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# EDGE OF THE ARCTIC

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- VISIT ALL THE WONDERS OF THE NORTHEAST COAST -







## Jökulsárgljúfur and Ásbyrgi

Some of Iceland's most renowned natural attractions are found within **Jökulsárgljúfur** canyon; natural wonders like **Dettifoss**, Europe's most powerful waterfall, the pristine **Hólmaturungr**, where babbling springbrooks empty into the glacial river and the mystical volcanic formations at **Hljóðaklettur**. And then there is **Ásbyrgi** enclosure, one of our most beloved nature pearls and magical in every season.

**Jökulsárgljúfur** canyon is approximately 25 km long and over 100 metres where deepest. Declared a national park in 1973, it is now part of Vatnajökull National Park. **Ásbyrgi Visitor Centre** has a wonderful exhibition and provides information about services, attractions and activities in the park and nearby region, such as the great network of hiking trails.

Glacial river **Jökulsá** and tectonic activity have shaped the landscape and local culture in this region. Though it may have taken mere days for catastrophic floods to carve out the canyon and **Ásbyrgi**, the river has been wandering back and forth across its vast delta over thousands of years. More recently, in 1976 subsidence caused the creation of **Skjálftavatn** (Quake Lake), now rich with both fish and birdlife.

Whether you enjoy bird watching, geology, fishing or horse riding, **Kelduhverfi** district, which lies between **Tjörnes** peninsula and Jökulsá river, provides ample opportunities for all nature lovers.

**Further information:**  
[www.edgeofthearctic.is/nordurhjari](http://www.edgeofthearctic.is/nordurhjari)

Ásbyrgi Visitor Centre  
Tel. (+354) 470 7100  
[asbyrgi@vjp.is](mailto:asbyrgi@vjp.is)  
[www.vjp.is](http://www.vjp.is)

## Öxarfjörður and Kópasker

### Birds, Seals and Plate Boundaries

**Kópasker** is a small village by **Öxarfjörður** bay. At **Snartarstaðir** near the village is the **District Museum** next to the church. The **Earthquake Centre** in the village should not be missed. It is an intriguing exhibition which explores earthquakes from both geological and social perspectives, with special emphasis on the **Kópasker** earthquake in 1976.

The coast holds an enchanting tranquillity with the soothing sounds of waves and the chatter of seabirds. You may even spot seals relaxing on skerries or swimming curiously near the shore.

Following the **Birding Trail** around the coast of **Melrakkaslétta** is well worth the time and the gravel road it entails. Northeast Iceland is renowned for its rich birdlife thanks to its diverse environmental conditions; from highlands to lowlands, heathery moors and woods to nourishing lakes and wetlands, and the shore in all its variety of shapes with beaches and cliffs.

**Rauðinúpur** cape, at the northwest point of **Melrakkaslétta**, is actually a volcano dating back to the ice age. Protruding 73 metres out of the surrounding plain and ocean, this landmark is capped with a lighthouse and guarded by two great sea stacks just off shore. A variety of birds can be seen along the way near **Núpskatla** farm and up on the cape. Ascending it requires a somewhat challenging hike along a rocky stretch of shore, but awards a good panoramic view on clear days.



**Further information:**  
[www.edgeofthearctic.is/nordurhjari](http://www.edgeofthearctic.is/nordurhjari)

[www.edgeofthearctic.is/places-to-see/raudinupur/](http://www.edgeofthearctic.is/places-to-see/raudinupur/)

[www.birdingtrail.is/area-guide/oxarfjordur-and-melrakkasletta](http://www.birdingtrail.is/area-guide/oxarfjordur-and-melrakkasletta)





## Raufarhöfn - Arctic Circle Village

The region of **Öxarfjörður** and **Melrakkaslétta** is a meeting point of many worlds. Here lie the plate boundaries of North America and Eurasia, the bio climate goes from boreal oceanic to tundra and the Arctic Fox Plain meets the wide expanse of blue ocean here at the **Edge of the Arctic**.

**Melrakkaslétta** is renowned for the natural splendour of its spring and summer nights. Road 870 weaves its way between lakes and lagoons along the rocky driftwood strewn shore, sparse with human habitation and abundant in birds. At the northern extremity of the plain is **Hraunhafnartangi** point, Iceland's northernmost extent.

Just off the coast lies the **Arctic Circle** and in the nearby village of **Raufarhöfn** which can also be reached by the paved road 874. Here, an **Arctic Henge** is under construction; a huge stone structure with allusions to mythology and folklore, designed to interact with the unique natural light.

**Raufarhöfn**, formerly a bustling herring village and prominent export harbour, is now a quiet little fishing village in the process of redefining itself. This **Arctic Circle village** is a peaceful setting to enjoy walks, fishing or birdwatching and offers a front row seat for enjoying the midnight sun in the long days of summer and the spectacular northern lights display in the winter months.

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## Pistilfjörður - Farming Culture

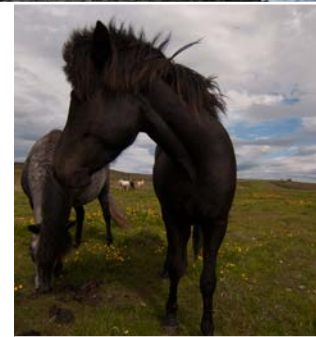
Northeast Iceland offers numerous well known pearls of nature which have attracted travellers from all corners of the world. The area is also rich with lesser known gems and places of interest, not least in its northern parts.

**Rauðanes** Point in **Pistilfjörður** district is one of these beautiful 'secret' nature pearls. A marked 7 km long trail circles **Rauðanes**, leading you past variously sculpted rock formations, natural arches, caves and secluded beaches. The cliffs and sea stacks of this small and scenic headland are home to puffins and a variety of other birds.

**Pistilfjörður** is a lush green farming district marked by low rolling hills separating shallow valleys through which some of Iceland's favourite salmon rivers run. The area is renowned for its traditional sheep farming and has several prominent farms congregated in the lower valleys and towards the coastline.

Foremost among its historic farms is the church site **Svalbarð**, which serves as a municipal seat and is the site of the community hall and former school.

In the old community hall nearby, an **Information Centre for Leader sheep** has been established. There you will find a nicely designed exhibition about this ancient breed of Icelandic sheep known for their unique leader characteristics, sense of directions and uncanny weather prediction.



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## Langes - Cliffs and Coastal Culture

**Þórshöfn** is a thriving town built on fisheries which are still the backbone of the town's economy. It is also a service centre for neighbouring farm regions, offering all basic services and a great place to stay while exploring its alluring surroundings.

The old vicar's house at nearby **Sauðanes** is part of the **National Museum's Historical Buildings Collection**. It is open to the public and has a nice exhibition and a coffee shop.

**Langes** peninsula stretches 40-50 km out into the ocean to a point called **Fontur**. Most of it was populated until mid 20th century by farmers who supplemented their sheep farming with fishing, eiderdown, eggs, driftwood and all available means.

It is a veritable outdoor paradise teeming with birdlife, great for hiking and study of nature and history. Travellers are advised to seek information about the road condition before venturing on to the outer peninsula.

**Skoruvíkurbjarg**, located mid-way out on its northern shore, is part of the **Birding Trail** and a great place to view and photograph sea birds such as auks. A viewing platform offers a close range view of a colony of Northern Gannets on the sea stack **Stóri Karl**.

On the eastern shore are the ruins of village **Skálar** (1910-1948), testimony to the rise and fall of a fishing village on the eve of motorised fishing boats.

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## Bakkaflói

**Gunnólfsvíkurfjall** mountain is an imposing landmark, rising majestically straight from the shore up to 719 m. South of it lies **Langesströnd**, a reposeful farming community at the bottom of the deep blue **Bakkaflói** bay.

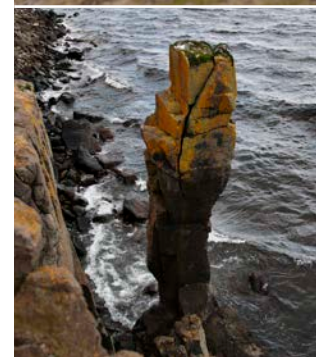
Flocks of common eider can be seen where the road runs near the shore and sometimes king eider can be spotted. A nice place to look for birds is at the small cliffs at Stapi sea stack. Nearby **Skeggjastaðir** church (1845) is one of the oldest churches in East Iceland.

The tiny village of **Bakkafjörður** is all about fish. The old village pier has been replaced by a quaint harbour where tranquillity and bustle merge into one timeless experience. East from the village a trail leads to the deserted farm **Steintún** and **Digranes** lighthouse, a great place for a hike and some scenic photography.

**Information about service providers in the region is found at:**  
[www.edgeofthearctic.is/nordurhjari](http://www.edgeofthearctic.is/nordurhjari)

Information centres in the region are in Ásbyrgi, Raufarhöfn and Þórshöfn.

Handy maps on the region are nr. 5, 6 and 7 in the series Exploration and Recreation as well as the Birding Trail map.

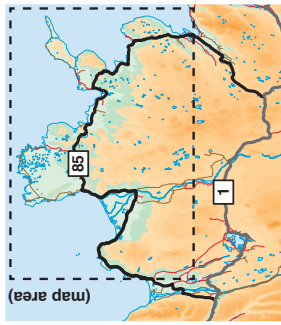


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Expanded overview of road 85 and where it meets ringroad 1.



# EDGE OF THE ARCTIC

ARCTIC CIRCLE



GATEWAY TO ARCTIC COAST WAY

Arctic Coast Way

Neiðarstrandir

The Edge of the Arctic area is a part of the Arctic Coast Way.

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