

# FAROE ISLANDS and ICELAND STORIES!

## Faroe Islands

### 1. **Aurora Borealis Schmorealis**

The great irony of life. You just have to LAUGH. So, we were in a place that many people plan entire trips around just to catch a glimpse of the stunning AURORA BOREALIS. I mean, we were here AND in Iceland, in its NORTH. And yet, we didn't really see it (other than a few smears of green I managed to spot a few times during the short span of actual night darkness). This is on us, as we knew the chances of seeing it were few since we were going during Spring, with about 21 hours of daylight. But still, it would have been an amazing bonus to see them in all their glory in such gorgeous places. I had seen them as a teenager when I did a student exchange to Watson Lake, Yukon. They were spectacular, but being a kid, I don't think I appreciated just what I was witnessing as much as I should have. So I was holding out hope that luck would be on our side and Aidan would get to see them, and we would share in this marvel together.

Well, luck came to visit. But it came to CANADA, rarely and specifically to our part of Southern Ontario, and news of its appearance was broadcast while we were away. When we arrived back at the Hamilton Airport, my Aunt and Uncle, who graciously allowed us to park our car at their nearby house and who dropped us off and picked us up (and packed us delicious sandwiches for our 3 hour drive home on the 401), didn't mention the soon to be phenomenon. My parents, who we messaged to inform we had made it home safely, also didn't mention it. The entire drive home, we heard nothing of it, as we were listening to a playlist, not radio. So once home, we immediately showered and collapsed into bed at around 9:00 pm. When we awoke in the morning, and scrolled through social media before climbing out of our beds, we saw the feed FLOODED with Northern Lights

images. That our families and friends took. WHAT THE WHATTTT WAS HAPPENING??? Aidan burst into my room, and we both blurted it out.

WE MISSED THE AURORA BOREALIS IN OUR HOMETOWN?????

Yes. That's right. We returned from some of the most popular tourist places in the world to see the MAGIC only to MISS them in our very own backyard, literally. In what was a historical moment, conditions were right for these glorious lights to be spotted all the way down to southern Ontario. Had we known, we would have stayed up late (via a pot of coffee) and made the short 10 minute drive out to my parents' house with an open field to best see and enjoy them. Everyone, I mean EVERYONE, seemed to see them but us.

The irony of it was almost too much.

But we will always have our own northern located, light filled stories filled with their own brand of colour.

## 2. **Won't Say No to Norway!**

On the most spectacular hiking day of possibly our lives, we were struggling a bit to just get up the most basic part of the slope as it had rained all morning and the steep ascent was quite slippery. We were also stopping a LOT to turn around and behold all there was to see. We were snapping and filming a lot. There had only been a few others around us: a couple close to my age in the parking area getting all their hardcore gear on, as we grabbed merely our crossbody bags and a small backpack with a little picnic and looked like the quintessential "annoying tourists". But I can say without any hesitation, that that MAN was THE most HANDSOME MAN I have ever laid eyes on, and he managed a quick, but unforgettable smile at me as he moved away, all geared up. But I digress...

Once starting the ascension ourselves, a young man possibly in his 30's was descending, and he noticed we were taking all these pictures

separately but we were clearly together (probably easy to deduce based on the fact that there were NO OTHER PEOPLE ANYWHERE). He paused and offered, in English, to take a few pictures of the two of us together. We were very grateful. We also clarified we were mother and son, and not a couple. In case he wanted to try and pose us as such. The sun had broken out and it was warming up. He was all sweaty and out of breath. He apologized for this, and said he had attempted the entire trail, but gave up and only did about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of it. He said this as though it were something to be embarrassed about. He then showed us the proof of his “failure”: his clothes were covered in mud from the times he had slipped and fallen. He also apologized for his English. He was Norwegian. We assured him that a) his English was fantastic (and that we sadly didn’t know any Norwegian), and b) we were struggling just to get up the FIRST and EASIEST part of the trail. I showed him my sweaty hair sticking messily out from my toque, and the muddy bits on the bottoms of my hiking leggings. I wanted him to know that in comparison to us, he was a hiking ROCKSTAR. This really seemed to please him and gave him the moxy to carry on, as he was descending toward Black Sand Beach, which we would get to next. So, in the middle of Saksun and waterfalls and freely roaming sheep, a muddy hiking trail and a quaint church, we made a random, momentary friend, whose name we forgot but whose indelible thoughtfulness and humour will forever be a part of this significant moment in our lifetime.

### **3. Yessa to Essa(barr)**

Our ONE big night out in downtown Torshavn certainly made up for our quiet, low key night life the rest of our stay. Aidan had been given an insider’s tip via a new local Faroese friend, Ria, he met on social media, to go to ESSABARR the night we did, as it was Trivia Night and would be packed with townspeople. I had already written this place down in my itinerary as a place to check out based on my research. So we figured it was meant to be. It was a great tip and it delivered on not just trivia from the game itself, but from the locals we met and chatted it up with. It was perfectly timed too, being a Wednesday and the night before all the popular park closures, so we

would have the next day (our last full one) to mosey around town at leisure. We prepped for it by having a wee nap (all that fresh mountain air and hiking at Saksun earlier in the day wore us out) and a home cooked meal of...hotdogs and potatoes and carrots.

At around 8:00 pm, we ventured down to the bar. It was, as per usual, a very foggy evening, which made the experience even more amplified. We got a little bar table in the back corner, and at first, we felt very out of place, as we were clearly the only non-locals. We were determined to have this authentic experience, so we went up to the bar and pointed to the cocktail menu's offerings. The bartenders were very kind and communicated quite nicely in English to us. It turned out that for my drink, they were missing one of the key ingredients (I believe it was elderberry syrup?), and not one, but two, of the bartenders went above and beyond to explain the situation and the alternative they had planned for it. I really didn't care, which I tried to convey. I was truly happy to be there and honestly, it would not have mattered what my drink was, (well, maybe swamp water excluded), I would have loved it. They pointed to our table and they told us they'd bring our drinks to us.

Suddenly, three of them were seemingly troubleshooting and looking frequently over at me. Next thing, we watched one of them leave the bar, go to a secret stairwell near us, and disappear for a while, coming back out with a new bottle of something. They came over to me with the bottle and explained THIS would be the replacement ingredient. I was IN. It was a very expensive drink (as I knew when I ordered it. It ended up being about \$28 Canadian!) BUT....it was fancy and tasty and soooooo POTENT!! To make up for the missing ingredient (that again, I was never remotely upset about), they also brought over a companion SHOT, which was perfectly warm and also potent on such a cold and gloomy evening. So we sat with our 3 drinks before us and started the business of getting down to business.





*Note the Beer “hookah” contraption on the table in the background. All the tables had these. We were not as bada\$\$ as we thought with our fancy drinks.*



*Shot down. Aidan’s drink down. Mine about to be. Now the FUN begins...*

As we were sipping, the Trivia game started, and to our delight, we understood a lot of it because all the questions were North American Pop Culture references, so we delightfully answered all of them, to ourselves and the air around us. It was fun to watch the interaction amongst the tables of friends. What started as a quiet night slowly started to turn into a louder, much more social ruckus. My hunch is the large beer filled hookah thingies in the middle of each table had much to do with this? Soon, the people who had prior to this kept stealing not so discreet glances at us, started walking by to either go outside to smoke on the patio, which our table was en route to, or to use the bathroom. People started to stop and at least say Hi. It was cute.

Ria had arrived with some of her friends, and it was lovely to have them come and chat with us. In very good English. We were starting to feel warmly welcomed and like we belonged after all. This must have given the others the nod to go ahead, because next up: a local radio host parked himself next to me and with all the rizz you would imagine in a Viking man, he introduced himself as the town's celebrity: Leif.

Yup. You just can't make this stuff up. He was in fact, as Ria confirmed, very much a local gem, being a longtime radio broadcaster. He told me many stories (he spoke English quite well) and I learned he was the eternal bachelor and a bit older than me, but in his own words, "young in spirit". After highlighting his very illustrious background of education and career, he invited me to join him at the bar across the street, which looked to me, upon glancing out the window, to be closed up for the night. When I commented on this, he replied that they'd open for him. They're his friends. He continued to ask. I continued to politely decline, saying I would only go if my son and his friend could also come. Leif insisted that they would want to stay here (at Essabarr) and I would much better like the one across the way. My final, polite but firm "No, thank you" was

met with perplexion. I probably seemed odd, wanting to hang back with the youngsters. He graciously nodded and got up to leave, but did remind me that I was welcome to pop over later, should I change my mind.

I did not change my mind. But I was grateful for the hospitality, which I told him quite sincerely. It was a treat to have such a lively conversation with such an interesting person!!

So Aidan, Ria and her friends, and I ended up carrying on with our chatting and this spilled out onto the fog filled street, as the bar was closing up (it was around midnight, I think). Our little group found a curb to sit on to continue talking. Ria suddenly pulled out a water bottle filled with VODKA. She passed it around, and when I tried a "HARD PASS" (I had already had more than my fill in the bar), she INSISTED. I did not want to offend anyone and she really was just trying to be friendly and kind. As it turns out, peer pressure is still a thing even in your 50's. LOL So Aidan and I found ourselves, quite hilariously, in the middle of a circle of 20 something year olds, swigging from a bottle of what can only be described as... moonshine?! I think if someone lit a match around us, something would've combusted. We listened to her tales of her family's sheep farm out in the country and how those wee lambs I had gleefully told her I adored were their livelihood and would eventually come to their demise. I tried my best not to think about that. It is their way of life, and she explained it all with a sincere reverence for and appreciation of the cycle of life that nature provided for them. I took another swig to help me accept it.

My inside started to match the outside... FOGGY.



As we chatted and swigged, 2 young guys who we thought were part of Ria's group, approached us (they had also stopped by our table, when we were inside, to say hi) and joined in. It was awesome that we, the foreigners, introduced them to Ria, vs the other way around. All the while, we saw glimpses of Leif peeking out through the window of the closed bar that was entertaining several people. He still looked perplexed. However, I was having a blast sitting outside on a CURB with my son and his age group, when I could have been in that beautiful, cozy, intimate place being mindful and demure. LOL We actually had some very deep, meaningful conversations passing that bottle around. This was exactly where I wanted to be. With my son. But it sure was nice to have been invited to that other bar and it is always good to have options. My ego was definitely not complaining.



When it came time to stumble back up the hill to our home away from home, the two young gentlemen insisted on escorting us. They would not take no for an answer (the theme of this night), and when we started walking away in a different direction, thinking we'd go along the water vs straight up the hill, they followed at length behind us in a sweet, protective manner. We turned around when we realized it was best to take the route we already knew, and they fell into place with us and we let them, because it was so sweet that they were going to "secretly follow us" anyway to make sure we got back safely.



*We stopped a few times for photo ops. Jogvan (L) gave me permission to share the pics.*

The entire walk back, they gushed to us about how amazing we were and how happy they were to have met us. They LOVED Aidan's moustache. I told Aidan that in about a month's time, the entire town's worth of males in their 20's would be donning them. He

unintentionally sparked a trend! They were also quite keen on me, one of them in particular, and I thought it was the funniest, given I was literally their Mum's age, and was walking along with MY own son, a few years older than them! But he too, like Leif, had the Viking rizz, and insisted that I was the most "gorgeous" woman he had ever seen *in person* (LOL). And they both agreed that Aidan was the most handsome man. Who were we to challenge that? Although I did try. I reminded them it was dark, foggy, and we had all had a copious amount of alcohol in Essabarr AND what was certainly moonshine in that water bottle.

True to their chivalric words, they escorted us all the way to our doorstep, and then they carried on their way. Aidan exchanged social media info with them so they could stay in touch. They lived just a few streets away from us, so it was nice to know they didn't have to go too far out of their way to help us. I'm sure based on how nice they were, they would have walked us home even if they lived in the other direction.

I do have to say that this one night gave us a glimpse of just how wonderful the Faroese people are, those in Torshavn especially. They are great fun, very warm, and truly a delight to befriend.

I would love to return during more of a peak season to see more of this kind of liveliness. Also, to see how that moustache trend is going.

The next morning was ROUGH. Rough as hell. We slept until close to 11:00. SIPPED our coffee at the table and looked out at the harbour, and asked each other several times: WHAT WAS THAT???

Our shared laughter, and nursing ourselves back to life ALL DAY LONG (but we did suck it up and get out to walk around the shops and the mall) was something that unexpectedly, and hilariously, bonded us even more as the adult duo of Mum and Son.

***Disclaimer: Iceland AND Faroe Islands are deemed two of the SAFEST countries in the world. They have next to zero crime rate and therefore, the story you just read may not have been a story had we been in a different environment. We felt a thousand percent welcomed, comfortable, and above all: SAFE in the company of our new friends. So, I want to gently remind you to always assess your situations and make the best possible decisions for your safety and protection. Fun should never compromise that. Always read and be fully aware of your surroundings and go with your instincts. In this particular story, our instincts were that we were in the company of very kind, warm, GOOD people whom we very much trusted.***

#### **4. GPS is a Real A\$shat**

Our departure from Faroe Islands was by far the most adventurous experience of our entire vacation, and maybe life? We did NOT want to miss our flight, as there are so few in and out, and as lovely as our time here was and as much as we would have loved sticking around longer, we had a full itinerary yet to fulfill in Iceland. So we ensured an early arrival by allowing lots of extra time for all sorts of unpredictable happenstances en route, fueling the car back up, and returning it to the airport kiosk. This meant getting up at 3:00 am and leaving our flat by 4:00 am ish. Luckily, it was already daylight at this time! However, it was still quite foggy, and being that early, we knew there wouldn't be any traffic on the highway, which would mean no tail lights to follow. We felt confident, though, in this drive as we had made that exact one INTO Torshavn. However, GPS, that little a\$shat, had other plans for us and took us on the "other" route (if you read my blog, you'd know that I had said there were 2 main routes into Torshavn. We had taken the sea level one, which was supposedly the slower one, and we were happy for that as it was lovely and scenic and felt safe).

This route had us endlessly winding up and up and up and up into the mountains. No. Heavens. Seriously. We were in the clouds. Did I mention the winding and winding? And the fog? And the NO traffic

anywhere? It was when we were at the top, so we thought, that panic started setting in for both of us. Even as I type this, I can feel my heart starting to race, and not in the good kind of way. Aidan was the excellent driver, and I had to have nothing but absolute trust in him as our lives were in his hands, gripped around that steering wheel. We were overlooking fjords. The cliff heights were indescribable. The terror was too. I had started to roll down my passenger window for fresh air, because I was feeling a panic attack coming on. I am not afraid of heights at all. What I am afraid of is driving off a cliff to impending death. I could feel the tingling starting in my fingers and toes. I knew I had to talk myself out of this immediately. Aidan, at this exact time, told me he was starting to feel very nervous and panic-y. Oh no. Mumma bear roared her power inside me and suddenly my own nerves quieted so I could keep him calm. We dropped both our windows fully down to get fresh air. He slowed his driving roll. Greatly. As I said, we were in fog and clouds. There was not much visibility. I tried my best NOT to look to my side at the sudden drop with hardly any room between my door and...did I say fjords. Far, far, far, far below. I told Aidan to just keep his eyes on the road, straight ahead. We couldn't get lost, as this was the only highway (other than the one we had taken in, which was at the foot of these cliffs), so we didn't have to fear that. We had no choice, as there was no possible way of turning around to go back, what with the fog and the winding and the zero road shoulders. So, as long as he could see a few feet in front (that was about it), we would proceed cautiously and slowly through it because the drive was supposed to be even faster than the one we had taken in (I call serious bull-you know what on that!), and from start to finish, the drive under the best circumstances would be about 45 minutes. We were not in the best circumstances, and were so very isolated, but at least we knew we would eventually come out of this. Well, that is what I repeatedly told us to comfort us.

Did we really know this? Would we in fact not just keep driving forever up into the sky??? It sure felt like that.



But not long after our panic set in, we could feel the descent. Our ears started popping again. He slowed his roll even more (as the descents are actually scarier at times). Bit by bit, we felt our stomachs come back up into their places from where they had dropped to our feet. After what felt like HOURS (it was all, at the height of it, pun intended, probably only about 15 minutes of terror), we FINALLY made it back down to sea level and merged in with the highway we remembered taking from the airport. NEVER had we EVER felt such joy at being level with the sea. I wanted to get out and kiss the ground. But my legs were seriously too shaky to stand at that point. Once at the bottom, we looked up to where we had just come, and WHOA. We couldn't even SEE the top of it. Like I said. We were in the clouds.

We carried on and stopped at a petrol station that was about 10 minutes ahead of the Vagar airport. We giggled.

Remember when we thought going through the tunnels when we first arrived was scary???

I didn't even get mad at the petrol station, as I had at a previous one, as I tried to figure out how the heck to use it. Which hose? How do I know how much gas to put in? Three attempts later, we finally had a full tank. And still, not a car or person around.

Now the humorous part settles in, I guess to compensate for the Drive of Holiest of Terrors. We more than arrived on time to the airport. It wasn't even open! We dropped our keys in what we hoped was the correct drop box after thoroughly inspecting and taking pics of our car. And, not having the comforts of the airport to settle in, we took a place on a bench in the lobby of the car rental kiosks, and had a wee nap, and tried to recover from what had just transpired.

An hour later, the airport finally opened. Well, not really. We saw a worker go in and one other car load of people, who apparently had the same early arrival plan as us, stopped him and asked him to let them (and then us) in. Once inside, nothing was open and there wasn't anything to do but find a bench.

Vagar is quite small and the check-in wasn't open until about an hour before take-off. Eventually, people started coming in and the airport came to life. We tried to laugh it all off. I mean, what else can you do?

But we hoped that in Iceland our GPS would be more empathetic because we had a LONG drive ahead of us once we landed. And we could NOT handle going through something like that again. Not then. Not EVER.

\*\*\* I should mention...in the few glimpses I had of the fjords (as I said, I tried to not look to keep us both calm) from the top of the mountains, I can say they were BREATHTAKING. MAJESTIC. POWERFUL. I just wish there was a way we could have had that driving experience without the isolation and fog and next to zero visibility.

## ICELAND

### 5. The Deal with the Wheel!

As with our one big bar night in Torshavn, we had an epic one in Reykjavik! Since we were a group of myself and two university aged young adults, Aidan and Urdur (his Icelandic friend), we did this night on a budget. We had a nice selection of wine to finish up from our haul at the Duty Free upon landing, so we opened up the bubbly (what better reason than to share with a local friend?) AND a red, and started sipping and listening to Urdur's stories about life in Reykjavik. After a few rounds and top ups, we

ventured out into a brisk night in our winter coats. We had a plan of having no plan. We were going to stroll down the main strip and peek inside windows and “shop around” to find the vibe that best matched ours. En route, we bumped into Urdur’s Mum (and Aunt), who were just locking up the brand new and amazing store that she had just opened earlier that day: **AFF CONCEPT STORE**. We had a quick meeting (they were lovely and super stylish!), and then kept on our way.

Finally, at the furthest end of the popular bar zone, we found it: The Drunk Rabbit (aka: The Irish Pub).

<https://www.instagram.com/explore/locations/1030928468/the-drunk-rabbit-irish-pub/>

We could hear live music. That was all we needed. In we went.



*As mentioned in the blog, this pic was taken the next day. With sunglasses on and while sucking back electrolytes. lol*

We took a table by the front door, as the rest of the space was quite full. Of men. All speaking different languages. We ordered a round of drinks, my treat. Aidan ordered something that was on tap and Urdur and I had tall vodka sodas. It was good that they were super strong (was there a triple shot in there? I think yes) because that was by far the most expensive round of simple (as in, not fancy) drinks I have EVER had: \$65 Cdn! They were good, though, and they were all we needed. We were content to chat amongst ourselves, take in the music, and people watch. Especially the group of men gathered in front of the WHEEL behind the bar. Not yet fully understanding its allure, we called it The Wheel of Fortune.



It seems the more they spun, and hit whatever jackpot they were hoping for, the more intoxicated they got, and soon the musician had vocal accompaniment galore. I snuck up, ninja-like, behind them, to “steal” a few beer coasters from the bar (a thing I like to do when I travel and gift to my brothers. Sorry DRUNK RABBIT!! But now you’re famous in my family AND you made the blog story! LOL), and ended up getting “busted” by one of them—or so I thought. He was just being friendly and looking to strike up a convo. I detected a Germanic accent; I was right. I also guessed he and





the guy I had talked to was walking over with a tray of shots that had just come from the last spin and loud hoorah!! I don't remember its name, but it had a distinctive black licorice flavour. And it pretty much pushed all of us over the edge. Shortly after this, Urdur and I made our own little dance floor near the musician, who we introduced ourselves to. His name is Roland. If you're ever in Reykjavik, you need to check him out here!



*Roland, the talented musician who kept the place a rockin'. He has partial Canadian roots, so that explains his good natured, humble, and friendly demeanour. (Pic posted with his permission)*

At some point in the blur of activity starting to unfold, the group of European engineers, good and happy from their wheel spinning gig, left to hop over to the British pub across the street. But about 15 minutes after their departure, the one who had brought us the round of Wheel of Fortune shots returned by himself. He stopped at Aidan and said something like, "Sorry Bro. But I'm gonna get your mum's number", to which Aidan, suddenly becoming Wingman Extraordinaire, gave a hearty, "Have at it".

And so we exchanged numbers, and we did chat –and continue to (as friends)! I'm not sure how I felt about my son being my wingman, but it was definitely free entertainment for Urdur, who was in the middle of all of it as it went down. The funniest and best part

of all of this is that we met in a very **ironic** way. I had been “stealing” those beer coasters for my brothers when he turned around and started talking to me. *Why is this ironic??* Because my brothers always tease me, relentlessly, about my long standing track record of befriending and dating Germanic speaking engineers, who tend to be a wee bit younger than me. I am usually just minding my own business when these things happen, and lo and behold, this played out in a very similar manner. I mean, my main concern at that time was shoving the coasters in my back jeans pockets before the bartender “caught me” (meanwhile, he likely would have been happy to just give them to me had I politely asked). Anyway, after the Germanic speaking engineer got my number and returned to the bar across the street again, Aidan declared, “I’ve seen it with my own eyes now!!!”. As in, how I meet these men. He even told me he’d back me up when I relayed the story to my brothers, who would surely challenge my story of “just minding my own business when...”. It was delightful to think THEIR beer coasters from the Irish Pub in Iceland were the very reason I met yet another Germanic engineer, and now they are linked to the greatness of it all. So now I fully understand THE DEAL WITH THE WHEEL.