

# Case Study: Iceland - Encouraging Partnerships with a Local Food Focus

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## ENTICE Exploring the Natural Tastes of Iceland



## **CASE STUDY: ICELAND - ENCOURAGING PARTNERSHIPS WITH A LOCAL FOOD FOCUS**

### **Introduction**

This case study is inspired by the ENTICE study visit to Iceland in June 2013, organised to allow food producers with an interest in tourism and tourism professionals involved in food and tourism to experience and learn about food tourism developments in Iceland, share their own experiences and those of Icelandic colleagues. The working group hope that this case study will be useful for themselves and fellow food and tourism professionals in the UK and Iceland as a teaching aid for their staff as well as for college and university lecturers teaching food and tourism modules.

Iceland, a Nordic island country, is the most sparsely populated country in Europe with only 320,000 people in a total area of 40,000 square miles. Its location at the meeting point of the Eurasian and North American tectonic plates gives the country its striking countryside and coastline, due to past and current geothermal activity. Due to the northern latitude, Iceland enjoys 24 hour daylight during the summer months and correspondingly few hours of daylight during the winter. However, it has a relatively temperate climate due to the Gulf Stream.

The country has seen a 100% increase in visitors from 302,900 in 2000 to 660,000 in 2012 and has a target to grow out of season visitors by 12% per year. The growth can be attributed to increasing numbers of cruise ships including Reykjavik in their itineraries, and to growth in low cost airlines flying into Reykjavik. Visitors come to Iceland for the geothermal attractions, for adventure pursuits, for conferences and touring.



### **Food Trails, Festivals and Partnerships**

There has been considerable interest in the relationship between food and tourism in recent years. This is partly due to the emergence and increasing awareness of organisations such as 'Slow Food', European Union geographical indication schemes (e.g. Protected Designation of Origin -PDO, Protected Geographical Indication -PGI and Traditional Specialities Guaranteed -TSG), national food initiatives, and to the linkage between sustainability and the use of and promotion of local produce and food culture and heritage to emphasize destination distinctiveness. In practice, this has led to a variety of food trails and food festivals throughout Europe which celebrate a particular food product or a locality's range of food products, as well as the development of food networks or partnerships which bring together producers and tourism providers/promoters. At national and regional level examples include:

- Experiencing Scotland
- Sussex Food and Drink Network ([www.sussexfoodnetwork.co.uk](http://www.sussexfoodnetwork.co.uk))
- Fife Food Network ([www.foodfromfife.co.uk](http://www.foodfromfife.co.uk))

- Ireland's Place on a Plate initiative (<http://www.failteireland.ie/In-Your-Sector/Food-Tourism-in-Ireland/Place-on-a-Plate.aspx>)
- Cornwall Food & Drink Ltd ([www.cornwallfoodanddrink.co.uk](http://www.cornwallfoodanddrink.co.uk))

Numerous advantages can flow from bringing food producers and tourism providers together to develop local food based tourism promotions. Whether the end result is a formal partnership or network with a range of activities, or a single food festival or trail, working together enables more efficient and effective use of budgets for marketing and promotion, allows different but related businesses to support each other by sharing ideas and developing complementary offers, and can extend market reach by encouraging visitors to seek out products from the destination when they return home, whether by asking in their home outlets or by purchasing mail order from the supplier. Perhaps most importantly, by working together, local food and tourism businesses can retain visitor spend in their area and minimise leakage by using locally sourced products.

### **The Iceland Food and Drink Experience**

Iceland is a distinctive destination. It is a beautiful country, as yet unspoiled by tourism, with a wealth of natural products: its wilderness, landscape, natural food produce, geo thermal activity and, most importantly, its people and their long tradition of hospitality. Quiet roads, 24 hour daylight during the summer months and the wide open spaces enhance the visitor experience and add to Iceland's uniqueness. Despite a range of places to visit all across Iceland, most visitors follow the 300 km Golden Circle route from Reykjavik, which takes in Thingvellir, the Gullfoss waterfall and Haukadalur (Geysir and Strokkur geysirs) and the site of the former capital at Skalholt.

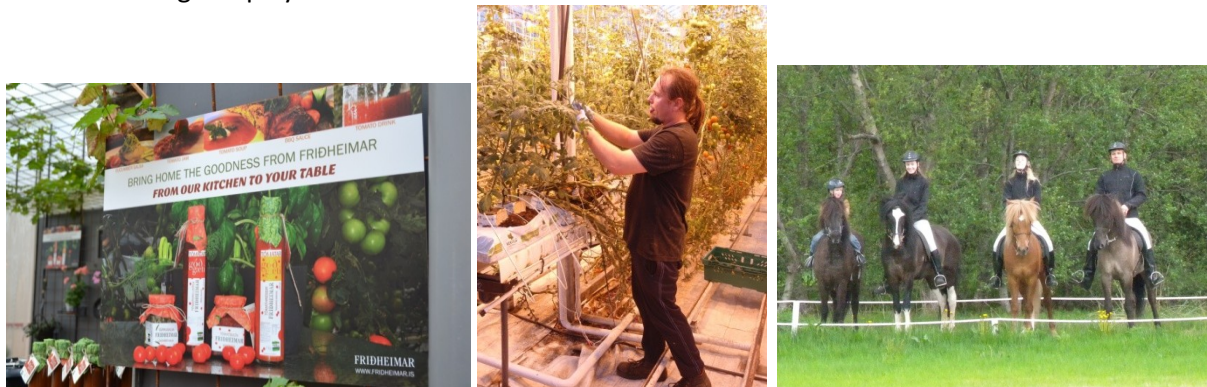


Food producers and visitor attractions take Iceland's traditions, the natural geothermal phenomena and local ingredients to create food and drink experiences which are rooted in the local landscape and history.

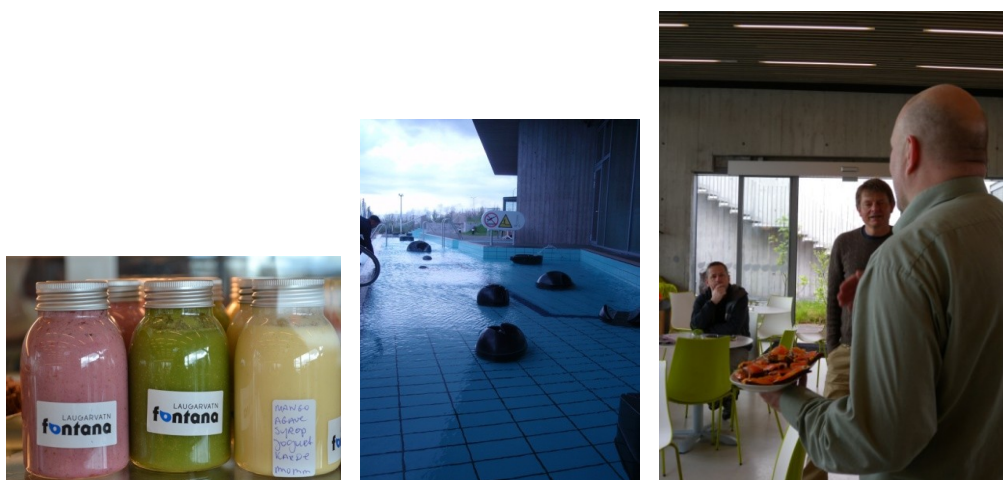
Chef Bjarki cooks boiled eggs in the hot springs at Geysir and serves them on rye bread also baked in the mud from the hot springs to visitors standing within sight and sound of Strokkur, the live geysir. Cafe Kjöt of Kúst (Earth and Art Cafe) also makes a feature of cooking and baking outside using a geothermal cooker and promotes Icelandic artists on the walls of the cafe.



The greenhouse project at Fridheimar uses both borehole water and geothermal energy to grow tomatoes and cucumbers to sell as produce and to use in making tomato jam, sauces and salsas, as well as tomato soup served in their cafe. The greenhouse owners also keep a small herd of Icelandic horses and stage displays for visitors.



Laugarvatn is a village on the Golden Circle between Reykjavik and Geysir. In the summer months it has two hotels, a 70 bedroom hostel and self catering accommodation in the Golden Circle Apartments, and is home to the Landsinn Restaurant specialising in wild Icelandic food. There have been steam baths on the side of the lake since 1929, and a new bath house and surroundings designed by [Landform](#), [Á stofunni architects](#), [Studio Strik](#) and Verkbjónusta Kristjáns were opened in 2011.



As previously there had been no cafe in the area, the new attraction, Laugarvatn Fontana, includes a cafe which serves home baked cakes, sandwiches and paninis, and where the staff make and serve

their boosts, cold drinks based on Skyr, the Icelandic yoghurt style dairy product. The staff are monitoring sales and adjusting their offer in response to customer feedback. The village population are keen to welcome more visitors and have plans to add to the attractions in the immediate area by creating a trail to the top of the local mountain to give panoramic views of three volcanoes, and to build a barbecue house, all to give visitors more reason to stay longer in Laugarvatn.

There is an enthusiasm for developing new products and new ways to diversify. The dairy farm at Efsti-Dalur, also on the Golden Circle route, is a family business which has been operating for 32 years. In addition to 220,000 litres of milk for sale, they produce 15,000 litres of milk for their own use, which they turn into skyr, butter and ice cream for sale on site. 10 years ago, in response to visitors asking to sleep in their barn, the family opened a small guest house. The tourism side of the business has grown from there to include a coffee shop and restaurant serving home cooked local and home grown produce. This is still very much a family business: Sölvi Arnarsson's mother and sister produce the dairy products, his brother does the farming, while Sölvi does the cooking and is training as a chef. They follow 'Slow Food' principles, use their own beef, and more or more farmers are selling them produce for the restaurant. In June 2013, they opened an ice-cream parlour which is just the other side of the wall from the cow byre. Visitors can look directly through a window at the cows which produce the milk for the ice cream and also from a window in the first floor restaurant. The family are also enthusiastic about and keen to share the musical traditions of Iceland; whenever possible, guests are treated to traditional Icelandic tunes played on the flute and/or accordion as an audio aperitif!



### **Comparable cases in the UK and elsewhere**

The group was hugely impressed by the energy and enthusiasm demonstrated by the various producers we met. There appear to be some challenges for the future, however.

There is clearly a lot of work going into developing new food and drink based products and initiatives, at a variety of levels: individual businesses, businesses working with the Matis institute, communities as at Laugarvatn. There are national and regional tourism marketing strategies, focussing on attracting more visitors, but there is not yet a tourism or visitor management strategy at national or regional level. Developing tourism food trails, showing visitors links to local food related venues and attractions beyond the Golden Circle, might be one way to raise awareness of the wider offer in Iceland and to attract them from the honey pot locations, thereby relieving physical stress on fragile areas such as Gullfoss, which is already experiencing capacity problems.

### ***Food tourism for collaboration and business support***

Experiencing Scotland is a Scottish Enterprise project which supports businesses to promote Scottish food and drink by providing training, business advice and information. The project has created opportunities for businesses to work together, resulting in 50 new collaborations between tourism venues and food producers. The two diagrams below illustrate the benefits to venues and producers which have been found to flow from the Experiencing Scotland project, and this model might be useful in matching individual business ambitions with the benefits of collaboration.

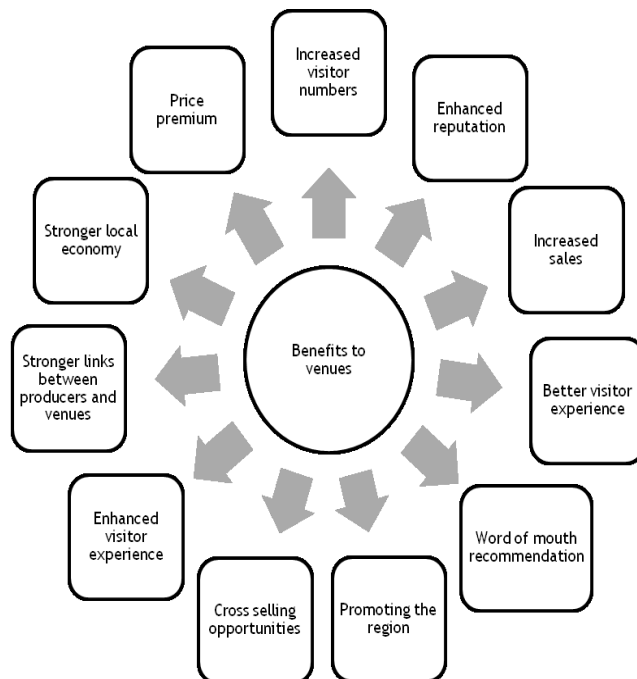


Fig 1: Benefits to Venues

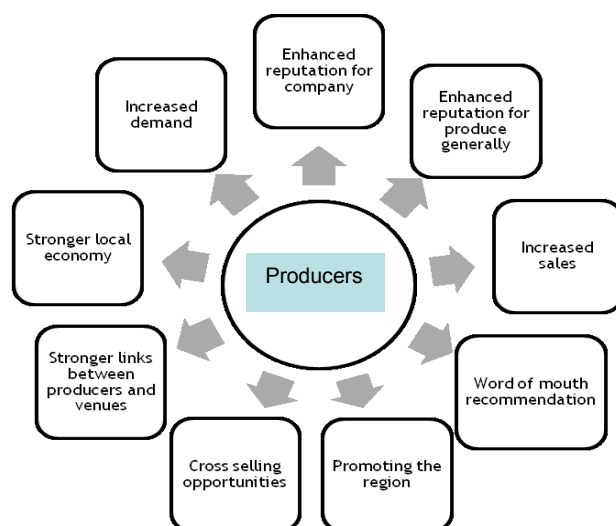


Fig 2: Benefits to Producers

At a regional level in the UK, the Fife Food Network, Cornwall Food & Drink Ltd and the Sussex Food and Drink Network have been successful in bringing together food and drink producers to celebrate

and promote local food culture to visitors and residents, raising standards and sharing best practice among producers and venues, and driving local food and drink initiatives such as the Sussex Breakfast, which showcases Sussex produce to accommodation providers as well as to visitors. It may be that colleagues in Iceland could benefit from setting up similar networks and use that collaboration to create food trails to encourage visitors to discover more of Iceland.



The Fife Food Network undertakes a range of business to business, business to consumer, and education and training activities. It helps local food and tourism businesses to work together, and promotes the region as a good food and drink destination. The Network has also been developing a “Fife Breakfast” brand for Bed and Breakfast and guesthouse owners, working in conjunction with the hospitality team at a local college, and with a cookery school based in Fife.

#### ***Working together to raise and promote quality***

Whilst every place we visited displayed the TripAdvisor logo, it seems that there are no quality assurance schemes for accommodation, restaurants or attractions. This is not an issue at the moment but could become one as more and more visitors arrive from countries where such schemes are in operation. Useful examples from the UK might include food and drink branding schemes such as Made in Cornwall, one of the first approved origin schemes in England (<http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=1106>) , and the Bord Bia scheme in Ireland.



The Fife Food Network produces a regional food guide ‘The Fife Larder-The Guide to Fife’s Food and Drink’ and a ‘Fife Larder Map’. These give visitors information about where to buy local produce and eat out in the region. The information is also available through the ‘Food from Fife’ website [www.foodfromfife.co.uk](http://www.foodfromfife.co.uk) These publications help visitors compile their own ‘food trails’ and provide the stories behind the artisan producers and the area’s food history. The publications are produced in association with ‘The List’ – a well established independent company based in Scotland. It produces the best selling arts and entertainment magazine in Scotland and hosts one of the largest events and entertainment websites in the UK. They also produce ‘The Larder’ – a guide to food and drink in Scotland. <http://food.list.co.uk/>. By working with the List, the Fife Food Network is able to promote quality local producers and eating establishments, and also gain profile through a national

publication that is a well-respected, and independent, source of information for food and restaurant reviews.

### ***Other examples***

The VisitScotland website provides visitors with some ideas for food themed trails:

<http://www.visitscotland.com/about/food-drink/trails>

The Malt Whisky Trail focuses on one iconic Scottish product in North East Scotland, promoting the whisky, distilleries, history and related events: <http://www.maltwhiskytrail.com/>

Northern Germany has also developed a number of examples of trails (and food related trails), including the Lower Saxony Milk Route:

<http://www.germany.travel/en/leisure-and-recreation/scenic-routes/lower-saxony-milk-route.html>

### ***Food Festivals***

Food Festivals can be a great way for locals and visitors to celebrate a particular food type, time of year, or their local town or city. Festivals can have significant economic impacts, particularly when carefully timed to fill a gap in the annual events calendar for a town or area.

During our visit to Iceland we heard about the annual 'Food and Fun' Festival in Reykjavik <http://www.foodandfun.is>. It celebrates culinary skills and the country's natural ingredients. The event involves internationally renowned chefs working with a range of the city's restaurants. There is also a chef competition at the end of the event. The Festival receives support from a range of businesses and organisations. Held at the end of February and the start of March, it helps promote tourism at a relatively quiet time of year.

Examples of food festivals in the UK include:

The Cornwall Food and Drink Festival, held in September

<http://www.cornwallfoodanddrink.co.uk/cornwall-food-and-drink-festival/>

Festivals such as The Great Dorset Chilli Festival and the Newlyn Fish Festival focus on specific foods in the same way as the various Lobster Festivals in Iceland

<http://www.greatdorsetchillifestival.co.uk/>

<http://www.newlynfishfestival.org.uk/>

Other UK festivals combine local culinary offerings with music, art and/or specific times of year:

Porthleven Food & Music Festival

<http://www.porthlevenfoodfestival.com/>

Ludlow Food Festival

<http://www.foodfestival.co.uk/>

Scottish Food and Drink Fortnight

<http://www.scottishfoodanddrinkfortnight.co.uk/> .

### ***Regional food tourism in Spain – La Rioja***

Developments in northern Spain may also provide relevant insights into food tourism development. La Rioja was the first Spanish region to trial the transformation of an important local product, wine, into a major tourism asset at both national and international level.

The local economy in the La Rioja region is heavily reliant on its world famous wine production. The region has over 500 wineries, which are protected by their own Destination of Origin standard, and it also hosts the Alvesa Wine Route. Visitors to the region can learn how wines are made, and can visit some of the 'cathedrals of wine', buildings and wineries designed by some of the world's leading contemporary architects.

The area's successful eco-tourism model has also provided a strong basis for gastronomy tourism. La Rioja's rich soil has supported a strong culinary tradition with the production of asparagus, beans, peppers, artichokes, onions, garlic, lettuce, chard and other vegetables. Traditional dishes include bean stews, lamb, pork, fish, sweet black pudding and chorizo. Traditional desserts include pears in wine and almond pastries.

This combination of quality agricultural products, world famous wines and existing culinary culture, led to La Rioja being selected as the 2012 Gastronomic Capital of Spain.

As in Iceland, tourism is a relatively new industry and has been promoted and developed in recent years. In addition to its wine and food tourism, the area also promotes its history, environment and pilgrimage routes such The Way of St James, part of the Santiago de Compostella pilgrimage.

## **Conclusions**

Iceland has tremendous natural assets and a long tradition of hospitality. It stands at the threshold of a period of enormous growth in visitor numbers, and developing food and drink networks, trails and festivals presents an opportunity to entice visitors beyond the current honeypots on the Golden Circle. At the same time, the can do attitude, enthusiasm, concentration on promoting and serving the best local and natural produce, and genuine warmth of the Icelander is a reminder of hospitality at its best.

## **Questions:**

### ***Level 1: General discussion points and exercise***

- Discuss how Iceland's existing food festivals and food trails could be adapted to the needs of the growing cruise ship market
- Iceland has an unspoiled, natural tourism product. How could food and drink partnerships contribute to managing the challenges posed by increasing numbers of visitors in vulnerable environments?
- Discuss ways of maintaining the balance between increasing visitors and maintaining access for locals to food and drink products/attractions/venues

### ***Level 2: Group Exercise – Presentations could be developed***

- Explore the ways in which a food and drink network or partnership might use social media/user generated content web sites such as Facebook and TripAdvisor for monitoring and managing demand
- You are a tour operator looking to specialise in food and drink itineraries in Iceland. Develop and present a business plan and sample itinerary for incoming groups. You may find this site a helpful source of information for similar themes in Scotland: <http://tastingscotland.com/>

### ***Level 3: Further Research Activity***

- One means of involving the visitor in protecting vulnerable natural resources is a visitor payback scheme. Research existing schemes as operated in places like the Isle of Arran and the South Lakes and others, and discuss the advantages and disadvantages from the visitor and the destination perspective