) Dill's cozy environment feels like a fairy-tale stone cottage.



PHOTO: KELLY JORDAN

This golden seal eyed the author's Zodiac tour suspiciously from the safety of his iceberg at Jökulsárlón.



PHOTO: JASON JORDAN

Dusk on Vík's black-sand beaches



PHOTO: JASON JORDAN

Every time we spotted a sheep, she was accompanied by two lambs. This pair visited the writer we ate breakfast at a picnic bench.

southern farm towns through which we drove typically offered pedestrian burgers and pizza). Though, to be fair, Reykjavík is home to several top-tier restaurants. If we had more time, I would have loved to visit Fish Market (Fiskmarkaðurinn) and a few of the others in my guidebook. But alas, adventure called.

On this first trip to Iceland, we primarily wanted to focus on nature and the country's otherworldly beauty. After stocking up on cheese, fruit, a bottle of Italian red wine and Icelandic barley bread at a local grocery store, we drove south on Route 1 or the "Ring Road," following the course I'd carefully plotted. In a tiny rented Hyundai, we traversed from Reykjavík to Jökulsárlón glacier and back again,

staying at various Airbnb homes and farm stays (farmhouses rented to visitors like us) along the way.

Despite the dizzyingly long days, the sunlight fended off any urge to sleep. Besides, there was too much to do. We ran ponies along cliffs at a farm outside of Reykjavík (our host completely oblivious to our fears). We hiked up a massive hill overlooking the black-sand beaches in Vík and photographed puffins protecting their nests on cliffsides. We stayed in a tiny Hobbit-style seaside cabin (my favorite stay of the trip) and drove the touristy—yet majestic—Golden Circle, a circular route close to Reykjavík that includes several natural attractions. We stopped every time we saw an eye-catching water-



PHOTO: JASON JORDAN

Overlooking the calm beaches below





One of many waterfalls along the Ring Road

PHOTO: JASON JORDAN

fall or site to explore and took non-stop photos from beaches, mountains and glaciers.

Once we finally reached Jökulsárlón glacier, we took a Zodiac boat (an inflatable, engine-propelled boat) through the glacial lagoon where we tasted 1,000-year-old ice and saw a golden seal. Jökulsárlón's majesty was so astounding, we were both shocked and saddened to learn that this glacier is expected to melt away completely in the next 50 years. It's a sobering thought, made all the more powerful when you're surrounded by the delicate balance of volcanic mountains, hundreds of sheep, seals, clown-faced puffins and chilly seas.

After a week of hiking and driving, we made our way back to Reykjavík, where we took a final walk through the pristine streets and New England-style storefronts, admiring the city's display of art and fine craftsmanship. The weather took a gloomy turn, and we were grateful to be clad in brand-new

Icelandic sheep's wool sweaters. To say goodbye, we warmed up on the famed lobster soup at Sea Baron, a shack a few steps from our posh digs, Icelandair Hotel Reykjavík Marina (though pricey, worth it for the view of the harbor, modern furnishings and location).

The next day, we would be flying out to Iceland's opposite, France, for a food-fueled adventure and warmer weather. We were saddened to leave this magical land of fire, beauty and ice, but our hearts were cheered with the knowledge that we'd be back again someday.

WOW Air
wowair.com

Dill
dillrestaurant.is

Icelandair Hotel Reykjavik Marina
Icelandairhotels.com/en/hotels/marina

Sea Baron
saegreifinn.is




Jason and I tried to capture the remoteness (and the romance) of southern Iceland. Here, we're somewhere near Vik.

PHOTO: JASON JORDAN

Cured Cod with Apple and Parsnip Purées

Recipe by Ragnar Eiriksson, Head Chef, Dill Restaurant

 Flavors' pairing suggestion:
Drink with white Côtes du Rhône or your favorite sparkler.

Yield: 4 appetizer servings

- 1+ pound skinned and cleaned cod loin
- 1/2 cup coarse sea salt
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- Apple Purée** (recipe included)
- Parsnip Purée** (recipe included)
- Cod Cream** (recipe included)

Rub fish in salt and sugar and leave to marinate in refrigerator for 2 to 3 hours.

Heat oven to 125 degrees. (This may seem low, but the trick here is to cook the fish long and low.) Wash fish and pat dry. Cut into 4 portions and bake about 20 to 30 minutes. Meanwhile prepare purées and **Cod Cream**.

To serve, place half a spoonful of each purée side by side on each plate and place 1 piece of fish next to them. Cover with warm **Cod Cream** and serve.

Apple Purée

- 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled and diced
- apple cider vinegar to taste
- salt to taste

For the Apple Purée

Caramelize sugar in a heavy pan and add diced apples. Cover pan and cook over low heat for about 20 minutes. Blend in a food processor until smooth and season to taste with vinegar and salt.

Parsnip Purée

- 4 parsnips, peeled and sliced
- 1 cup cream
- 1 cup milk
- salt to taste

For the Parsnip Purée

Place parsnips in cream and milk and cook over medium heat until soft. Blend in a food processor until smooth and season with salt to taste.

Cod Cream

- 1 cod carcass
- 1 pint cream

For the Cod Cream

Sauté cod bones in a heavy pan until golden brown. Cover with 2 quarts water and simmer for 2 to 3 hours. Strain and discard bones. Add cream and reduce by half.



All dishes at Dill are given painstaking attention to detail. The result? Edible art as exemplified by the parsnip portion of this dish.

