

Destination Management Plan for the Westfjords

Updated Action Plan 2024





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INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the Westfjords Regional Development Office submitted the first Destination Management Plan for the Westfjords, which contained a detailed analysis of the state of tourism in the Westfjords, a comprehensive strategy for the industry within the region, as well as four action plans that addressed infrastructure needs and the quality of tourism in the region. The Destination Management Plan was always intended to be a living document, as can be seen by the fact that it has been updated three times in the past two years due to minor amendments. By 2020, however, it was time to look back and evaluate the status of the industry and the projects that have been highlighted in the Destination Management Plan. Work on revising the plan is therefore underway.

In the 2018 Destination Management Plan, the region was divided in three: Strandir and Reykhólar, the northern Westfjords and the southern Westfjords, and action plans were submitted for each area, as well as one plan for the Westfjords as a whole. When preparing the action plans, meetings were held in each area but not in each municipality, so there may have been a certain lack of depth in the list of actions. Thus, when the Destination Management Plan was revised, it was decided to meet with representatives of all nine municipalities and all population centres, or a total of 12 population centres. This approach provided us with an action plan that is much more detailed and realistic in terms of development in the region.

During work on the original Destination Management Plan, an abundance of information directly and indirectly related to the industry was compiled. The key information was then published in a summary compiling the region's key tourism figures and action plans. In revising the Destination Management Plan, it was decided to focus on the action plans and on updating the key tourism figures.

In recent years, progress has been made in extending the tourist season and developing stronger infrastructure, but it is likely that the tourism industry's vision and goals will need to be re-evaluated in line with the government's tourism strategy and action plan.



VISION FOR THE FUTURE

6

A shared vision of tourism in the Westfjords up to 2024.

“The Westfjords are a sustainable quality destination where profitable tourism co-exists in harmony with the environment and the community. The Vestfjarðaleiðin (“Westfjords Way”) travel route is being developed along with activities based on the unique features of the region, the great natural beauty and the distinctive towns and villages, all year-round.”



PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

Primary objectives guided by sustainability:

- > Development of quality destinations
- > Strong stakeholder partnerships that lay the foundations for quality travel services
- > Consensus on the environment and community
- > Improved transport
- > Maintaining the distinctive character of the region and its nature
- > Year-round tourism
- > Development of activities based on the unique natural features
- > Research, development and innovation



TYPES OF TOURISM APPROPRIATE FOR THE WESTFJORDS AND MAIN MARKETS

Tourism focusing on nature and culture:

- > Nature-based tourism
- > Sustainable tourism
- > Experience tourism
- > Culture and heritage tourism
- > Winter tourism

The plan is to avoid mass tourism in the Westfjords while focusing on development of tourism for visitors who are willing to stay longer and pay for quality.

The *independent explorer* is the target group generally considered to be best suited for tourism in the Westfjords, based on Business Iceland's target group analysis.



DIVISION OF THE WESTFJORDS IN THE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

A single Destination Management Plan is developed for the Westfjords, divided into four action plans: the Westfjords as a whole, the southern Westfjords, the northern Westfjords, and Strandir and Reykhólar.

There are nine municipalities in the region, which covers 8,898 km². They are Ísafjarðarbær, Súðavíkurbhreppur, Bolungarvíkurkaupstaður, Vesturbyggð, Tálknafjarðarhreppur, Reykhólahreppur, Árneshreppur, Kaldraneshreppur and Strandabyggð.



NORTHERN WESTFJORDS

SOUTHERN WESTFJORDS

STRANDIR AND REYKHÓLAR



TOURISM IN THE WESTFJORDS – A SUMMARY OF THE STATUS ANALYSIS

Valid operating licences 2022



Travel agencies



Tourist agent for day trips



Accommodation services 2022



Hotels



Guesthouses



Camping sites



Sleeping bag accommodation



Farmhouse accommodation



Hostels



Apartments



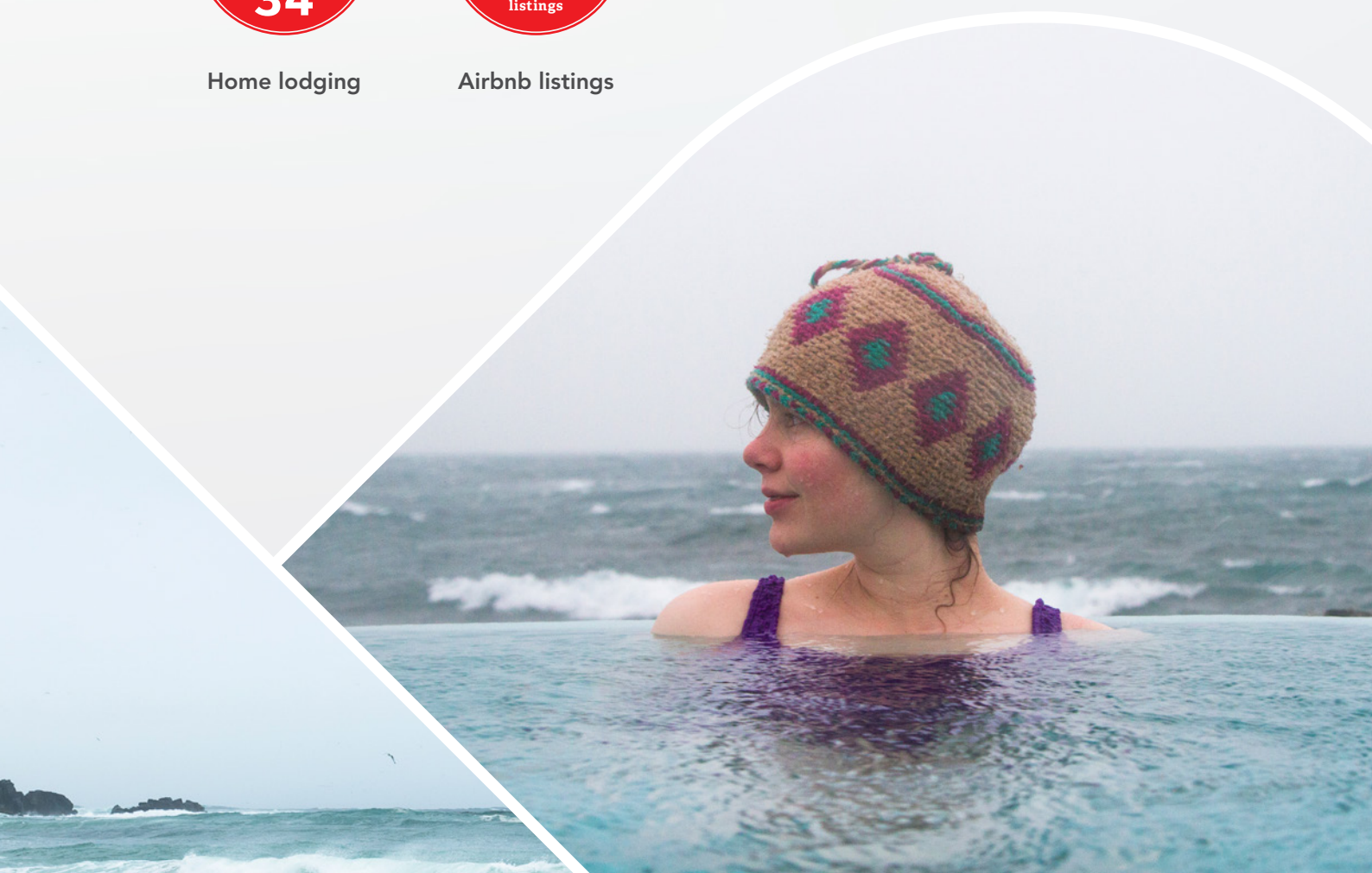
Summerhouses



Home lodging



Airbnb listings



Overnight stays



Overnight stays in the Westfjords in 2022
(190,151 in 2021)

Increase of overnight stays



Increase in overnight stays in 2020-2022

Visitor arrivals



Number of visitor arrivals in 2022 in the Westfjords
(124,470 in 2021)

Average of available beds in 2022

Average based on months of availability



Hotels – 498
Hotel apartments - 67
Guesthouses open year-round - 374
Summer hotels - 218

Summer guesthouses - 168
Home lodging - 99
Hostels - 41
Sleeping bag accommodation – 62



Restaurant services



Places with a restaurant licence

Grocery stores



Number of grocery stores

Car rentals



Ísafjörður has branches of the three largest car rental suppliers and two branches are in the southern Westfjords

Motor vehicle repair services



Listed garages

Petrol stations



Self-service stations

Charging stations



Listed charging stations

Museums and exhibits



Listed museums and exhibitions

Swimming pools and hot springs



There are also many geothermal baths in the Westfjords, ranging from completely man-made pools to 100% natural pools. Although most of these pools are open to the public, some are privately owned. Some of these natural pools are listed, while others are only known to locals who often want to keep it that way.



Recreation

Various day trips and longer trips are on offer. 56 entities are registered with the Icelandic Tourist Board in the recreation category.

KAYAKING
LUXURY TRAVEL
FOOD EXPERIENCE
AND RENTALS
DIVING
SNOWMOBILE
TOURS
QUAD AND BUGGY TOURS
NORTHERN LIGHTS TOURS
HIKING
HORSE ACTIVITIES
BICYCLE TOURS
BOAT TOURS
JEEP AND GLACIER TOURS
SEAL WATCHING
ICE CLIMBING
ANGLING
PHOTOGRAPHY TOURS
WHALE WATCHING
BIRD WATCHING
SKIING AND CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING



Nationalities



Based on the figures for visitor arrivals in the Westfjords in 2022, most visitors came from Germany and the United States, as in the previous year

Cruise ships



Passengers

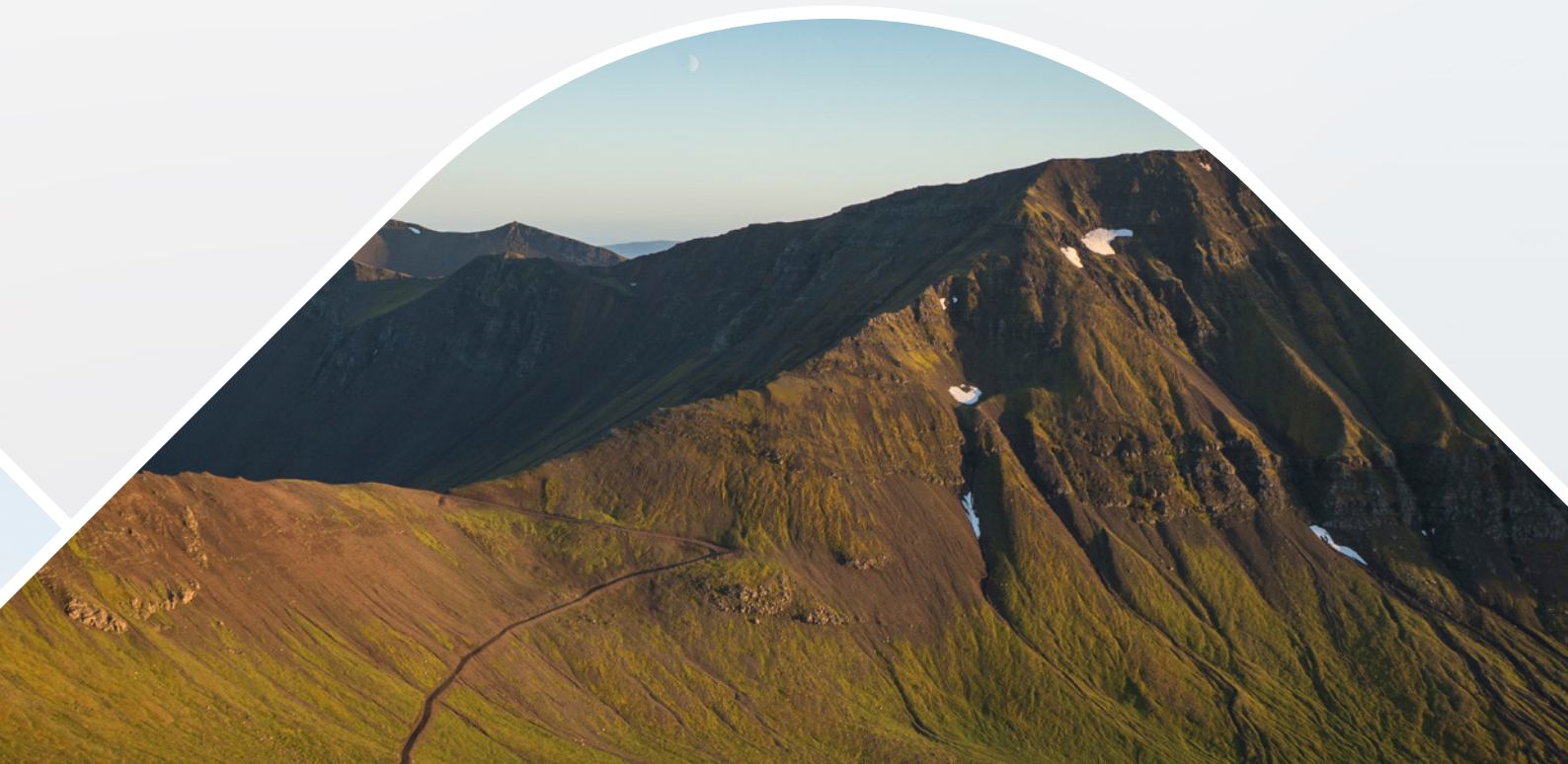
In 2022, a total of 159 cruise ships arrived in the Westfjords. 86,286 passengers on 118 ships to Ísafjörður. 4,700 passengers on 23 ships in Vesturbyggð. 456 passengers on 3 ships in Árneshreppur. 320 passengers arrived on 2 ships in Strandabyggð. 167 passengers on 1 ship in Bolungarvík. 12 ships were anchored at Vigur.

By air

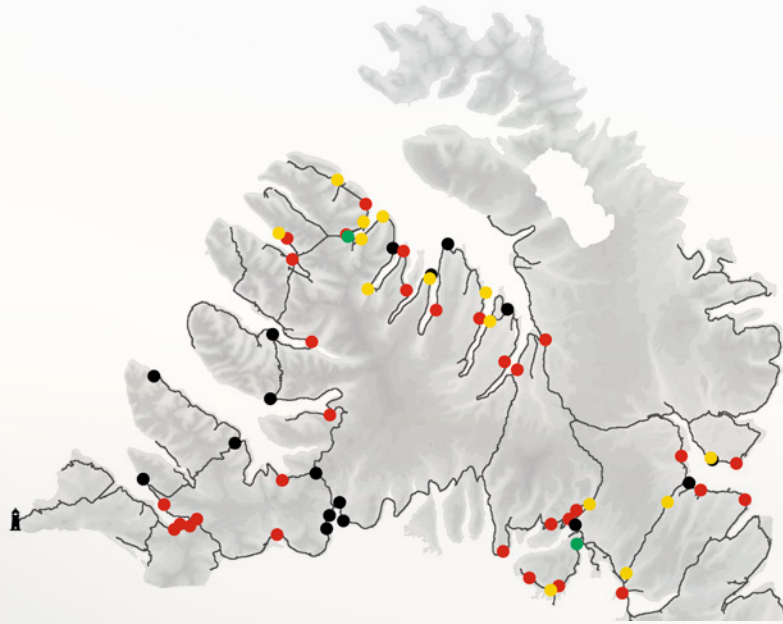


Passengers

In 2022, 31,234 passengers passed through Ísafjörður Airport, compared with 26,066 in the previous year; an increase of 19.8%. 4,696 passengers passed through Bíldudalur Airport in 2022, compared with 3,685 passengers in 2021; an increase of 27.4%. 97 passengers passed through Gjögur Airport in 2022, compared with 153 in the previous year; a decrease of 36.6%.



Stopping points

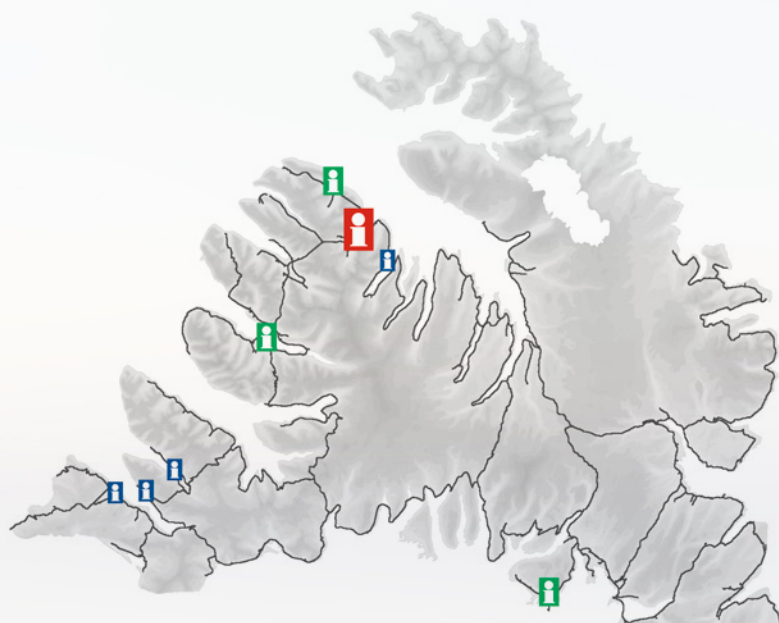


CATEGORISATION OF STOPPING STOPS

- Stopping point
- Rest area with information
- Open woodland
- 🗼 Lighthouse
- Rest area



Information centres



CATEGORISATION OF INFORMATION CENTRES

- Regional centre
- Area centre
- Information centre



THE REGION'S IMAGE AND ATTRACTIVENESS

The Westfjords' attractiveness and image has always been associated with the region's unique nature, and marketing relies heavily on these factors. The strategy for tourism in the Westfjords for 2016-2020 highlights the following unique features:

Unique nature, serenity and a different experience

- > Proximity to unique nature: Nature reserves, waterfalls, mountains, fjords, purity and wildlife
- > Unparalleled serenity: Secluded, few people, quiet, wide open spaces and stillness
- > A different experience: We are adventurous, sustainable, creative, cultural and mysterious

The most visited tourist destinations in the Westfjords during the summer are Látrarbjarg, Dynjandi and Rauðasandur. In fact, all of these destinations have high seasonal fluctuations due to accessibility, as roads leading to them don't have full-season service. Other frequently visited places are Hornstrandir, Bolafjall and Vigur, which also have high seasonal fluctuations. In addition to these natural attractions, tourists frequently visit the villages throughout the Westfjords, as they provide the services that tourists are looking for.

The large seasonal fluctuations in Westfjords tourism is evident when looking at the use of accommodation in winter. The extension of the tourist season and year-round tourism has therefore been one of the main priorities of the Westfjords Marketing Office in recent years. Year-round tourism is promoted through marketing, but also through product development, as well as work on extending opening times in cooperation with tourism operators and municipalities.



ACTION PLAN



The Westfjords as a whole

The Westfjords Way – Construction, promotion and development of year-round tourism services in connection with the opening of the Westfjords Way.

Hiking and biking trails – Mapping of hiking and biking trails across the Westfjords, improving markings and accessibility, as well as sharing routes and information. See Appendix 1 for a list of hiking and biking trails.

Stopping points – Mapping, promotion and development of stopping points in the Westfjords in the context of traffic safety and ideal stops. See Appendix 2 for a list of stopping points.

Birdwatching sites in the Westfjords – Mapping birdwatching sites across the Westfjords, holistic design and development of bird-watching facilities, along with dissemination of information.

Cruise ships – Developing a framework for the management and accessibility of cruise ships in the Westfjords.

Winter tourism – Promoting and developing winter tourism in the Westfjords through increased availability of a wide range of winter activities. At the same time, we ensure that service providers, including businesses, museums and other activities, are able to receive visitors outside the peak season.





Northern Westfjords

Dynjandi – The overall planning of the area at the destination Dynjandi.

Bolafjall – Overall planning of Bolafjall as a destination.

Planning and design of the harbours in Ísafjörður - Planning, design and construction work, extension of the harbour area and development of the small boat/yacht harbour.

Hvítanes and Litlibær in Ísafjarðadjúp - Improved tourist access to Hvítanes and Litlibær with a focus on the interaction between nature and the safety of tourists on the highway.

Hornstrandir and Jökulfjörður - An analysis of the current situation and strategy on the development of the nature reserve as a destination.

Overall planning of Tungudalur, Seljalandsdalur and Hnífar - Design and construction of an all-purpose outdoor area that includes ski, hiking, running and bicycle trails with vantage points and service facilities.

Sólsetrið at Þingeyri – Development and construction of Sólsetrið as part of developing Þingeyri as a destination.

Tankurinn in Þingeyri – Construction and design of the outdoor artwork Tankurinn, part of developing Þingeyri as a destination.

The Viking area in Þingeyri – Development and construction of the Viking area, part of developing Þingeyri as a destination.

Observation deck on a breakwater in Flateyri – Development and construction of an observation deck on a breakwater in Önundarfjörður.

Sea swimming facilities in Ísafjörður – Design and development of sea swimming facilities in Ísafjörður, focusing on Önundarfjörður and the swimming cow Sæunn.

Valagil – Design and construction for a hiking trail and the destination of Valagil in Álftafjörður.

Ósvör and the seashore – Improving facilities at the destination of Ósvör and its connection to the seashore with a focus on the safety of visitors.

Chimney at Hvilftarströnd – Developing and protecting cultural artifacts as well as sharing information, designing access and connecting footpaths.

Staðardalur in Súgandafjörður – Design and development of a destination in Staðardalur, construction and development of an old fishing station and dissemination of information.

Suðureyri lagoon – Dissemination of information and design of the environment, construction and improvement of access to the lagoon.

Cable car in Ísafjörður – Design and construction of a cable car from Ísafjörður to Eyrarfjall

Skrúður in Dýrafjörður – Construction and continuing development of the flower garden Skrúður at Núpur in Dýrafjörður.

Spaceship landing site at Seljalandsdalur - Development and construction of outdoor artwork and observation deck/contemplation site in Seljalandsdalur.

Neðsti kaupstaður – Design and development of a museum area taking safety and accessibility into account.

Hrafseyri and the Jón Sigurðsson Museum – Renewed focus on promoting Jón Sigurðsson's legacy and the history, nature and culture of Arnarfjörður.



Southern Westfjords

Látrabjarg – Working towards a permanent solution with the overall planning of Látrabjarg as a destination.

Vatneyri Coal Pier – The design and restoration of an old pier at Vatneyri in Patreksfjörður in connection with maritime tourism.

Bíldudalur renovations – Construction and development of Gamla smiðjan and reconstructing the traditional appearance of Bíldudalur.

Rauðasandur – Overall planning of Rauðasandur as a year-round destination.

Garðar BA – Design and development of a rest area.

The Samúel Jónsson Art Museum in Selárdalur – Continued development of the museum with facilities for guests, restaurant facilities and a shop.

Laugarneslaug pool at Barðaströnd – Development of the natural pool in Laugarnes at Barðaströnd.

Forestry area in Bíldudalur – Construction, design and development of a trail system in and around the forestry area.

Reykjafjörður in Arnarfjörður – Construction and development around hot springs in Reykjafjörður.

Arnarfjörður the monster fjord – Development and design of monster stopping points along with dissemination of information and education.

Svuntufoss in Patreksfjörður – Development and construction for access to Svuntufoss waterfall, markings at the destination and dissemination of information.

Birdwatching house in Tálknafjörður – Design and construction of a birdwatching house in Tálknafjörður.

Tálknafjörður bird trail – Development and construction of a bird trail along the length of Tálknafjörður fjord, along with markings and promotion.

Brjánslækur port – Tourist facilities at Brjánslækur port - construction around the port area near Flókatóftir.

Vatnsfjörður – Development of infrastructure and markings.

Patrekshöfn harbour – Organisation and development for cruise ship arrivals.

Patreksfjörður renovations – Construction and development of the old village in Vatneyri.

Kollsvík – Development of a destination with information and safety signs, trail markings.

Gísli á Uppsölum museum – Development of the museum and facilities.





Strandir and Reykhólar

Hólmavík sculpture trail – Design and development of a sculpture trail in Hólmavík.

Artwork trail at Sævangur - Construction and ongoing development of an artwork trail and destination in the land of Kirkjuból.

Hólmavík campsite – Continued development and renovations of the Hólmavík campsite.

Mountain refuge on Steingrímsfjarðarheiði – Design, construction and development of the destination and rest area with regard to traffic safety and dissemination of information.

Flatøy island – Construction of paths around the island, markings and dissemination of information.

Kúlaug natural pools at Reykhólar – Design and development of the destination, construction and accessibility.

Lake Langavatn at Reykhólar – Continued construction of paths and observation decks, signs and dissemination of information.

Kaldalón – Development of Kaldalón as a destination with a connection to Drangajökull glacier.

Grímsey island – Design and development of the destination, improving access to the island and dissemination of information.

Laugarhóll and the Sorcerer's Cottage in Bjarnarfjörður – Construction and development of the Sorcerer's Cottage and Laugarhóll in Bjarnarfjörður – development and dissemination of folklore trail, development of the Gvendarlaug pool and improvements to accessibility.

The hot pots at Drangsnæs – Improvements in accessibility, design of the area and development of the seashore hot pots at Drangsnæs.

Krossneslaug pool – Design and development of facilities, access and environment at the Krossneslaug pool.

Norðurfjörður harbour – Developments around Norðurfjörður harbour to improve it as a tourist destination, both through increased development and with regard to safety considerations.

Water sport facilities at Hólmavík – Design and development of water sport and sea swimming facilities at Hólmavík

Old water tank – Development and design for a vantage point at the old water tank in Hólmavík.

Basque centre –
Development of a
Basque centre in
Djúpavík.





APPENDIX 1

HIKING AND BIKING TRAILS

Northern Westfjords

Trail construction and markings around avalanche defence structures and forestry areas in Skutulsfjörður.

Listing and promotion of hiking trails around Bolungarvík.

Path from Ósvör to the harbour in Bolungarvík.

Path between the old and new settlement in Súðavík, connecting campsites, the Arctic Fox Centre and Raggagarður.

Mapping and promotion of hiking trails in Dýrafjörður.

Hiking trail between Sólbakki and the chimney from the old Öndarfjörður whaling station.

Development of a hiking and outdoor recreational area at and around the avalanche barrier above Flateyri.

Construction and markings of bicycle paths in Öndarfjörður.

History trails with signs and markings around Staðardalur in Ségandafjörður.

Promotion and markings for a route across Klofningsheiði.

Development and construction of an outdoor recreational area adjacent to Hrafnseyrarheiði, mapping of routes, markings and promotion.

Development and construction of the "Westfjords Alps" as an all-round outdoor recreational area, mapping of routes, markings and dissemination of information.

Mapping, marking and promotion of mountain bike trails.

Laying a nature path into Naustahvíft.





Southern Westfjords

Mapping, marking and dissemination of information on routes and paths around Ketildalur.

Construction of a hiking trail to Lónfell.

Mapping, marking and promotion of hiking and biking trails around Patreksfjörður.

Development of a trail system, markings and promotion of routes through the forestry area by Bíldudalur.

Marking of a route and dissemination of information relating to the pagan grave in Hringsdalur.

Development and construction of a "monster trail" around Arnarfjörður.

Mapping, marking and promotion of hiking and biking trails around Bíldudalur.

Development and promotion of hiking trails between Tálknafjörður and Arnarfjörður.

Kleifakarlinn – Development of hiking trails around Kleifakarlinn on Kleifaheiði.

Development of hiking trails in the forestry area in Vestur-Botn.





Strandir and Reykhólar

Development of a trail system and linking of trails, along with construction of birdwatching houses at Reykhólar.

Hiking trail down to Lake Langavatn by Reykhólar.

Hiking trail to Staður in Reykhólasveit.

Hiking trails and paths in the vicinity of Hólmavík. Mapping, markings and development.

Hiking trail to Gáttin above Laugarhóll in Bjarnarfjörður.

Hiking trails at Kirkjuból in Steingrímsfjörður.

Hiking trail along Þjóðbrókargil and around Staðarfjall.

Circle route around Þiðriksvallavatn lake.

The "Wedding Route" (Waterway from Steingrímsfjörður to Bjarnarfjörður).

Bæjarskarð at Kaldrananes and to Bæjarfell at Drangsnes.

Asparvíkurdalur to Kaldbakur (the "thousand waterfalls valley" up to Kaldbakshorn at a height of 525m overlooking the whole of Eiríksjökull, Langjökull and Lambatindur).

Marking and promotion of a route up to Lambatindur, with a view over Hornbjarg, Drangaskarð, Kaldbakshorn, Langjökull, Eiríksjökull and Siglunes.

Route from Goðafoss waterfall to Þverárgljúfur in Bjarnarfjörður. A forested slope with natural hot pools and streams along the way.

Mapping, marking and promotion of hiking trails at Djúpavík in Árneshreppur.

Mapping, marking and promotion of biking trails in Árneshreppur.

"Crossing of Iceland", marking and promotion of the route of the gully from Bitrufjörður to Gilsfjörður.



APPENDIX 2

STOPPING POINTS



In connection with the development of the Westfjords Way, work is carried out on the mapping, development and promotion of stopping points around the Westfjords. Below is a list of ideal stopping points on which development is especially focused.

These are not final locations and the list is published subject to approval and cooperation with municipalities and landowners.

Northern Westfjords

Stopping points at the head and mouth of Álftafjörður, Seyðisfjörður, Hestfjörður, Skötufjörður, Mjóifjörður and Ísafjörður in Ísafjarðardjúp.

Stopping point and signage at Hestur in Hestfjörður.

Development of larger stopping points and dissemination of information at Arnarneshamar, Kambsnes, Hvítanes, Fossahlíð, Rjúkandi, Reykjanes and Langidalur in Ísafjarðardjúp.

Development of a larger stopping point and dissemination of information at the bridge across Dýrafjörður.

Stopping point and dissemination of information on Gemlufallsheiði.

Stopping point at the Gemlufall ferry terminal.

Stopping point by the old fishing station in Staðardalur in Súgandafjörður.

Stopping point at the head of the trails in Botnsdalur in Súgandafjörður.

Development of a larger stopping point and dissemination of information on Hrafseyrarheiði.





Southern Westfjords

Development of a larger stopping point and dissemination of information at the crossroads at the head of Tálknafjörður.

Stopping point at Guðmundarlundur in Tálknafjörður.

Development of a larger stopping point and dissemination of information at Hvesta in Arnarfjörður.

Stopping point in the forestry area by Bíldudalur.

Stopping point in Trostansfjörður.

Development of a larger stopping point and dissemination of information on Dynjandisheiði.

Stopping point by the A-house in Fossfjörður.

Stopping point by the fish shacks in Miklidalur.

Stopping point by the Patreksfjörður rocks.

Development of a larger stopping point and dissemination of information at Flókatóftir.

Stopping point at Foss in Fossfjörður.

Stopping point at Garðar BA in Skápadalur.

Stopping point at Gíslahellir í Vatnsfjörður.

Stopping point at Kleifakarlinn on Kleifarheiði.

Stopping point by the pagan graves in Vatnsdalur.

Stopping point at Móbergssfoss waterfall on Rauðasandur.





Strandir and Reykhólar

Development of a larger stopping point and dissemination of information at the herring factory in Ingólfsvörður.

Stopping point at Grásteinn, Kolgrafarvík and Kistuvogur in the land of Stóra-Ávík in Árneshreppur.

Stopping point at Þrjátíudalastapa in Árneshreppur.

Stopping point above Veiðileysufjörður in Árneshreppur.

Stopping/vantage point overlooking Grímsey island in Steingrímsfjörður.

Stopping point at Balar in Kaldrananeshreppur.

Development of a larger stopping point and dissemination of information at the mountain refuge

on Steingrímsfjarðarheiði.

Stopping point at the waterfall in Gervidalsá river.

Stopping point at Kaldalón in Ísafjarðardjúp.

Stopping point at Þröskuldar.

Development of a larger stopping point and dissemination of information at Vaðalfjöll.

Stopping point at the Matthías Jochumsson memorial.

Stopping and storytelling point by the Westfjords trolls by Drangavík in Kollafjörður.

Stopping and panoramic point at Ennisháls.

Selecting and developing a seal watching spot in Strandir.

Stopping point at HúsavíkurlEIF in Strandir.











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