

# **An Icelandic Goliard Proposal**

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When I was growing up, I always dreamt of traveling the world, seeing the globe, and experiencing different cultures. After 22 years of life these are the highlights so far: World's Largest Hand-Dug Well, Greensburg, Kansas; the nation's largest chair, Anniston, Alabama; the Texas Tornado Museum, Amarillo, Texas; the balanced rock, Little Rock, Arkansas; and the first ever Wendy's in Columbus, Ohio. Seriously, I'm not kidding, I have been to all of these places. Sometimes I've even gone out of my way to visit these hotspots. Unfortunately, my dreams of wandering the Earth have not panned out. I've had only one opportunity to leave the country. Once when I was an infant we drove to Niagara Falls, crossed the U.S. border, then I vomited and we returned. Total time outside the U.S. was around four minutes. I don't remember any of this, so part of me thinks my parents made it up to make me not feel so bad that I haven't left the U.S.

When I saw this opportunity for open travel, I thought I'd jump on it. Then I started thinking about where I would want to go in the world if I could travel anywhere. The first idea that sprang into my head was Iceland. First of all, I cannot imagine a better conversation starter than coolly mentioning, "When I was in Iceland..." It's even better than my usual story-beginner, "When I was in Little Rock..." Secondly, the next time somebody tells a story about their exotic travels to the Galapagos or Madrid or the Swiss Alps, I can one-up them with Icelandic cities. "Let me tell you, Vienna is totally fake Vopnafjordur, Geneva is a second-rate Thorshofn, and Madrid is nice but only if you've never been to Isafjordur."

The Iceland idea began from pure whimsy, but then I researched the country and discovered many things that I would love to do there. I love hiking and have hiked all over Colorado. Iceland has a diverse landscape that is filled with lava fields, waterfalls,

ice, geysers, and lakes. Over the summer it never gets fully dark so there will be plenty of time to hike. One place in particular, Gullfoss or the Golden Falls, sounds magnificent. The waterfall plunges down a double cascade. Also the country is noted for its hot springs. I wouldn't mind fraternizing with Heidi and Helga in an Icelandic hot springs.

I would love to soak up a different culture – and Iceland has a distinctly different culture than the U.S. Linguistically, you can get around with English but I think it would be great to learn some phrases in Icelandic. Sure, it's not very practical, but that would be tremendous fun to test it out on the locals. Reykjavik, the largest city and capital of Iceland, is famous for its nightlife and clubs. I would want to experience that for a night or two, but it's not really my scene. I am more excited about a town called Hafnarfjordur, a short bus ride away from the capital. According to their website, the town has “one of Iceland's largest settlements of elves, dwarves, and other mythical beings.” They call them Hidden Folk. Many Icelanders believe in these spirits. In fact, residents of Hafnarfjordur think that these Hidden Folk live under the rocks in the center of town. The Hafnarfjordur Museum has an exhibit dedicated to the magical Hidden Folk of Iceland. You can also take guided tours of their hidden worlds. The town also has a golf course that is located on a lava field on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean where you can play midnight golf.

When I told my friends about traveling to Iceland, they inevitably asked, “Why Iceland?” My standard response was, “Why not?” Now after my research my answer is, “Because I can hike lava fields, see great waterfalls, cavort with Nordic ladies in hot springs, play midnight golf, and observe dwarves and elves.” Most of these friends then tried to steal my idea. Thanks to the scholarship committee for offering such a great

opportunity to Rice students and for considering my proposal. It certainly would not change my life, but having this travel opportunity would give me a great story to tell and the chance to finally realize my childhood goal of seeing the world.