

ICELAND, 2026



Off again on another cruise ship based adventure. This time another repositioning cruise that took in a few bucket list items; Greenland, the Canadian Maritimes and hopefully the famous fall colors of the NE. We booked it though a discount travel agency that was pretty well known, Travel With Alan.

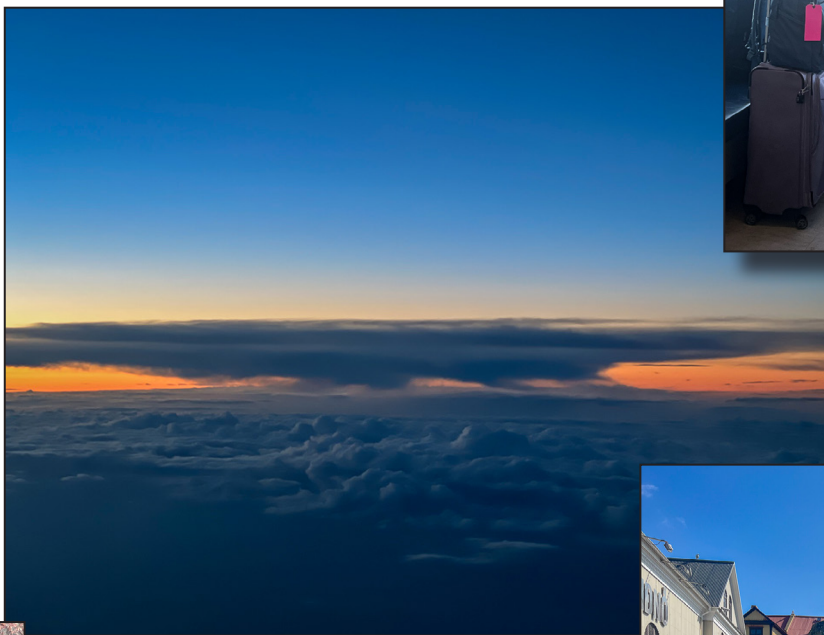
We know several people that have used the Travel With Alan discount travel agency and have been satisfied. The cost was untouchable by the cruise line itself. The Travel With Alan booking even included a few extra days and tours out of Reykjavik, Iceland before we boarded the ship, the embarkation point for the ship. The ship was coming across the Atlantic from the summer cruising season in Europe to spend the winter cruising season in the Caribbean. We had been to Iceland in 2015, traveling by rental car for over a month. We had visited most of the places that were included in Travel With Alan tours so rather than revisit those places we planned to spend most of the time wandering around Reykjavik on our own except for the included Blue Lagoon tour as we didn't go there on our prior trip due to the high cost and lack of interest.

So... packed and loaded we Uber'd to the Bremerton - Seattle Ferry, cruised across Puget Sound, and taxi'd to the airport.

The flight to Iceland was great for Wendy, she had a window seat and got a great display of the Northern Lights across northern Canada. Good enough that she could check that off her bucket list. I caught a glimpse from my middle seat as I tried to tolerate the fellow passenger falling asleep and into me, so seeing the Northern Lights is not checked off my bucket list.

We landed to a bit of Travel With Alan chaos but after a few hours we were checked into a nice hotel in the center of Reykjavik and could decompress for the next couple days, re-explore the city on our own and ready ourselves for the ship board adventure up the coast of Iceland, across the Atlantic to Greenland and then onto North America.

We did a lot of Reykjavik street walking; enjoying the memories from our last trip, noticing the changes and things that did not change.



The 'Monument to the Unknown Bureaucrat' statue was still there. A large slab of Icelandic volcanic basalt sits where you would expect to see a torso and head. The unique statue was sculpted by Magnús Tómasson in 1994. You'll have to decide for yourself whether it was meant as a serious tribute, or a humorous, satirical piece.



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We thought we would search out the small Reykjavik restaurant where we first were introduced to Icelandic Cod on our last trip. We ate there a couple times during that visit because we liked it so much. Back in Poulsbo, we seldom pass up the chance to buy it at our local market when it becomes available, North Atlantic Cod sometimes an acceptable substitute. As luck would have it, that restaurant, the Old Iceland Restaurant, was only a couple doors down from the hotel we were staying at on this trip.

So for a starter it was Koniakslöguo villisveppasúpa - Sveppamauk, pikkladir sveppir, enoki sveppir og estragon (*Wild mushroom soup: Wild mushroom paste, pickled mushrooms, enoki mushrooms and tarragon oil*).

The second course: Porskhnakki - Kartöflumús, confit gulrætur, gulrótarmauk me appelsínu, gulrótarflögur og kampavínssósa úr borskhausum (*Fillet of cod: Mashed potatoes, confit carrots, carrot puree with orange, carrot chips and champagne sauce from cod heads*).

We saw more painted buildings than we remembered.



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These colored door greenhouses at Vitatorg Square in the center of Reykjavik have become a tourist attraction. We didn't see much activity, but could imagine it being a great little farmer's market, supplied with produce grown on site.



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I found an impossible chess game in a used bookstore window.



A colorful display Icelandic wool felted soap caught our attention. As you use the felted soap, the wool continues to felt and shrink around the bar of soap until you are left with a little scrubby.





I had never seen a DJI store before. DJI is probably the most popular drone manufacturer in the world but their drones are now banned by the USA from being imported into the USA. You can own them, and I do, you just can't purchase them here anymore unless they were already here pre-ban. The salesman gave me a nice overview of the latest and greatest of their products line. A lot of the customers at this store are coming from the USA to purchase DJI products that can't be imported. Sadly, I could not bring my drone on this trip as almost all cruise lines now ban drones from even being carried onto their ships.



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Iceland as seen from the east.

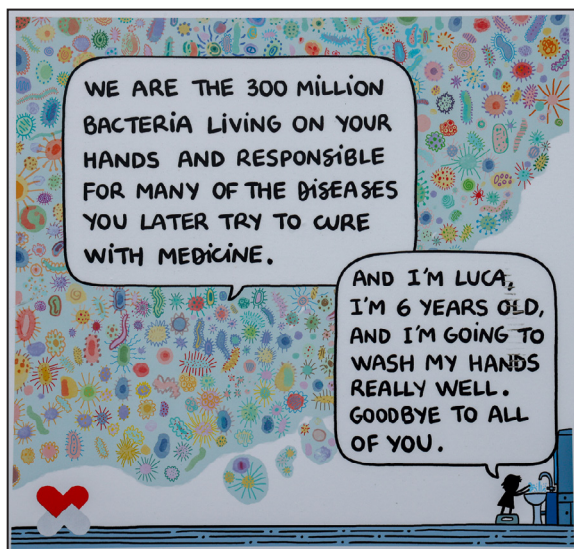
Sketching Antimicrobial Resistance

We came across an interesting and educational 'street art' display. From the display:

"There is a world within us and around us, invisible, ancient, and alive. A universe of microbes that help us digest food, protect our skin, and keep ecosystems balanced. Most of them live in harmony with us, but some can cause diseases. And, like every form of life, they adapt to survive. When they know how to withstand the medicines made to stop them, we encounter one of the most pressing health challenges of our time: antimicrobial resistance (AMR)."

This exhibition is an invitation to look closer: to discover the beauty of a balanced microbial world and the power we hold to preserve it. 30 illustrators. 30 countries. Each illustration and message tells a piece of this shared story, one that belongs to all of us.

Because taking care of our antibiotics means taking care of life itself.



My favorite panel of the display was the one to the left by Luca. Something I thought very appropriate to keep in mind as we were about to board a ship with several hundred others.

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We only saw one puffin, a Stuffed Puffin, on this trip. A bit of a let down from seeing 1,000s on our month long trip in 2015. We did see plenty of the Lesser Black-Backed Gulls like the one below though.



All of the plastic bottle lids were made in such a way that they would remain attached to the bottle. Seems like a great idea to reduce litter.



Another place we ate at frequently on our last trip was the Red Tomato. I think we ate here twice on this trip as well, once as window dressing, (I must have dressed better that evening). Exploring the Reykjavik streets and going to these restaurants again brought back fond memories of our good friend and frequent travel companion Pat Strayer, in particular that month of Iceland travel with Pat back in 2015.



Self portrait in one of our nearby Situation Rooms. This one had a southwest vibe.





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We ran across the 'black humor' of Þórarinn Huguéikur Dagsson in the gift store Rammagerðin, one of Iceland's oldest and well thought of.

Huguéikur is known for all kinds of visual and video art. He is most famous for his satirical comics filled with black humor.

Huguéikur has written three stage plays. The first *Forðist okkur* (Avoid us), is based on one of his books. It is a story about three dysfunctional families. The second, *Leg* (Uterus), is a musical about teenage pregnancy in the near future of Iceland. "*Þaðstofan*" (Bathroom) his third play, is a dark vision of Iceland in the 18th century. All plays received rave reviews and Huguéikur received "the playwright of the year" award for *Forðist okkur*. His book titles give one some idea of the content. The one published in 2006 is titled, *Should You Be Laughing at This?*, then published in 2007 the title *Is This Supposed to be Funny?*, and then in 2008 the title, *Is This Some Kind of joke?*. Below is Dagsson's web site where you can buy all sorts of merchandise adorned with his humor. I'll be doing a certain amount of my shopping there going forward. Be warned of some may find some items and content inappropriate and offensive.

<https://dagsson.com>

On our last day in Reykjavik we went on an included excursion to the famous Blue Lagoon, which is really just by-product from the nearby Svartsengi geothermal power plant where superheated water is vented from the ground near a lava flow and used to run turbines that generate electricity. After going through the turbines, the steam and hot water pass through a heat exchanger to provide heat for a municipal water heating system. Then the water is fed into a lagoon, the Blue Lagoon.

It is a rather expensive affair that we choose not to do on our last trip but since it was included in this tour package we decided to go.

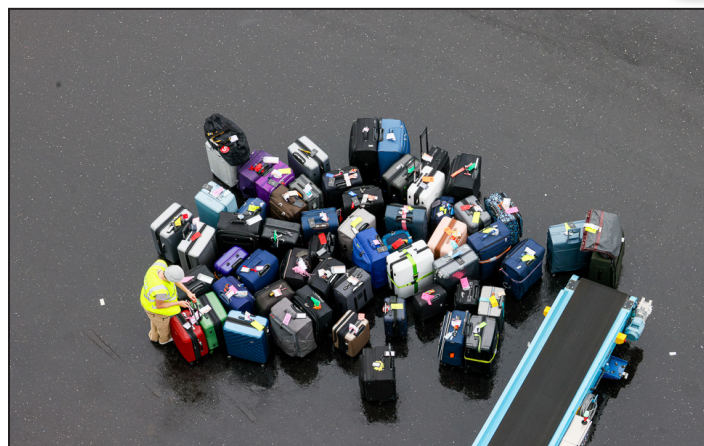
While it was an interesting experience and we can now say we went to the Blue Lagoon. It only confirmed that our choice was the right one when we choose not to go there on our last trip. We did experience hot geothermal spas at several places we stayed at throughout Iceland on that trip though, albeit as a much less luxurious and populated affair.



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By the end of our last day in Reykjavik we were in our ship cabin that was docked in an industrial section of greater Reykjavik waiting for our luggage to be delivered. From our 10th floor balcony we watched as the luggage sat out on the dock in the pouring rain awaiting transport into the ship and eventually to our room.



One of the things we were concerned about with using a discount travel agency to book this trip was that we could not pick our room. We paid extra for a 'better' room, but all that got us was a room higher up on the ship. Our 'better' room was directly under a service room and the toilets for a lounge on the next deck up, usually listening to service carts roll across the floors until after midnight. We knew ahead of time that not being able to choose our room could lead to this so we were predisposed to tolerate a certain amount of this sort of thing. We would have preferred a cabin low and in the middle of the ship with no adjoining doors to other cabins. As it was all three of those preferences were failures.

Our next stop was supposed to be Grundarfjörður, Iceland but due to 'something' it was canceled and instead we sailed onto what was supposed to be our second stop, Ísafjörður, Iceland. We have found on our past few large ship cruises that the advertised itineraries are just suggestions, marketing noise and rarely followed, some to a lesser degree than others. We typically choose cruises for the intermediate destinations, not just for the embarkation and disembarkation points, and not for the cruise ship environment itself. I do a bit of research, planning and independent booking based upon the original itineraries so changes are particularly annoying to us. On this cruise 6 ports of call out of 22 were canceled, about 27% of the entire cruise. We adapted, but yet again we reconsidered our choice of a cruise ships to visit the places we wanted to explore. I suggest the following disclaimer: *"Due to the erratic lives of ship captains, the capricious personalities of cruise directors, and the whimsical nature of the sea, all of the above schedule is subject to change for no apparent reason."*



This issue is dedicated to our friend and frequent travel companion Pat Strayer. We explored the entire of Iceland with Pat in 2015. Patricia Keim-Strayer: 1959 - 2022

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We had slightly rough seas making our way north up the west coast of Iceland and Wendy had to work at getting her sea legs and dining table stability back right away.

The seas were calmer as we entered the Ísafjarðardjúp Fjord and took on a pilot upon our approach to Ísafjörður, Iceland.

We had a nice walk around Ísafjörður, stretched our legs, saw a few birds and then returned to the ship where the highlights of the stop were the landscape views of Ísafjarðardjúp fjord from the ship.





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The next morning we entered another calm seas fjord, the Eyjafjörður Fjord, and as we neared the port of call Akureyri, we acquired the required pilot.

The weather was cool and wet, but we got off the ship for a short walk.

As with our last stop the highlights were the landscape views of Eyjafjörður Fjord from the ship.

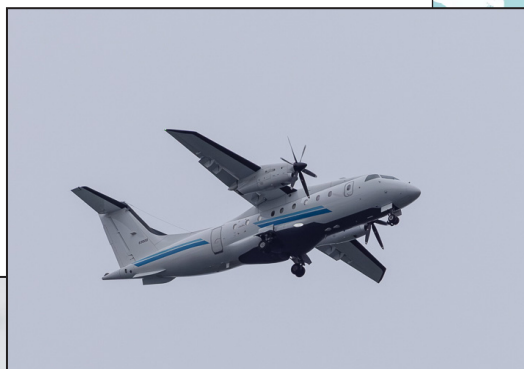


thermal stream and waterfall



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Akureyri has a small and exciting airport with the landing approach bringing the planes over the port and any ships, like us, docked there.



This tunnel entrance brought back memories of our driving around Iceland in 2015. While this tunnel looks big enough for multiple lanes, we remember several that were one lane and many kilometers long with pull outs every so often so vehicles going in opposite directions could pass each other. Some of those tunnels were long enough that we could not see the other end of the tunnel or if traffic had entered coming our way already. Entry into those kinds of tunnels required faith that oncoming traffic would cooperate in using those turnouts too. A kind of commitment we found difficult to get used to.



As we left Ísafjörður we dropped off the harbor pilot and picked up a Northern Fulmar escort.



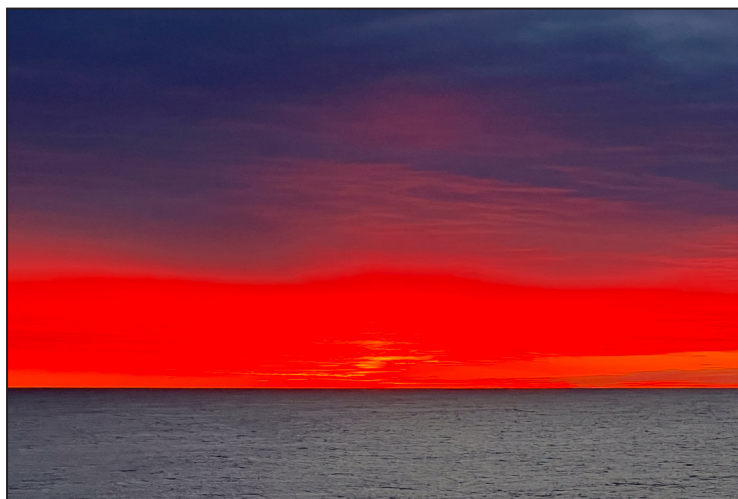
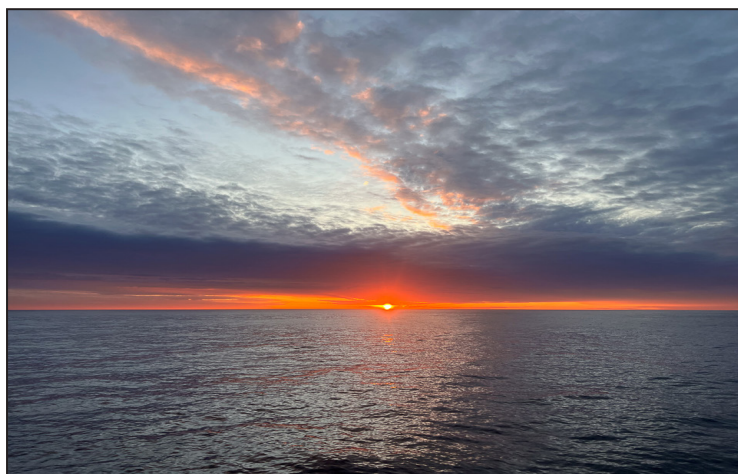


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We headed west out of Eyjafjörður Fjord, into the Denmark Strait and towards our next destination, Greenland. It took us three sunsets to get there.



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