Coming Home to Faroese
The Why and How of Learning a Small Language

Faroes: Revisited
Excerpt from the 1875 book "An American in Iceland"

Danish and Faroese: A Biography
Two languages fight it out in Faroese history and daily life.

The Faroese Festival Summer
Ólavsøka and the G! Festival

The Grind: Why the Faroese Hunt Whales
A look at the controversial grindadráp
Look beyond what you know

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Contents

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It is published by Scrivereomo Publishing, a division of Parleremo, the language learning community.

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Published by Scrivereomo Publishing, a division of Parleremo. This issue is available online from http://www.parrottime.com

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Cover: The village of Nordragøta is a fine example of the typical Faroese village, situated on a narrow shelf of almost flat land between the mountains and the sea. The sea; the beach and the harbour; the turf-roofed church and houses old and new; the infield; the outfield; the cliffs; the mountains; top fog; the sky — are all stacked like layers of coloured sand in a jar.
Dugir tú fúroyskt?

Learn a language,
Make friends,
Have fun!

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One of the main reasons for learning another language is to explore another country and culture. Language is your passport to the world. People who learn a language and travel to another country (or travel to another country and learn the language there) have a chance to become something more: world ambassadors.

These individuals have the unique opportunity to expand our world by sharing their experiences with us, and they have been doing it for thousands of years, with so much of our knowledge of earlier civilizations recorded by them in the form of travelogues.

One of these world ambassadors is Miranda Metheny, who wrote an article for this magazine about her recent experience living in the Faroe Islands. Now, what I know of the Faroe Islands could fill a glass of water without first removing the water. I figured many other people might be similarly knowledge challenged, so I proposed to her that we do a special issue of the magazine based around the Faroe Islands, and she kindly agreed. The result of that is what you are currently holding in your virtual hands.

The Faroe Islands is an autonomous country comprised of 18 closely spaced islands. These islands, which can be found about halfway between Iceland and Norway, are currently under the control of the Kingdom of Denmark although the inhabitants, around 50,000 people, have made some pushes towards independence. The Faroe Islands cover an area of around 1,399 square kilometres (540 sq. mi). Although they are surrounded by the open ocean, the islands have no major lakes or rivers.

The name for the islands comes from an old map from 1280, where they are labelled “farei”. This is most likely based on the Old Norse fár, meaning “livestock”, and so they became known as fær-øer, or “sheep islands”. The 18 main islands are: Borðoy, Eysturoy, Fugloy, Hestur, Kalsoy, Koltur, Kunoy, Lítla Dímun, Mykines, Nólsoy, Sandoy, Skúvoy, Stóra Dímun, Streymoy, Suðuroy, Svínøy, Vágar, and Viðoy. Tórshavn is the capital and largest city of the Faroe Islands, located in the southern part of the largest island, Streymoy. The smallest island, Lítla Dímun, is the only one which is uninhabited.

Icelandic sagas tell us that the Norse had colonized the Faroe Islands before the first Millennium, with some historical superstars like Leif Erikson spending time there. The islands became part of the Kingdom of Norway in 1035 and were under its control until 1380, at which time they became part of the dual monarchy Denmark-Norway.

For centuries, Danish was the main language of the islands, spoken in church, school, and business; Faroese was the secondary language, spoken in the homes and fields. This ended with the passing of the Act of Faroese Home Rule in 1948, which among other things named Faroese the official language while Danish was relegated to secondary language status. The Faroese flag was also recognized by Danish authorities. When Denmark joined the EU in 1973, the Faroe Islands refused to join to preserve their fishing rights, as fishing had become their major industry.

Those are the basics. Now you can properly begin exploring the Faroes with us!
Coming Home to Faroese

by Miranda Metheny
Since I first became interested in learning the Faroese language, I’ve heard a lot of two questions from friends and family: “Why?” and “How?”

It was bad enough with Norwegian. They used to laugh and say, “Wow, that’s useful! Now you can talk to a whole five million people, in one country, who already speak English!” They’ve stopped laughing, and now they’re just confused. Faroese, with its 65,000 speakers mostly gathered in a remote archipelago and a small district of Copenhagen, makes Norwegian look dead useful in comparison.

But that’s not why I learned Faroese. I don’t deceive myself that Faroese is going to unlock job opportunities for me, or help me to travel wide swaths of the globe. I’m not going around recommending it to any friends. But that doesn’t mean it’s been a waste of time – far from it. Faroese has enriched my life, and I can’t ask for more than that.

Choosing any language has to come down to personal motivation. It all depends on what you’re looking for.

When I first heard Faroese, I liked the sound of it. I was thrilled by its echoes to the older form of Norwegian, intrigued by the chanted melodies of the ring dance, amused by the vocalic offglides and consonant clusters. Yes, it started out as a purely linguistic love affair.

I wouldn’t judge anyone for learning a language just on the merits of liking its sounds. What people do with their free time is up to them, and I can’t see how learning even a random language is more wasteful than spending just as many hours catching up on Netflix. But as I delved a bit deeper into Faroese, and realized that it was a pretty tricky language – highly inflected, highly irregular, loads of inflections – my motivation waned. I didn’t know when or how I’d ever do more with the language

Miranda Metheny is the Petite Polyglottal American who travels the world in search of language, culture, and interesting stories.
than study it out of the dusty, outdated books I’d found in the university library. So as the going got rough, I shifted my attention to other things.

Then I visited the Faroe Islands. My curiosity, and my correspondence with a Faroese friend online, had outlasted my studies and compelled me to spend a long Easter vacation there. I love it. The islands were beautiful and exotic and wild, just mountains rising from the sea, with cirques and hanging valleys and other features my Midwestern vocabulary didn’t even have words for. I loved the cozy, modern homes tucked under brightly painted concrete and turf-roofed exteriors, the drying sheds stocked with wind-cured meat, the undauntable sheep crossing the highways... and most of all, the people. I have received warm welcomes in many countries, but no one could ever outdo the Faroese. I have never felt so safe or so welcome. During my short stay, I was invited into so many homes for tea, cake, and often, gifts of woolen slippers and scarves, that I completely lost count.

If love of the language had not been enough, falling in love with the land and the people themselves proved much better for my motivation. I made plans to return to the Faroes for a whole summer, and set to work learning the language in preparation. In the intervening time, a modern textbook and grammar book had been published, and an excellent dictionary made available online. I also collected a few Faroese books and movies, started reading the news and followed various Faroese Facebook groups. Once I really got going, I was able to find all the resources I needed.

Though at first I could only speak slowly and poorly, I developed enough of a knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar that when I arrived in the Faroe Islands and immersed myself, I was able to progress rapidly. I was having halting conversations within the week, and managing a certain sort of rough fluency after a month.

It was as if by saying “Hvussu hevur tú tað?” I was actually saying, “I’m one of you, though not by birth. I know something about this place and I’m eager to learn more, I love this country and I respect you all.”

But not everyone is equally linguistically talented, or linguistically bold – especially in older generations. Speaking to such people in their native language puts them at ease, makes them feel more comfortable expressing themselves. Young children, who haven’t yet been to school, would have been a complete mystery to me had I not learned Faroese. Proficiency also made me more independent and informed in every aspect of my life there – I could read signs, listen to the radio, and watch performances without demanding and waiting on translations.

Most importantly, perhaps, Faroese people speak Faroese amongst themselves. To do otherwise is unnatural and uncomfortable for most. Not learning the language, then, sets you apart from social gatherings, lively discussions, and even Facebook conversations. Learning it means you can slip right in. There is also the simple matter of respect – of not expecting or wanting everyone in your host country to pander to you and your linguistic limitations at every turn... no matter how willingly.
Most of the above is true for any language on earth. But small languages, for all their extra challenges, also come with extra rewards. The Faroese are fiercely proud of and interested in their language. Linguistic topics occur with astonishing regularity in their television programs, debates and everyday conversations. Even with a translator, a non-speaker would miss out on a full understanding of this whole element of their culture.

And languages are, of course, intimately tied to culture and place. Faroese is so well adapted to its own tiny, beautiful world that even translating it for my friends back home can be a struggle. Eði is isthmus, but I didn’t use that word once growing up – in the Faroes, it featured frequently in directions and place names. Bøur and Hagi, infield and outfield, mean just that – but so much more.

The bøur, the field near the village, is fenced in, safe, almost home. The hagi is beyond... wild, rough, even mysterious – the realm of the mythical “hidden people.”

At trola in Faroese means to trawl, in a fishing boat out at sea. They also use it for the act of running after girls. The Faroese word for perspective is sjónarmið, where sjón means sight, and mið means fishing ground. This baffled me, until I came to understand that mið are small fishing grounds, in sight of land. To make sure he’s in the right spot, a fisherman depends on taking his bearings on features ashore – the view from his perspective. What a joy to discover all these little things!

The Faroese speak of “at fara niður” (to go “down” – to Denmark) and “at koma heim” (to come “home” – to the Faroes), and that doesn’t only apply to locals. I had to smile the first few times I was asked when I would be going down and whether I would be coming home again soon.

I discovered that speaking Faroese, even badly, worked as a sort of shibboleth on the islands. Though the Faroese are welcoming to start with, I couldn't help but feel as though it opened even more doors for me. It was a conversation starter par-excellence, and a sign that I was taking my work there seriously. I found that I could wave off a wide range of concerns – that I might not know how to walk...
The natural harbour of Gjógv, on Eysturoy.
Fishing boats in Klaksvík, on Borðoy.
safely on the seaside cliffs, that I might be a hassle to deal with, that I might be an undercover anti-whaling activist (a major concern) – with just a short demonstration of my Faroese speaking abilities.

It was as if by saying “Hvussu heuvr tú tad?” (How are you?) I was actually saying, “I’m one of you, though not by birth. I know something about this place and I’m eager to learn more, I love this country and I respect you all.”

Had I not learned Faroese, I imagine my summer in the islands would still have gone well. I could have done my work, though maybe not as thoroughly, not with such a diverse group of informants. I suppose the bird cliffs would have been just as high and majestic, the cured lamb just as delightful, the music just as hauntingly beautiful in the cool blue mist of midsummer nights. I would have made some friends and had a nice time, undoubtedly.

But Faroese is there, in many of my fondest memories. I remember walking downtown one summer night, and a man bursting out onto his balcony as we passed to belt out the first stanza of the ballad, Ormurin Langi, and how it felt to be able to join in the singing as we sang the next few stanzas back and continued singing all the way down to Tórshavn. I remember evenings spent with my Faroese family, laughing about the news and world events and my life there, how nice it was to catch most of the jokes and how happy they were to explain the new ones to me.

I remember how it felt to speak Faroese down in Copenhagen, to navigate through the crowded city and yet feel as if I had never left the islands when I heard the language I had learned to love so well. The Danes and other foreigners that passed were none the wiser that something didn’t add up, that I was an imposter, that I didn’t belong. In a way I did. In that moment, I felt I could just glimpse, just taste, that feeling of being a part of something... smaller. Something more intimate. Of what it meant to know just from a language that you were home.

“Why would you learn such a tiny language?” they ask.

“Do you have sixty thousand friends?” I reply.

“Uhhh... no?”

“Well, to speak Faroese is to feel that you do...” PT
A mother and child walk up from the natural harbour of Gjógv, on Eysturoy.

A small concert in Tull, the main Faroese record company, during the Faroese culture night.
Finding Your Way to Languages

Six Methods of Language Learning

So you want to learn another language? Great! You've chosen the one you want, and are ready to jump in with the learning? Fantastic!

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Since each person learns in a different way, is no method that works the best for everyone. This book is designed for those that don't yet know what their way is. It examines six common methods of studying a language: through audio, like audio courses and podcasts; by books, ranging from phrasebooks to full textbooks; classes, with a teacher and other students; software, using computer programs to help train you; internet, utilising the potential of some of the other methods on a global scale; immersion, in which a person is completely surrounded by the language and must learn it to survive.

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“Can you please hand me the spake?”

That’s more or less how it would have sounded when I asked a Danish boy that question. I was around six years old, playing out on the street on a summer trip in Denmark. I had spoken in Danish, of course — or at least in what I thought was Danish. But as his face twisted in confusion, I realized that he didn’t understand the word “spake,” which I had apparently invented by saying the Faroese word for spade with Danish pronunciation.

For the first time, I became aware of a definite distinction between Faroese and Danish. I remember how shocked I was at the inconsistency this incident revealed. Up until that point, I did not know exactly where the borders lay between the two languages. From what I can recall from the early years of my life, I did change the way I spoke when I was speaking “Danish,” but I would just transform my Faroese words into Danish-sounding equivalents. I had picked up many of the sounds and patterns from watching children’s shows in Danish, so I would try to imitate those television voices. I’m sure I had a thick accent and made other mistakes, but the Danes always seemed to understand what I was trying to say.

Growing up in the Faroe Islands, one is exposed to a lot of Danish. There are a handful of Faroese-made or, more commonly, Faroese-dubbed children’s shows, but they are only broadcast on the national television channel, KVF, for about half an hour a day. But children’s programming in Danish can be seen practically 24/7 on satellite TV! Many other shows and movies come in English, with Danish subtitles.

And it’s not only television that comes to us in Danish. More books are published in Faroese per speaker than almost any other language, but our libraries and bookstores are still full of Danish titles. The operating system on our computers, the apps on our smartphones, the instructions on our washing machines... everything is in Danish.

Uni Johannesen is a 22-year-old Faroese Islander from the village of Nordragøta who is interested in science and languages.
Danish, right down to the small stickers on the cheese and chicken at the grocery store. I completely understand why this happens, and that it would only make it more expensive for me, the consumer, to have everything relabelled and rewritten in Faroese. But still, it is a nice thought — to see the name of everything spelled out in my mother tongue.

Danish is not only in our everyday lives, but also in our school system. We start learning Danish in the third grade, and most of us already understand and speak a little before those classes start. Until 9th grade, we have regular Danish classes, but most of the other school material is in Faroese.

In upper secondary school, the situation is reversed. A lot of work has gone into creating Faroese material for primary school children so that they can start out learning in their mother tongue. But once we reach upper secondary school, pretty much everything is in Danish, except for Faroese class, of course. Some teachers were Faroese, others were Danish, but although most of them understood Faroese, the coursework was only available in Danish. Therefore I would study biology, chemistry, physics, history, religion, mathematics, geography, English — and, of course, Danish — all in Danish. All of this exposure to Danish meant that we were exempted from a whole year of Danish class the first year of upper secondary school, and still ended up with the exact same Danish degree as our counterparts studying in Denmark.

Although we were spared a year of Danish classes, I think what we gave up was even greater. I remember how frustrating it was to do readings in Danish, knowing that I would be presenting in Faroese! Sometimes I would even sit down and translate the entire text into Faroese, so that I would understand it thoroughly. It is hard to always read technical words in a foreign language, and then to have to express them in Faroese. Many students use more international Faroese words, which are imported and therefore closer to their Danish equivalents, but I like to use our own native words, which complicates matters.

The Home Rule Act of 1948 made Faroese the main language of the Faroe Islands, although Danish was also to be learnt well by all. Because of this, we should all have the legal right to write our exams in Faroese or Danish, according to our preference. But sometimes matters are not as black and white as the letters of the law. When I wrote my exams in chemistry and mathematics, I was told that it was safer for me to write my answers in Danish, since they would be graded in Denmark and there was no guarantee that the graders would understand Faroese well enough to determine if I had answered correctly. There were also cases in the 1970’s in which students refused to speak Danish at their oral exams in civics, which the school required of them since the examiner did not understand Faroese. Because of this, the students did not officially graduate, but were later allowed to continue into higher education because of their special circumstances.

However, we have not always had the legal right to use Faroese. Danish was for many years the language of the administration — legislative, ecclesiastic, judicial and commercial — and of the entire educational system. The language of the Church became Danish after the Reformation in 1537, in spite of the core Protestant belief that the word of God should be told to people in their native language. The Faroe Islanders, however, were told that God did not understand Faroese.

Despite all of this, the Faroese maintained their own language in their everyday lives. They wrote in Danish, but spoke Faroese in their homes and fields and other interactions with their countrymen. Of course, the language was profoundly affected by years of formal disuse and heavy contact
with Danish. But at the beginning of the 20th century, some schools began to offer Faroese classes, and Faroese gained equal rights with Danish in schools and churches in 1939. Finally, the Home Rule Act assured Faroese its official and dominant status within the islands. With the help of the nationalist movement, which started at the end of the 19th century, and the Faroese Language Committee, established in 1985, the Danish influence has been gradually lessened in favour of a more Faroese style and vocabulary.

After all of this language conflict, we still learn Danish in school. Faroese is now the first priority, Danish is the second, and English follows closely behind as the third. Many students even study an additional language, such as German, Spanish, or French.

I sometimes wish that Faroese had an even higher priority in our schools. If we cannot speak and write our own mother tongue flawlessly, how can we expect to master any other languages? A survey from 2004 shows that Faroese secondary school students have serious difficulties with normative Faroese grammar and spelling, so it might be best to focus a bit more on Faroese.

But because the Faroe Islands is such a small nation, we really do need to be able to speak other languages — and that naturally leaves less time and energy for our own. And studies have indicated that if we were to isolate ourselves, only speaking Faroese, the language would likely be in a worse state than it is in now. We need to be able to speak some other languages if we want to have opportunities in life and a diversity of experiences. It would be quite boring to spend all of our days in the Faroes and talk only to the same 50,000 souls our entire lives, wouldn’t it?

For my own sake, I am very happy to be able to speak Danish. It has brought me the joys and opportunities of easy communication with all of our Scandinavian neighbours. I imagine it as a kind of bond, bringing the Faroes closer to our relatives in Norway and Sweden as well as Denmark. The Icelanders have abandoned learning any mainland Scandinavian language well, and they are drifting farther and farther from the others as a result... something I hope will never happen here. If the talk of secession ever becomes reality, I won’t mind if we learn Norwegian or Swedish, or even a pan-Scandinavian mixture of all three, instead of Danish — as long as the old ties to the rest of our region are preserved. A deep connection to our linguistic and cultural past will give us strong roots as we move towards a Faroese future.
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At the Cinema - Ludo

Ludo reviewed by Miranda Metheny

Ludo is the first feature film to come out of the Faroe Islands in fifteen years – and it’s a dark one. It was written and directed by Katrin Ot-tarsdóttir, who is also behind the road-trip movie Bye Bye Bluebird (1999) and the slice-of-life relay Atlantic Rhapsody (1989), as well as several shorter movies and documentaries.

Ludo takes us into the home of a small family living in a beautiful house by the sea. A woman struggles with mental illness, her husband wonders how to handle the difficult and escalating situation, and their eleven-year-old daughter sings herself to sleep at night over the sounds of her mother’s wailing.

The movie opens with a rare and beautiful summer day promising to let a little fresh air into the gloomy house. Father and daughter conspire to get the mother in a good mood, bringing her breakfast in bed to try to persuade her to go out with them on a walk in the hills. At first, she readily agrees, even chastising them for thinking they needed to do so much to convince her. But she soon changes her mind without cause, telling them icily to go on without her.

The young girl hesitates. She knows her mother, and it’s clear to everyone that the mother doesn’t mean what she says. But her father begs, unwilling to let the fine weather slip away, and finally they go on out for a pleasant hike that will upset mother far more than they know.

The movie is heavy with symbolism. We see toys scattered throughout the house (including an eerie doll whose eyes open and close on their own), birds (mostly ravens crying and a dead chick the girl finds on the mountain), waves, knives, blood, the child’s voice singing her own lullaby...

As the movie continues, the shots of these symbols come faster and more frequently, repeating themselves in a way that makes us feel disoriented and trapped in a cycle. The director’s purpose, I feel, is to make viewers not sympathize but empathize with the situation. The scary music and the mother’s moans are unpleasant on multiple levels, and the knife sounds were sometimes so sharp that I felt they were coming through my speakers and cutting my skin.

Throughout the movie, we find ourselves perched uneasily between the mother’s hallucination-fueled anxiety and her husband and daughter’s attempts to say and do just the right things to keep her happy. But...
sometimes it seems impossible, as when the father asks the girl to lie so as not to unnecessarily upset the mother, but the mother seems to see right through it and ominously warns her about what happens to “little girls who lie to their mothers.”

Three times, we see the mother try to turn over a new leaf. She initially agrees to go for a walk. She sings and makes a batch of pancakes on their return. Finally, she eagerly suggests a family game of Ludo. But the game they play in the dark house is one none of them can win.

Ottarsdóttir writes that the topics of the movie have also appeared in her other work, but in Ludo she wanted to go all the way with them. She stresses that mental illness is a problem that is urgent for everyone, no matter where in the world they are. Certainly it is true that mental illness is a worldwide concern and that the movie could be appreciated by an international audience, even without any other knowledge of the setting in the Faroe Islands. With a short 70 minute runtime, the director is quite busy with her artistic and thematic goals, and exploring Faroese culture is not one of them. There is, in fact, a noticeable lack of proper nouns in the film; neither the places, nor the characters, are named – giving it a certain sense of anonymity.

But the movie is set in the Faroe Islands, and setting is more than a backdrop. The movie and the story it tells would be slightly different in another place. The family lives on the island of Sandoy, which is one of the more remote of the Faroese islands as it is not connected by road to the others. While the father and daughter are out walking, they happen to run into the local doctor and his wife, who know them well and inquire after their family. The mother later watches the couple walk past her window, gossiping and staring, and is convinced that everyone in the village is talking about her. Of course, gossip, anxiety about gossip, and the coincidence of happening upon people you know on a hike happen everywhere, but certainly more frequently in a small island village like Sandur than in a large city. The Faroese are quick to say that, for better or for worse, everyone there knows everyone else’s business.

While I was in the Faroes, more than one person told me life could be difficult there for people with any sort of psychiatric disorder due to the scarcity of specialized treatment in a remote and small society. In an odd coincidence, I also saw a striking similarity between the family in Ludo and the one readers meet in the first part of Lognbrá, by Heðín Brú—a famous Faroese novelist and Ottarsdóttir’s grandfather. Both works explore the world of a young child caught between a mother’s depressive instability and a kind but meek father.

In a small community, the family gains even more importance as the basic building block of society. There are fewer distractions from the crucial and complex interpersonal relationships of the home. “Coziness” is often cited as a fundamental aspect of Scandinavian culture, when everyone celebrates togetherness and the glowing warmth of being inside together despite darkness and bad weather just beyond the door. But what happens when you find yourself shut in with mental illness? As night falls on the house and a storm rises on the sea, Ludo’s small family gathers around a board game in what feels like a corruption of the very concept of coziness.

“The Faroe Islands can be quite eerie, can’t they?” commented my friend who watched the movie with me, “In your pictures, they look so beautiful, but I think they would also be a great setting for a horror film. You could really play with the feeling of being trapped.”

I think Ottarsdóttir already has.

Language learners will be happy to know that the movie takes place entirely in Faroese. The cinematography and quality of the acting are impressive, especially considering the constraints placed on the production by the tight budget and small pool of Faroese actors. It’s well worth a watch for those interested in the topic, artistic films, or Faroese cinema.
Faroese is a very cool language. Make sure you don’t miss out on its coolness. We are presenting a list of simple words and phrases in Faroese to help you show your coolness.

**Good morning.**
Góðan morgun. (go-wan mor-gun)

**Good day.**
Góðan dag(in). (go-wan dya-(in))

**Good evening.**
Gott kvøld. (gott kvuhld)

**Good night.**
Góða nátt. (go-wa nawt)

**Hello.**
Halló. (hah-loww)

**Hello/Hi/Hey.**
Hey. (hey)

**How are you?**
Hvussu gongur? (kvuss-u gong-ur)

**Fine, thank you.**
Væl, takk. (Ve-al, tahk)

**What is your name?**
Hvussu eita tygum? (kvuss-u oyt-a tee-yoon?)

**What is your name?**
Hvussu eitur tú? (kvuss-u oyt-ur tew?)

**My name is _____ .**
Eg eiti _____ . (ey oyt-i _____ .) 

**Nice to meet you.**
Stuttligt at hitta teg. (stut-leeegt at heett-a teyh)

**Goodbye**
Farvæl. (far-vell)

**Yes**
Ja. (ya)

**No**
Nei. (noy)

**Please.**
Vinarliga (veen-ar-lee-ya)

**Thank you.**
Takk fyrí. (takk fee-rih)
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Faroese (English)</th>
<th>Faroese (Faroese)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thanks.</td>
<td>Takk.</td>
<td>(takk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re welcome.</td>
<td>Einki at takka fyrí.</td>
<td>(oyn-chih at takka fi-ree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t understand.</td>
<td>Eg skilji ikki.</td>
<td>(ey shil-yi ich-e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where is the toilet?</td>
<td>Hvar er vesið?</td>
<td>(kvar er ve-see?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse me. (getting attention)</td>
<td>Orsaka.</td>
<td>(or-sha-ka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse me. (begging pardon)</td>
<td>Umskylda.</td>
<td>(um-shil-da)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t speak Faroese [well].</td>
<td>Eg dignity [so vell] at tosa føroyskt.</td>
<td>(ey doo-ih ih-chih [soh vell] at toh-suh fur-ist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you speak English?</td>
<td>Dugir tú eingilskt?</td>
<td>(doo-urr too oyn-jillst?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there someone here who speaks English?</td>
<td>Dugir nakar her eingilskt?</td>
<td>(doo-urr nak-ar hair oyn-jillst?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help!</td>
<td>Hjálp!</td>
<td>(yolp!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look out!</td>
<td>Ansa tær!</td>
<td>(an-sa te-ar!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is a really nice magazine.</td>
<td>Hetta er eitt ordiliga gott blæð.</td>
<td>(hett-ah air oyt ord-ill-lee-yuh gott blaah.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You should tell all your friends about it.</td>
<td>Tú skuldi sagt òllum vinunum frá tí.</td>
<td>(too skull-dih sagt udd-lunn vee-nuh-nunn fraw tui)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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The Faroese Festival: Summer

The Ólavsøka National Holiday and G! Music Festival

by Miranda Metheny
Summer in the Faroe Islands is short but exquisite. The grass glows a vibrant green, flowers bloom, and the sun doesn't set long enough for darkness to take hold. Even at midnight, the sky glows a beautiful blue and calls you to enjoy every hour. It's no wonder that the Faroese want to fit as much fun into the summer as possible. June, July, and August offer a huge variety of festivals and other activities.

The most traditional are the local festivals, or “stevna,” which feature rowing competitions, sports, activities for children and of course dancing and partying in the evenings. There are also many other types of local festivals and events. The last and greatest of the annual stevna is Ólavsøka, in Tórshavn, which is also the national cultural, political, and religious holiday of the Faroe Islands.

In recent years, music has also become a crucial part of the Faroese summer. Each summer features a calendar of concerts spread evenly through the summer months, different genres, and unique venues ranging from cafes in downtown Tórshavn to churches on remote outer islands. There are also several huge music festivals, including the magical G! Festival in the village of Gøta.
Celebrations - The Faroese Festival Summer

Ólavsøka – History
Ólavsøka is the national holiday of the Faroe Islands, and is a religious, political, cultural and sporting high point in the year. The Faroese parliament, or løgting, opens at this time. Historically, this was the time of the year that the most people from the various Faroese villages and islands would crowd into the capital to socialize, trade, and celebrate.

Ólavsøka means “St. Olaf’s Wake.” Like the smaller holiday of Olsok in Norway, Ólavsøka commemorates the death of the Norwegian King Olaf II Haraldsson, who is credited with bringing Christianity to Norway. King Olaf died on the 29th of July 1030 at the Battle of Stiklestad. However, the Faroese parliament predates this, so although the date has been changed, the origin of the holiday is even older.

Ólavsøka – Festivities
Ólavsøka traditionally takes place over two days, Ólavsøka eve on July 28th and Ólavsøka proper on the 29th. However, in recent years some events have in fact started on the 27th, with concerts and the Faroese gay pride festival taking place before the main holiday.

One of the centerpoints of Ólavsøka is the rowing competition. At the various stevna throughout the summer, regional teams have competed in rowing, but the finals are held at Ólavsøka. There are also various folk concerts, chain dancing, performances, a carnival for children and a variety of processions.

A typical Ólavsøka celebration involves wearing traditional Faroese dress as you wander from event to event, meeting people you know and sharing pictures and conversations with them. There are many restaurants selling delicious Faroese food here and
Celebrations - The Faroese Festival Summer

Some of the major Festival Summer events (Late May – August):

Norðoyarstevna – The stevna of the northern islands (Klaksvík)

Mentanarnáttin – An event celebrating both modern and traditional Faroese culture, with a huge schedule of varied events. Some call it “the little Ólavsøka.” (Tórshavn)

Eystanstevna – The stevna of Eysturoy (Runavík)

Sundalagsstevna – The stevna of The Sound (alternates Kollafjørður, Hósvík and Hvalvík)

Voxbotn Music Festival – Music festival with local and international bands (Tórshavn)

Jóansøka – Midsummer and the stevna of Suðuroy (alternates Tvøroyri and Vágur)

Varmakeldustevna – A local festival (Fuglafjørður)

Útoyggjastevna – The stevna of the outer islands (location alternates greatly)

Fjarðastevna – A local festival (alternates Vestmanna, Skáli and Strendur)

Vestanstevna – The stevna of Vágur (alternates Sandavágur, Miðvágur and Sandavágur)

G! Festival – A magical summer music festival showcasing Faroese and international Music (Gøta)

Ólavsøka – The national cultural, political, and religious holiday of the Faroe Islands (Tórshavn)

Summer Festival – A huge summer music festival (Klaksvík)

Ovastevna – A festival celebrating local rowing hero Ove Joensen (Nólsoy)

there. At night, if you like, you can change out of the Faroese dress and go out on the town, as the bars and clubs are bustling.

The ending of Ólavsøka is perhaps its most distinctive moment. Thousands of people gather in the square for an All-song, or public singalong. Faroese and a few tourists alike all join together to sing about twenty Faroese songs from a printed booklet. This is the official end of the festival, but then, as everyone prepares to go home, a different sort of song starts coming over the speakers – a Faroese kvæði, or ballad. Everyone then links arms and starts dancing to the ancient Faroese ring-dance. It’s a magical moment that brings together the most traditional and beautiful elements of Faroese culture.
Scenes from the Summer

Top left: Hanus G. Johansen and Cantabile perform at Ólavsvöra.

Middle left: The crowd at Voxbotn is in high spirits despite a drizzle of rain.

Bottom left: Delicious Faroese langoustine is grilled and sold on the street.
Scenes from the Summer

**Top Right:** The Faroese parliament's first session is open to the public.

**Middle Right:** Beautiful Faroese national clothing at Ólavsøka. This woman inherited her home-made and unique whale-bone jewelry from her mother.

**Bottom Right:** The Faroese national dress can come in many colors, with green and red the most traditional but blue, purple, and other colors also appearing.
Celebrations - The Faroese Festival Summer

**G! – History**
The G! Festival is widely considered to be the most important musical event in the Faroe Islands, and is, together with Summarfestivalurinn, one of the Faroes two biggest music festivals. Remarkably, this event takes place in the tiny fjordside village of Gøta, where an astonishing percentage of Faroese musical talent originates.

G! was founded by two locals, Sólarn Solmunde and Jón Tyril, whose goal was to change the Faroese musical landscape. The first year was 2002, and the line-ups and attendance have been growing steadily since then. It has been estimated that up to one fifth of the Faroese population attends the G! Festival, and it is a veritable who’s who of Faroese cultural icons.

**G! – Festivities**
G! takes place each year over the course of three days in July, a few weeks before Ólavsøka. The venues are built around the village of Gøta – on the beach, on the playground, in an old building foundation by the shore, and even in private homes. Gøta sits at the end of a long fjord, ringed by high green mountains almost like a natural amphitheater. As the festival begins, boats fill up the cozy harbor or sit out in the sparkling fjord, campers race to get the best spots in a huge party field, and the little village lights up with the wonderful energy that comes from music and togetherness.

People of all ages and interests flock to G! There is a
Modern Faroese Music

Faroese music has a rich heritage including not only the unique ballads, but also several other types of traditional church and secular music. Today, the Faroese have an astonishing number of musicians per capita, and you can find Faroese music in any genre, ranging from heavy metal to experimental, pop to country (oddly enough, several Faroese artists record in Nashville, Tennessee!)

The main Faroese record label, Tutl, has given most Faroese musicians their start. They organize many concerts in a huge variety of Faroese venues, and also operate a store in Tórshavn which is the best starting place for any visitor interested in learning more about Faroese music. The head of Tutl, Kristian Blak, is himself a notable composer and musician, and the founder of the Nordic ensemble Yggdrasil.

Here are some of the biggest names in Faroese music:

**Eivør Pálsdóttir** – From her birthplace of Gøta, the home of the G! Festival, Eivør has brought her unique voice and incredible stage presence to a huge variety of genres, from folk to rock, pop, and experimental music. She has recorded songs in Faroese, Danish and English as well as Icelandic.

**Teitur Lassen** – Generally considered to be the most world-famous of all Faroese musicians, Teitur’s popular English-language music has brought him a global following.

**Frændur** – This band, which was formed in the town of Klaksvík in the 1980’s, has produced some of the most famous and beloved of all Faroese songs, without which no Faroese party is complete.

**Annika Hoydal** – Recording most of her work in both Faroese and Danish, Hoydal is known as an actress and a singer-songwriter who records traditional and children’s music.

**Orka** – Famous for building their own instruments and constantly experimenting, Orka started out with acoustic vocal songs in Faroese and has since delved into dark electronic and atmospheric music.

**Byrta** – One of the newest and hottest Faroese bands on the scene right now, Byrta’s electro-pop sound was influenced by eighties music. The duo performs in Faroese and is rapidly gaining popularity in the Faroes and Iceland.
Celebrations - The Faroese Festival Summer

Viking village for children, little restaurants set up on the spot to serve Faroese seafood and other delicacies, hot tubs and saunas by the ocean, and other attractions... but the focus is always on the music. Each year, musicians from both all around the Faroe Islands and all around the world converge there for unforgettable concerts that go late into the eternally lit Nordic nights.

When the weather is good, Syðrugøta at G!-time might be the finest place on earth, as the fjord sparkles in the sunlight and the landscape seems too verdant and spectacular to be real. Even when the weather is bad (it's the Faroes, after all, and it's been known to rain, storm, and even flood the stages) the spirits of the Faroese seem unquenchable, and the party continues.  

Children play on the beach during G! - the festival grounds are open and free each day, before closing to ticket-holders for the headline evening concerts.

Hot-pots and a sauna are set up on the beach during G!, and small restaurants selling sushi, snacks, gourmet food, and alcohol fill the small village.

View From the Town

The Parleremo Blog

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Being a foreigner is a lot like being a child.
Everything is fresh, new, exciting, fun... and humbling.

- Miranda Metheny
Flag of the Faroe Islands flying at Funningur, Eysturoy, Faroe Islands
The is a reprint of a chapter from “An American in Iceland”, written by Samuel Kneeland and published in 1875. The author visited Iceland, the Faroe Islands, the Orkney Islands, and the Shetland Islands in 1874.

Our pilot left us in about two hours, to pursue our unerring course, thanks to good seamanship and the power of steam, through fog and wind and storm, to the Faroes, distant one hundred and eighty-five miles in an north-westerly direction. Darkness was not added to the other dangers, a sort of semi-twilight, in spite of the misty clouds, lasting all night. The sea was very rough, and most of us paid tribute to Neptune, who moreover asserted his victory over me by making me thoroughly uncomfortable; I was very glad that no importunate newspapers were looking to me for a hurried account of the strange things we saw. In the afternoon we came in sight of the southern island of the group, passing some fine scenery which the occasionally lifting fog enabled us to get glimpses of. As usual, we got lost in the fog, and had to feel our way very slowly among these dangerous rocks, knowing that the strong currents must have taken us somewhat out of our course. We finally were cheered by the sight of the greater Diman, a melancholy-looking rock, about a mile long by half a mile wide, one of the most inaccessible of the group; even this rocky monster had a pleasant look, as it told us just where we were. The shore is so steep that no boat can be kept there, and the wretched inhabitants are almost shut off from their kind; the clergyman, who visits them once or twice a year, has to be pulled up by ropes from the cliffs. It is a great place for the breeding of seabirds, whose young and eggs supply a large part of the food consumed there.

The mountains were, at least, half a mile high, and the cliffs with their base in the sea and their summits in the clouds, with precipitous sides rent by deep and narrow chasms, tenanted by innumerable sea birds, whose harsh voices were louder than those of the wind and waves, were singularly grand and picturesquely dreary.

The Faroe Islands, as far as coast scenery and people are concerned, are a sort of Iceland in miniature. Settled by the same fierce Northmen who were driven from Norway by Harald, the Fair-haired, their greater distance from Great Britain, and their consequently more isolated situation, in connection with the difficulty and danger of reaching them in the foggy and stormy northern ocean, have given them a peculiar character, very different from the poetic and literary Icelanders of the olden time.

Though nominally subject to Norway, they were practically independent, refusing to pay tribute, and apparently for a long time forgotten by the mother country.
say of the olden time, as at the present day, poetry, literature, and even ordinary energy have ceased to be characteristic of the down-trodden, too much governed, Iceland. The name is derived from faer, a sheep. The group rises from the ocean, between 61° and 62° N. lat, with high perpendicular cliffs of the wildest character, indented by deep gulfs or bays, and fashioned into the most fantastic forms, tenanted by innumerable birds. About twenty out of thirty-five small islands are inhabited, the rest being naked rocks, inaccessible, except to sea-birds, and daring bird and egg hunters. The extent of open sea in all directions, three hundred and twenty miles to Iceland and over four hundred to Norway, exposes them always to the fury of the waves, which dash, even in calm weather, with violence against the rocks; the water is very deep close to the shore, and the currents are very strong and dangerous in the fogs which there abound. The climate is not severe, being tempered by the ocean; grass grows at an elevation of 2000 feet, though the mountain tops, some 900 feet higher, are perfectly barren; the absence of trees here, as well as in Iceland, is due to the high winds and the salt mist, and not to excess of cold. Barley, the only grain which will grow in Faroe, ripens at elevations varying from 80 to 400 feet, according to northern or southern exposure.

The Faroese, though belonging to the same stock as the Icelanders, were never, like them, a literary people, probably, because the population was a very fluctuating one with decided piratical tendencies, most of the early colonists having come from the Lofoten Islands, off the coast of Norway. Though nominally subject to Norway, they were practically independent, refusing to pay tribute, and apparently for a long time forgotten by the mother country, their fierce manners being rendered more peaceful by Catholic Christianity.

From their exposed situation they were frequently plundered by pirates, English, French, and Turkish, though afterwards protected by Denmark, when this country was united to Norway. During our revolutionary war, much of our colonial produce found its way there, whence it was smuggled into Scotland. Being wholly unprotected, during the wars of the northern nations, they suffered great privations from the interruption of trade, to such an extent that England, in 1809 to 1811, allowed them to trade with some of her ports, as stranger-friends, too feeble to act as enemies and powerless as friends. This will account for the extent to which the English language is spoken by the old traders at Tórshavn. In 1814, the peace restored them to Denmark, which has monopolized the small trade ever since, with the usual oppression of monopolies.

Their agricultural products are small, as, from the rocky character of the soil, most of the cultivation must be done with the hoe instead of the plough. Beside the pursuit of the cod and herring fisheries, the taking of seals and whales is an important industry. When a school of dolphins is in sight, the joyful news is communicated by signal fires, and the boats, to the number of several hundred, soon form a huge semicircle around the prey, driving them into shallow water with shouts and blows, where they are quickly killed by the excited crowd. The flesh is eaten fresh and dried, and the blubber, is converted...
into train-oil for food and various uses. Almost all kinds of sea-fowl, the gulls and cormorants excepted, are eaten, fresh, salted, or dried, as, also, are their eggs. They raise many cattle, ponies, and sheep, for which the fields are well calculated; from the latter, as in Iceland, the wool is pulled instead of being shorn, the portions ready to fall being taken at each time. The people are healthy and long lived, but do not increase rapidly.

It was 9pm when we reached the capital, Tórshavn, on the principal island, Streymoy, which contains about one hundred and forty-three square miles, being on an average about twenty-six miles long and nearly six miles wide. These islands were known to the Norwegian rovers before the settlement of Iceland, this last having been discovered by the former toward the end of the ninth century; they were not chosen for fixed habitations till the wars of Harald drove the chiefs and their followers from Norway to the northern islands. They are now the property of Denmark, and at Tórshavn we found the ships of his Danish majesty, just arrived from Copenhagen on their way to attend the Iceland millennial celebration; they had put in for the double purpose of taking on coal and of visiting this distant dependency.

We saw the flag of Denmark, a white cross on a scarlet ground, floating from the masts of two men-of-war, from several smaller vessels in the harbor, and from numerous points on shore, which we at first took for grassy hillocks, but afterward discovered to be roofs of turf-covered houses. We had left British waters, and were anchored in the seas once ploughed by the Scandinavian sea-kings. We here first came into contact with a pure Norse people, and first saw the form of house almost universal in Iceland, with low walls and roofs overgrown with grass-bearing turf, hardly distinguishable from the ground about them except for the wreaths of smoke and the flags. It being quite light we went ashore soon after coming to anchor.

The town is situated on the rocky hills surrounding two exposed bays separated by a peninsula; the houses are placed in utter confusion, wherever intervals between the black rocks or any level surface will permit. This, while it adds in one sense to the picturesqueness as seen from the sea, makes getting about in any definite direction very difficult. There can hardly be said to be any streets, but steep, irregular, narrow, stone-paved lanes, sometimes in front and sometimes in the rear of the houses, and often admitting only persons going in single file; the pavements were slippery from fish-skin and refuse, and the sides redolent of fish and the slops of the houses; it reminded me of some of the streets in New York near the wharves and markets. The houses were generally small and miserable, made of wood, tarred to preserve them from dampness, with sod-covered roofs; the fronts and projecting corners were adorned by strings of fish in every stage of decomposition, the attempt at drying them in such a moist air being, according to my nasal organs, often a decided failure. The odors of fish and oil predominated everywhere, and the interior of the houses betokened discomfort, dampness, closeness, and want of cleanliness, which must be a fruitful source of disease and premature death, especially in children. It was a dismal day, and it was to me impossible to associate any idea of home with such dwellings. In some of the better houses, of two or more stories, lace curtains and flowers gave a cheerful look.

This gentle-mannered race seemed out of place amid the rugged scenery, bleak rocks, howling winds, and stormy seas of the Faroes.
to the windows, and evidences of woman’s taste. Though night by the clock, it was light, and the shops were open and crowded. We went into one pestiferous place, through a dark, ill-paved, and winding alley, where we found men drinking in one corner, and in another some women buying gewgaws for the morrow’s celebration with all the eagerness, chatter, and apparent satisfaction of a shopper on Broadway. The odor was overpowering from reeking garments, wet shoes, unclean bodies, and the organic and inorganic stock upon the shelves; anything could be procured here from a needle to an iron chain, from a bit of candy to a pound of snuff, from a keg of fish to a bottle of brandy.

The Norse characteristics of the people were evident at a glance; the abundant light hair and beard, blue eyes, ruddy complexion, tall stature, and stalwart form, revealed the old Viking race. The physical appearance and dress of the people were much like those of the Norwegians, and their habits those of fishing communities in high latitudes; a very little agriculture, a little grazing, and a great deal of fishing, are their occupations. They were very respectful, raising their Phrygian caps as we passed, and bidding us good-evening. The men wore breeches of woollen material, of their own manufacture, buttoned below the knee, and upper garments like northern fishermen; long woollen stockings and seal-skin shoes, kept from the wet pavement by clattering wooden clogs, completed their attire. I saw nothing peculiar about the female costume; the inevitable shawl around the shoulders, and a head-dress consisting of a black-silk handkerchief tied behind with a point toward the forehead, were not at all becoming.

Just before our arrival the king had made his official entry, and the harbor was still gay with flags and rushing boats, and the streets were spanned with arches and strewed with flowers. The people in gala dress were quietly watching the processions, and the petty officials were strutting around with all the pomp and feathers of one of our militia trainings. Such an important event as the landing of a king, for the first time since their occupation by Denmark, was deemed worthy of a formal address by the mayor, but so overpowered was he by the grandeurof the occasion, that his loyal heart could not bear the emotion, and he fell dead at the very feet of the king. This, of course, gave a tone of sadness to what otherwise would have been universal rejoicing.

The town, named after the god Thor, ordinarily contains about eight hundred inhabitants, many of whom are Danes, and this element of the population was very demonstrative for obvious reasons; the place was now crowded with strangers from all parts of the island to see the king, who had been expected the day before. His majesty occupied the governor’s house on the hill, and the road thereto from the arch of welcome on the shore had been strewn with flowers. His officers were disposed in the houses of the principal residents, to a degree that the operations of the post-office, the schools, and the courts of justice, were practically suspended.

Passing the night on board our steamer, as we always did when in port, we retired at 11 pm, it still being quite light. We went ashore the next day, Sunday, to attend church, whither the king and his party went to participate in a simple, tedious medley of inaudible prayer, poor singing, and a prosy sermon in the Danish language. The wash of the waves made a landing difficult on the slippery rocks, the only wharves being irregular heaps of stones; it required considerable dexterity to avoid getting wet feet and being thrown down; but friendly hands were extended to save us, and we landed in good condition. Our boats carried the American and English flags, which the people seemed to look at with more enthusiasm than at the Danish.
The crowds were well dressed, and every thing, as yesterday, had a gala look, on land and water, as far as flags could make it. We visited various public buildings and private residences, but could not get access to any officials as all were busy at breakfast with their stranger guests. While waiting for the opening of the church, after looking at the tombstones in the near church-yard, we ascended a hill behind the useless fort, the only decent walk in the place, and thence had a fine view of the town, its harbor, the gardens and fields of grass and hardy vegetables, and the mist covered mountains in the distance.

At 11am we went to the church, where seats had been reserved for us; it was of the plainest description, with uncushioned seats innocent of paint, accommodating a few hundred persons on the floor and small gallery. The altar, over which was a faded picture of the entombment of Christ, was at the rear of a space raised a few inches above the floor, and in this space seats had been arranged for the king and his suite. Soon the bells began to ring, the great doors were thrown open, and the king entered, quietly walking with the prince Waldemar to his seat, bowing on each side as he passed along. He was simply dressed in the Danish naval uniform with a few decorations; his appearance was dignified, his expression kind and genial, with an entire absence of that hauteur and formality which some potentates think indicate the divinity of royalty. Indeed, had he made a display, in proportion to that of some of his followers, the islanders would have liked it better, as most of them looked upon the visit as a mere pageant, without any political significance or possible benefit to them.

The audience were quiet and devotional, joining in the hymns with fervent but unmusical voices. The women looked care-worn and prematurely old, and I saw no signs of beauty. There was no pretension to dress, though upstairs I caught a glimpse of some Paris-looking hats, doubtless accompanied by three-button gloves.

As in Iceland, the people here are all Lutherans; but the altar, the burning candles, and the dress, attitudes, and tones of the clergyman, gave a semi-Romish character to the service, at variance with the independent, intelligent character of the audience. I think all were glad when the ceremony was over, as neither fresh ideas nor fresh air were supplied during its continuance. The clergyman was enclosed in a boxlike pulpit on one side, high above the heads of his congregation; he looked very queer with his stiff, plaited Elizabethan ruff about his neck. The royal party seemed bored by the platitudes of the sermon, and, at the close of the services, decomposed, before the audience, with great alacrity.

After the service the king and his party returned to the frigate to dinner, to which many of the people had been invited; the vessel was about two miles from shore, and the sea quite rough, yet boat-load after boat-load, including many ladies, went to and fro all the afternoon and late into the night. Some of the guests, high in church and state, are currently reported to have imbibed more stimulating...
drinks than were consistent with Sunday gravity or steady locomotion; judging from the hilarity, and evident disarrangement of ruffs, epaulettes, and hats, this may safely be set down as a fact.

The people were admitted to see the tables and the cabins, the former rich with gold and silver, and the latter gaily furnished; the ship was, however, of the old-fashioned type, slow, with many hundred tons of old iron in the shape of cannon, whose space on such a long and rough voyage had much better have been occupied by coal, saving thereby much labor and time.

Among other places, we visited the school, occupied then by the guests, and were pleased to see in this distant island modern apparatus for physical out-door exercise. Living as they do chiefly on barley meal, milk, sheep, fish, and sea-fowl and their eggs, the health of the children is often affected by the foul air of the houses; the school, therefore, not only educates the mind, but does much to invigorate the body.

This gentle-mannered race seemed out of place amid the rugged scenery, bleak rocks, howling winds, and stormy seas of the Faroes; we should rather have expected a coarse, bold, semi-savage horde, as the legitimate descendants of the Vikings of old.

The king was everywhere saluted with respect, but not with enthusiasm, except by his Danish subjects; the same indifference I noticed in Iceland. The old Scandinavian independence, almost contempt for royalty, as such, was publicly manifest; they had nothing to ask, and it never entered their heads that a king of Denmark, the first that ever visited these islands, had the inclination, if he had the power, to grant them any political favors. His visit they attributed to curiosity, and they gratified their own at the same time at his expense.

The day had been windy and rainy, and the night was unpromising; we could see that the waves outside were dashing with violence against the rocky shores, and we retired, hoping for a calmer sea the next day. Early the next morning we sailed, in advance of the royal vessels, for Iceland, 320 miles to the north-west, which we ought to reach, wind and weather permitting, in about forty hours.

The Faroese are long-lived, and the climate, notwithstanding its occasional severity and sudden changes, must be a healthy one, or, as in Iceland, the race would long ago have been exterminated by the utter absence of all sanitary precautions to prevent disease.

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The streets of Parleremo are named after famous writers for the language of each quarter. This is where we take a quick look at why they are famous.
Hans Jakob Jacobsen was born 17 August 1901 in Skálevík, Faroe Islands. He was a great Faroese novelist and translator who was best known by his pen name Heðin Brú. He is considered to be the most important Faroese writer of his generation and he helped establish Faroese as a literary language.

Before his rise to fame, Brú started out at the age of 14 as a fisherman. He studied agriculture in Denmark for several years in the 1920s and when he returned to the Faroe Islands he became an agricultural adviser to the Faroese government in 1928. This job allowed him to travel to all parts of the country, during which time he made many contacts with ordinary village people. He began writing about what he saw in the form of novels.

His first two novels, Lognbrá (“Mirage”), published in 1930 and Fastatørk (“Firm Grip”), published in 1937, focused around the changing way of Faroese life as farming gave way to the fishing industry.

A similar theme was presented in his 1940 novel Fedgaráferd (“The Old Man and His Sons”), 1940), which became his most famous work. It has been translated into other languages, first Danish in 1962 (Fattigmandsære), then into German in 1966 (Des armen Mannes Ehre), and finally into English in 1970 (The Old Man and his Sons). It was his first novel to be translated into English. The novel tells the story of the transformation from a rural society into a modern one of fisheries, highlighting the conflicts between the generations that occur.

This was not his only theme, however. Brů’s 1963 novel Leikum fagurt satirised the Faroese politics of the interwar period. He wrote about Faroese villages in both Men lívio lær (1970) and Tað stóra takid (1972).

Brú also wrote three collections of novellas as well as translating two Shakespeare plays, Hamlet and The Tempest. He published a six-volume collection of Faroese fairy tales, Ævintýr I–VI, between 1959 and 1974.

Besides writing, Brú was the coeditor of the literary periodical Vardin and a member of the Faroese Scientific Society. He continued writing and also translated many works of world literature into Faroese up until his death in 1987.

**Bibliography**

**Novels:**
- 1930 Lognbrá (Mirage)
- 1935 Fastatørk (Firm Grip)
- 1940 Fedgaráferd (The Old Man and His Sons)
- 1963 Leikum fagurt (Let’s Play Nicely)
- 1970 Men lívio lær (But Life Laughs)
- 1972 Tað stóra takid (The Big Take)

**Collection of short stories:**
- 1936 Fjallaskuggin (The Mountain Shadow)
- 1948 Fólkakatrað
- 1966 Purkhús
- 1971 Búravnurin

**Poetry and poems:**
- 1934 Snípan
- 1953 Ásannað
- 1956 Fáramir
- 1961 Tey sjúku við strondina
Mariannasgøta

Marianna Debes Dahl
24 November 1947 -

Marianna Debes Dahl is a Faroese writer. She was born in 1947 in Vestmanna and grew up in Tórshavn. She started attending a Danish boarding school when she was 12, then later spent a year as an exchange student in the USA. From there, she studied literature at the University of Copenhagen, then became qualified to teach on the Faroe Islands in 1975.

She worked for a few years as a school teacher, a college teacher, and a museum instructor at the Faroe Island’s nature museum, the Føroya Nátturugripasavn.

Dahl started writing in 1975, creating works in a variety of different genres. She has written for all ages, from small children to adults, in the forms of short stories, novels, plays, travelogues, and translations of other works. She has also worked with the national Faroese Broadcasting company, Kringvarp Føroya, producing radio broadcasts along with translating and editing materials.

In 1978 she received the Barnamentanaheiðoursløn Tórshavnar byráðs, which is a children’s cultural prize of Tórshavn City Council, given out annually.

She held the position of president for the Association of Writers of the Faroe Islands from 1980 to 1981, becoming the first woman to do so. Dahl has also been chair of the association of writers, and from 1983 to 1993 was a critic for the communist newspaper Fríu Føroyar.

Dahl’s first book was a children’s book, Burtur á heiði, which she wrote for a competition and won. It focused on the contrast between rural and urban life, a theme she focused on in later works. Her main publications are Lokkalogi, published in 1984, Onglalag (1986), and Faldalín (1988). Dahl’s historical novel, Vívil (1992), focused on the norms of capitalist society confronting socialist and female cultural values.

Dahl is the first women to write an autobiography in Faroese, Úti á leysum oyygjum (“Out on loose islands”), which was published in 1997. She is married to a college teacher, editor, and text-book author, and has two children.

Bibliography

Novels
• 1984 Lokkalogi
• 1986 Onglalag
• 1988 Faldalín
• 1992 Vívil

Autobiographies
• 1997 Úti á leysum oyygjum

Short stories
• 1978 Millumleikur
• 1978 Fløkjan
• 1980 Lepar
• 1980 Sjósta skúlaárið

Children’s books
• 1975 Burtur á heiði
• 1979 Dirdri
• 1981 Skilnaður

Books for small children
• 1983 Bjarta og snigilin
• 1984 Døgg er dottin

Books for teaching in the Faroese language for children
• 1983 Ása fer í skúla

Travelogues
• 1982 Latið alt í sólina

Plays
• 1979 Skálabotir (written together with J.S. Hansen)
• 1990 Bardagábørn

Translations
• 1982 Uppreisnin (stories from South Africa)
During medieval times, this village was the episcopal centre of the region, but it is now composed of just a few houses made of stone and wood, with the majority of the older houses having been washed away by a fierce storm in the 16th century.

Today, the site also acts as a museum which is open almost daily during the summer months. It is still of interest for some of its more notable buildings. First is a church that was built in 1111 and dedicated to the king.

Here also stands the stone ruins of a great cathedral, which was built around 1300 by a bishop. It was never completed, however, and to this day, it still has no roof. It is the largest and most beautiful medieval building in this region. Even without a roof, it was used until 1538. The stone walls, built with rock taken from the nearby hills, are over 1.5 meters thick and 9 meters high.

Another historical landmark here is a 900 year old farmhouse that has a turf roof. The wood from which the house is made was obtained accidentally when the ship which was carrying the timber to another place sank. The wood washed up on the shore where it was collected and used to construct the farmhouse. The house has been home for 18 generations to the same family line and is one of the oldest wooden houses of the world which is still inhabited.

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Language Boat is a blog about language learning in natural environments. Here you will find personal narratives about language learning experiences, in addition to tips, ideas, technical stuff like grammar, pronunciation, etc., cultural observations, and language resources.
The Faroe Islands are famous worldwide not only for their beauty and culture, but also for the grindadráp, or whale slaughter. In an average year, the Faroese kill approximately 800 pilot whales in order to eat their meat and blubber, which is the Faroese national dish. This practice has provoked considerable controversy among anti-whaling organizations. In this article, we will look at the discussion from the perspective of two Faroe Islanders.
Some of the most common arguments against Faroese whaling are claims that the pilot whales are endangered, that it is a tradition that has no place in the modern world, that whales are an intelligent species that should not be eaten, and that whale meat is contaminated and unfit for human consumption. Faroese journalist Elin Brimheim Heinesen responds to these arguments in excerpts taken from her blog [http://heinesen.info/wp]:

The Faroese should stop killing pilot whales because the pilot whales are endangered.
The pilot whale is one of the most common whale species in the oceans all over the world, especially the long finned pilot whale. Pilot whales are not endangered according to the authorities in this matter. The NAMMCO (North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission) is the real authority on all matters regarding the North Atlantic pilot whale. The NAMMCO base their estimation on sightings – and they estimate that the number of long finned pilot whales in the North- and East Atlantic is 780,000, and that’s excluding the West Atlantic, so the number might be, even significantly higher. The ACS (American Cetacean Society) agrees with those numbers and the IUCN also agrees that the pilot whale hunt is, as they say: ‘probably sustainable’. The IWC doesn’t consider itself an authority on small cetaceans, of which the long finned pilot whale is one. So the pilot whale is not on the list of endangered animal species. The Sea Shepherd organisation stands alone in its claims that the long finned pilot whale is endangered.

The Faroese have killed pilot whales for at least 1,200 years, so the pilot whales should probably have been extinct by now, if the pilot whaling in the Faroes was a threat to the population as a whole. Since 1584 (that is how long it’s been carefully monitored) the Faroese have killed 850 pilot whales (in later years around 800) on average a year, so that’s a tenth of a percent (0.1%) of the pilot whale population only in the North Atlantic, which is very far from exceeding the pilot whales’ reproduction rate at around 2%. There is nothing to indicate that the pilot whale population is in decline. As long as the pilot whale is not endangered, this is not a rational argument. So this is a failed argument.

The Faroese should stop killing pilot whales because such a tradition doesn’t belong to the 21st century. They shouldn’t do this just because it is a tradition.
People in the Faroe Islands don’t kill pilot whales because it is a tradition. They do it for food, as they’ve always done. But opponents call this practice of getting food ‘a tradition’, because this way of living off of the natural resources of the ocean has been common on these islands for more than 1,200 years.

Pilot whale meat and blubber is so common and natural for the Faroese to eat that to them this food is no different than beef or bacon is to people in other countries, where they have a tradition for eating cattle or pig meat. It’s just that you can’t breed pilot whales in the same manner as you can breed cattle or pigs. But why would you want to do that, if there is an abundance of pilot whales around the islands living free their whole life? Why would the Faroese deprive the whales of that privilege and somehow cage them or put them in ocean feed lots?

Who’s to decide what belongs to the 21st century or not? Or which traditions are worth keeping for the Faroese or not? It is definitely not for people outside the Faroe Islands to decide. The right word for this is ethnocentrism. That is: judging another culture solely by the values and standards of one’s own culture. The ethnocentric individual will judge other groups relative to his or her own particular ethnic group or culture, especially with concern to language, behavior, customs, and religion. Ethnocentrism is not rational, so again a failed argument.

The Faroese should stop killing pilot whales because the whales are intelligent, sentient, and sociable.
Sea Shepherd founder Capt. Watson claims that it is a sign of highly developed intelligence that the whales have figured out how to live in harmony with nature, unlike us humans, so therefore they are more intelligent than people. Okay, if that is his logic, he could just as well claim a squirrel is more intelligent than humans. A squirrel also lives
in harmony with nature, and nobody would say that a squirrel is more intelligent than a human being for that reason. Capt. Watson is just being manipulative.

There is no doubt that bottle-nosed dolphins are some of the most intelligent creatures in the animal kingdom. Dolphins are good at learning tricks, especially in captivity – also pilot whales to a degree. Dolphins are proven more intelligent than most other animals, but they are still very far from being as intelligent as people. And not all whales rank that high. The pilot whale is in the dolphin family, but pilot whales are not the most intelligent of the dolphins. Pilot whales are not especially intelligent in comparison to many other mammals either.

Other animal species that humans kill for food are also proven highly ‘intelligent’. So this argument is inconsistent, if those who claim it is wrong to kill pilot whales because of their intelligence do not also oppose the killing of other intelligent animals for food.

Whether humans should refrain from killing “intelligent” animals or not is a matter of opinion. And there is no rational reason for claiming that one opinion is morally more right than the other. Also: How intelligent should an animal be to obtain a rank between the untouchables? How would you measure that to be able to set a border between highly intelligent and “stupid” animals?

Yes, pilot whales are sentient and sociable, that is true. And so are all other animals too, more or less. Animals, most people in the world eat – like cows and pigs, even chickens – are also sentient and sociable. So you can’t on the one hand say that the Faroese shouldn’t kill whales on these grounds, and at the same time accept the killing of other sentient and sociable animals.

If you are against the killing of animals because they are sentient and sociable, you are inconsistent if you don’t include all animals in the equation – that is: you must also oppose the killing of cattle, pigs and chickens, yes, any animal in fact. That is unrealistic.

The Faroese should stop killing pilot whales because pilot whale meat and blubber are contaminated and it is dangerous for the Faroese people’s health to eat it.

The Faroese will likely stop the pilot whaling gradually over the coming years, because pilot whale meat and blubber does contain mercury/methyl mercury at levels considered too high. Pilot whales also contain other toxins coming from man-made pollution, like PCB and DTD. And there are indications that exposure to some of these contaminants may affect human fetuses and their development. This fact is absolutely relevant and the majority of the Faroese people recognize this. But the anti-whaling activists often exaggerate the effects of this contamination, which are more subtle than they let people believe. There has, for instance, not been one single reported fatality due to eating pilot whale meat and blubber, not ever.

The Faroese health authorities recommend that pregnant women, or women who plan on being pregnant soon, should not eat pilot whale foods at all, as the critical levels for methyl mercury intoxication of pregnant women and fetuses are lower by a factor of 2–5 than for the general population. They do not recommend that pilot whale meat and blubber should be served to younger children, while it seems to be within safe limits for the rest of the population to eat pilot whale meat and blubber once to twice a month.

The Faroese people are not indifferent to this unfortunate development. People are taking action personally – many do not serve pilot whale meat and blubber to their children any longer, and most younger women as well as child-bearing women choose not to eat pilot whale meat and blubber at all. But as long as the health authorities haven’t recommended that the Faroese population as a whole completely refrain from eating pilot whale meat and blubber (which, by the way, is the Faroese national dish), and, as long as pilot whaling is done in a responsible, sustainable, care-taking manner, the Faroese see no reason for stopping pilot whaling altogether. And they think that there is absolutely no valid reason for others to interfere in Faroese matters, trying to force the Faroese not to utilize this natural resource in their own country.
The Grind: Why the Faroese Hunt Whales

The Hunter's Perspective

by Morten Ejner Hønge

The Faroe Islands are a small island nation very bound in deep traditions, with our ring-dance, our national costume, and our long history. We live very close together, and we still cherish our values and our heritage as we have done throughout the centuries. We are descended from the great Vikings, and it is from them we get our stubbornness. We have eaten pilot whale since we first arrived on these islands of the North Atlantic over a thousand years ago, and it is still part of a daily life: we are not prepared to stop doing this because some foreigners disagree.

Whale hunting was very necessary in the old days, when hunger was a major problem in the Faroe Islands. Sometimes we had to eat seaweed or worse just to survive, and anyone caught stealing a sheep received the death penalty, so you can imagine how the discovery of the pilots whales seemed like a gift from heaven. The meat would be shared among everyone who had participated in the grind, or whale killing, and everyone who lived nearby. It was free, good meat from the sea. Whale meat still makes up a significant portion of our diet today.

Since April 2014, an organization called Sea Shepherd has been in the Faroe Islands. Its members have tried everything they can to get the world to hate us for killing whales. In return, we have treated them like our own people and been very nice to them, even if they are there to try to get us to change our way of life. But we won’t stop, because it is part of our culture and tradition. For us, the whales have always been a valuable food source for which we have been extremely grateful.

The whales are killed in the most humane way possible. We don’t go looking for them, but only drive the whales that have come closer to the shore themselves onto the beach so we can kill them quickly and humanely. A knife called a mønustingar is struck into the whale near the blowhole, killing it instantly. After the whale is dead, it is cut to allow its blood to flow out. When the whale is bled out, we drag it onto the beach. The bleeding is done in the water because it is cleaner and gets the blood cleansed away quickly. This makes the process look messy, because the water is full of red blood after the killing. But if you would kill a cow in the ocean instead of in a slaughterhouse, hidden from sight, it would look very similar.

After the whales have been dragged up onto the beach, the meat is divided among everyone who participated, and who lives in the area. The beach is full of people during this process, so it is a very social event and everyone gets their share. Much of the meat also goes to retirement homes, hospitals and the homeless to feed people. None of the meat goes to waste; everything is used.

Whale meat helps many people who have little money for food, and it is therefore still a great need in the Faroe Islands and will probably continue to be so for many years yet. Because we are so far away from the rest of the world, our food is very expensive to import. Fishing is a major part of the general collective Faroese food source, and most people eat fish here several times a week.

We feel it is much better to eat fresh food from the sea than meat from factory farmed animals. It has long been a necessity for us to kill the whale and we will continue to do so for many more years, sticking to our old traditions that have kept us alive on these remote islands for many years. We will never forget these things, because they are what makes us Faroese.

The Faroe Islands are a great place on earth; a place that must be experienced at least once in a person’s life. Come here and discover some of the traditions we have and enjoy our great hospitality. We love our nature and take great care of it. Discover an amazing place on earth; come visit the Faroe Islands!

Morten Ejner Hønge is a grindadráp supporter, hunter, and founder of the "whale wars faroe island - hvalakríggj í Føroyun" group on Facebook, which has people discussing both sides of the whaling controversy.

https://www.facebook.com/groups/whalewarsfaroeislan/948935571787983

Parrot Time | Issue #11 | September / October 2014
I was born in the late 50’s in the Faroe Islands. At that time we pretty much had a subsistence way of life in this remote place on earth with a hostile climate and an environment that humans could never hope to survive in without eating animals.

In winter, our region is stormy and dark for months on end, and the summer is very short. There are no trees except some imported trees in sheltered areas inside the villages and just a few edible plants. And yet, somehow we, the Faroese people, have survived here for more than a thousand years, relying on an intimate knowledge and understanding of our environment for our survival, constantly walking a tightrope between life and death.

In my childhood we still harvested most of our own food, integrating healthy, wild edibles into our diet. Most of our food supply was right outside our front door, and we used time-tested methods for living off the land and the sea. Our people were unencumbered, only depending on nature’s resources and the skill in our hands. Sudden food cost increases or empty grocery shelves caused by turmoil on the international market were not our biggest concerns. The only uncertainties were the whims of nature.

I remember the foods of my childhood. We ate mostly fish, some sheep meat and quite a lot of whale meat and blubber, served with homegrown potatoes. And afterwards we would have porridge made from homegrown rhubarbs, for instance. Our storage of dry and salted food and our new freezer were filled with fish, sheep meat and whale meat and blubber, my family had provided directly from natures larder. Our dairy products were from local farmers. But the grains, flours and sugar we used for baking bread and cakes were imported. And we only ate vegetables and fruits, if we could afford it. They were very expensive, because they came from far away, so they were luxury foods, we could not have everyday.

But things changed. Our fishing became industrialized. We got money on our hands. And suddenly we were able to import exotic foods from countries far away, like oranges and bananas. When I was a teenager in the 70’s, we probably already ate fifty-fifty, half traditional Faroese food, half regular European food. Today the division is more like eighty-twenty, at least for people living in the bigger towns, while people in smaller and less affluent villages still try to reduce food costs by holding on to the old traditional diet.

But it’s very doubtful whether the modern foods replacing the traditional foods, are any better or healthier. The opposite is more likely. The closer people live to towns and the more access they have to stores and cash-paying jobs, the more likely they are to have westernized their eating. And with westernization comes processed foods and cheap carbohydrates—soda, cookies, chips, pizza, fries and the like. The young and urbanized are increasingly into fast food. So much so that type 2 diabetes, obesity, and other diseases of Western civilization are becoming causes for great concern in our country too.

Well, it seems that there are no essential foods—only essential nutrients. And humans can get those nutrients from diverse sources. One might, for instance, imagine gross vitamin deficiencies arising from a diet very scarce on fresh fruits and vegetables. People in southern climes derive much of their Vitamin A from colorful plant

Sheep grazing on a hill in the Faroe Islands. They are part of the Faroese standard diet.
foods, constructing it from pigmented plant precursors called carotenoids (as in carrots). But vitamin A, which is oil soluble, is also plentiful in the oils of cold-water fishes and sea mammals, as well as in the animals’ livers, where fat is processed.

These dietary staples also provide vitamin D, another oil-soluble vitamin needed for bones. Those living in temperate and tropical climates, on the other hand, usually make vitamin D indirectly by exposing skin to strong sun—hardly an option in the long and dark winters in the north. If you have some fresh meat in your diet every day and don’t overcook it, there will be enough vitamin C from that source alone to prevent scurvy.

Traditional Faroese practices like freezing or drying meat and fish and frequently eating them raw, conserve vitamin C, which is easily cooked off and lost in food processing, so eating dry fish, sheep or whale meat and blubber is as good as drinking orange juice.

Fats have been demonized in modern western cultures. But all fats are not created equal. Wild animals and/or animals that range freely and eat what nature intended have fat that is far more healthful. Less of their fat is saturated, and more of it is in the monounsaturated form (like olive oil). What’s more, cold-water fishes and sea mammals are particularly rich in polyunsaturated fats called n-3 fatty acids or omega-3 fatty acids. These fats appear to benefit the heart and vascular system. But the polyunsaturated fats in most Europeans and Americans’ diets are the omega-6 fatty acids supplied by vegetable oils. By contrast, whale blubber consists of 70 percent monounsaturated fat and close to 30 percent omega-3s.

A young woman of childbearing age may choose not to eat certain foods that concentrate contaminants. As individuals, we do have options. And eating our fish, our sheep and our whale meat and blubber might still be a much better option than pulling something processed that’s full of additives off a store shelf.

How often do you hear someone living in an industrial society speak familiarly about “our” food animals? How often do people talk of “our pigs” and “our beef?” Most people in the modern world are taught to think in boxes and have lost that sense of kinship with food sources. But in the Faroese hunting and farming village culture the connectivity between humans, animals, plants, the land we live on, and the air we share has not been lost—not yet, at least. It is still ingrained in most Faroese people from birth.

Many of our young people and people in bigger towns are quite influenced by western urbanized culture and food habits. They are slowly getting alienated to our old traditions. However, it is still not possible, really, to separate the way many of us still get our food from the way we live in this society as a whole. How we get our traditional food is intrinsic to our culture. It’s how we pass on our values and knowledge to the young. When you go out with your father, mother, aunts and uncles to fish in the sea, to hear the sheep, handle the wool, to gather plants, to hunt birds and other animals or catch whales, you learn to smell the air, watch the wind, understand the way the currents move and know the land. You get to know where to pick which plants and what animals to take. This way of life has been an integrated part of our culture for so long, and it still is to a degree, especially in the smaller villages, where people share their food with the community. They show respect to their elders and the weak in the society by offering them part of the catch. They give thanks to the animals that gave up their life for their sustenance. They get all the physical activity of harvesting their own food, all the social activity of sharing and preparing it, and all the spiritual aspects as well. You certainly don’t get all that when you buy prepackaged food from a store.

That is why some of us here in the Faroe Islands are working hard to protect what is left of our old way of life, so that our people can continue to live and work in our remote villages, as independently as possible from polluting transport systems and a fraud-full modern economic infrastructure. Because if we don’t take care of our food, it won’t be there for us in the future. And if we lose our foods, we lose who we are.

Elin Brimheim Heinesen is a Faroese journalist and freelance consultant. For more on this subject and her complete blog visit http://heinesen.info/wp/.
With the recent movement by Scotland to become independent from the United Kingdom, there was some talk that someone from the Faroe Islands should be made the new King of Scotland.

This idea seems very far-fetched, considering that there doesn’t seem to be any connection between the two islands. The Faroe Islands are under Danish control and have never been under Scottish rule. So how does this claim make any sense?

Well, there is an old legend on the Faroe Islands about a Scottish princess having fled to the islands centuries ago, and that her descendants are now living there. In what was once Kongsdaal, now Korndalur, (“The Corn Valley”), on the island of Nólsøy, the foundations of a few small huts or cottages can still be found among the hay fields and potato-patches of the village of Èilde. One of these ruins, which is rather larger than the rest (but still quite small), is known among the islanders as the Prinsessutoftir, or “The Princess’s Ruin”. According to the legend, long ago, a Scottish princess lived here. She was a daughter of Jacobus, King of Scotland, and she married in secret to a page named Ëric, who came to her father’s Court from abroad. Knowing the King was bound to find this out and would not approve, the princess sailed away with her husband and many followers in a ship. They arrived in the Faroe Islands, on Nólsøy, where the Black Death had recently ravaged the population.

The princess had her servants build her a house in Kongsdaal, where she soon gave birth to a son. Her father eventually found her on the islands, and the first person he saw when he landed on Nólsøy was his little grandson, who happened to be playing on the shore. The boy was so like his mother that the king instantly knew that he was his grandson. The boy’s beauty warmed King Jacobus’s heart, and he forgave the princess and her husband. He begged them to return to Scotland with him, but they declined to do so, and he returned to Scotland without them.

This is all legend, and there is no historical evidence to prove it, but the people of the island are sure she was the daughter of King James II of Scotland. Since the vote for Scottish independence failed, we didn’t get to see this claim put to the test. Perhaps there will be another chance in a few years. It would make for a very unique connection between the two countries.
Adventures in the Land of Maybe

An American girl’s island-hopping, party-crawling, tallow-tasting, scarf-knitting, tongue-twisting, car-stalling and sheep-stalking attempts to understand what it means to be Faroese.
Introduction To The Faroese Ballad Of Nornagest
- taken from Stories And Ballads Of The Far Past Translated From The Norse (Icelandic And Faroese) With Introductions And Notes By N. Kershaw, 1921

The Ballad of Nornagest was published for the first time by Lyngbye in 1822 in Færöiske Kvæder om Sigurd Fofnersbane etc. In his visit to the Faroes in 1847-8, Hammershaimb took down the ballad from oral recitation at Sumbø. He afterwards collated his version carefully with those of Svabo, Schrøter and Lyngbye, and published the result in Færöiske Kvæder, Vol. I, Copenhagen, 1851. This is the version of the ballad translated below.

Lyngbye points out that Nornagest has become a well-known character in modern Faroese legend. We certainly note his popularity in the ballads, which is no doubt due to his association with Sigurth in the original story. In some ballads he appears as a companion in arms of the latter and even as a great warrior himself. He it is who rides with Sigurth and Virgar to meet the giant in Holmgarth (cf. Rísin í Holmarðum, v. 33), and in Ragnarlikkja (cf. v. 39 ff.) “the fierce Nornagest” sails with Sigurth, Brand, and Virgar to slay the King of Girtland; and so too in other stories.

Many similar folk-tales are known from Icelandic and Danish sources as well as from many parts of Europe and Asia.
1. Eitt er fræðið um Nornagest,
-tú tarvst onki rão geva í vanda-
Tílíkum göðum gekk han næst,
-hvør ein svenur geri so-
Oksar tôv vóru leiddir á torg
Og so fram á friðu borg

2. Hvita tjald nívur niður frammí.
Enn gellir lúður í stavni,
Kalhur kom heim við ungum syni,
Kelling situr so hákonu blíð,
Hvita tjald nívur niður frammí.

3. Kongur ælur at hóggur teir,
-tú tarvst onki rão geva í vanda-
Tílíkum göðum gekk tað við gleim.
-hvør ein svenur geri so-
Kongurin hjó so miklið hógg,
At blóðið dreiv við benjar døgg

4. Allir duttu teir deyðir niður,
-tú tarvst onki rão geva í vanda-
Øxin stóð í stokki við.
-hvør ein svenur geri so-
Allir lovaðu hilmahógg,
Blóðið dreiv um benjar døgg

5. Har kom kall við høkjurtvær,
-tú tarvst onki rão geva í vanda-
Studdist so fast á báðar tær.
-hvør ein svenur geri so-
Kongurin kvøðurkalliblítt.
"Hvílovartú ikkihøggið mítt"

6. Yvrið harra var høggði tít,
-tú tarvst onki rão geva í vanda-
Í forðum ság eg vænari slikt.
-hvør ein svenur geri so-
Tá skalv bæði ley v og lund,
Sjurður høgg ormin í miðju sundur."

7. anst tú siga frá Sjurð svein,
-tú tarvst onki rão geva í vanda-
Hann var frægur av fornum ein.
-hvør ein svenur geri so-
Tað kann eg siga Sjurði frá,
Tilikan eingin við eygum sá.

8. Høgni var ein heidúrsmann,
-tú tarvst onki rão geva í vanda-
Ljotan av lit so kendi eg hann.
-hvør ein svenur geri so-
Gunnar var so reýstur og ríkur,
Fróður og blíður og Gunhild líkur.
9. Fróðurogblíðurog Gunhild líkur,
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva i vanda-
Seint man fødast annar silíkur.
-hvør ein sveinur geri so-
Faðir min átti fríðlítgt bú.
Fjól tað miðið um manga kú.

10. Egsatáskógvioggoymdihest,
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva i vanda-
Helst tá ið veðurið var best.
-hvør ein sveinur geri so-
Riðu teir um díkið heim,
Gunnar og Hógni og Sjúrður svein.

11. Riðu teir um díkið tá,
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva i vanda-
Eg vand sevin og sá hárá.
-hvør ein sveinur geri so-
Gunnars hestur sprakk um fyrst,
Gunnar kandi væl tann dyst.

12. Hóagna hestur sprakk um tá,
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva i vanda-
Grani fastur í feni lá.
-hvør ein sveinur geri so-
Sjúrðar hestur sprakk um síðst,
Tá gav Guð mær goðan list.

13. Grani fell i fenið fast,
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva i vanda-
Galtagjørðin sundur brast.
-hvør ein sveinur geri so-
Allir stigu úr söðlum teir,
Gunnar, Hógni og Sjúrður svein.

14. Allir tuga á dýran hest,
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva i vanda-
Sjúrður tugar á teymar mest.
-hvør ein sveinur geri so-
Ofta havi eg um díkið trøtt
Bæði dag og døkka nátt.

15. Gestur, ger mær viljan ein
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva i vanda-
Tváa mín góda gangara rein’.
-hvør ein sveinur geri so-
Sylgjan, ið sundur brast fyrí mær,
Hana, Gestur, gevi eg tær.

16. Riðu so fram at eina á,
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva i vanda-
Eingin kündi til manna sjá.
-hvør ein sveinur geri so-
Eg tváði hans bróst og bringa rein’,
Hans lær og legg og langa bein.

9. Wise and friendly and like Gunhild,
- refrain 1 -
His match will never be born again.
- refrain 2 -
My father owned a peaceful farm
He hosted a lot of cattle there.

10. I was in the forest herding horses,
- refrain 1 -
Especially when the weather was fine.
- refrain 2 -
They all rode home by the moor,
Gunnar, Högni and Sigurd swain.

11. They all rode around the moor,
- refrain 1 -
I was a boy and watched them.
- refrain 2 -
Gunnar’s horse jumped over first,
Gunnar knew that sport so well.

12. Högni’s horse jumped over next,
- refrain 1 -
Fast stuck Grani in the fen.
- refrain 2 -
Sigurd’s horse jumped the last,
He did so with great joy.

13. Grani fell and stuck in the mud,
- refrain 1 -
the saddle girth broke in pieces.
- refrain 2 -
they all jumped from their saddles,
Gunnar, Högni and Sigurd swain.

14. They all pulled the precious horse,
- refrain 1 -
Sigurd pulled the most.
- refrain 2 -
I have often walked the moor,
both by day and the darkest night.

15. Gestur, please do me a favour,
- refrain 1 -
Wash my good steed clean.
- refrain 2 -
The saddle buckle which broke for me,
Gestur, I will give to you.

16. We rode on to a river,
- refrain 1 -
Where no man was in sight.
- refrain 2 -
I washed his breast and chest,
His thigh and shin and long leg.
17. Góðan ganga gjørdi eg rein',
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva í vanda-
Siðan hevði meg Sjurður til svein.
-hvær ein svenur geri so-
Vær riðum so fram á Fávnís bóll,
Har skein gull sum geisar av söl.

18. Eg tók eitt hár av sama hesti,
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva í vanda-
Tað var sitt og vaxió mest.
-hvær ein svenur geri so-
Tað var favn og fethi sitt.
Glóvaði røtt sum silvur hvitt.

19. Eg haví í forðum farið vitt,
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva í vanda-
Ei funnið ljós og livið mitt."
-hvær ein svenur geri so-
Kóngur gav honum skáft og skeið,
Og sjálvur segði han kalli leið.

20. Í Fraklandi er vatnið vitt,
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva í vanda-
Har er ljós og livið titt.
-hvær ein svenur geri so-
Leingi kavaði kurtis mann,
Aður hann beint á blýggið fann.

21. Kórnar prestur skírði hann,
-tú tarvst onki ráð geva í vanda-
Tá leið liv sum ljósið brann.
-hvær ein svenur geri so-
Tá ið ljós í lyktu var brennt,
Tá var liv og levað ent.

22. Hvita tjald bíviður frammí.
Enn gellir lúður í stavni,
Kalur kom heim við ungum syni,
Kelling situr so hákonu blíð,
Hvita tjald bíviður bíviður frammí.

Nornagestur arrives in the court of
King Ólafur Tryggvason, who was
trying to convert Iceland, Norway
and the Faroes to Christianity.

Nornagestur tells the king of his life
and his memories of heroes of the
past.

At the end of it, he is baptised, and
the flame of the candle he is
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Ormurin Langi

Ormurin Langi is one of the most popular of the Faroese kvæði, or ballads, though it is a relatively modern one. The early 1800's were a good time for the Faroese ballads, as the people started collecting and celebrating the oldest ones as well as inventing new ones. It was at this time that a farmer named Jens Christian Djurhuus, from the village of Kollafjørður, wrote Ormurin Langi's 86 verses about the Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvason and his longship, Ormen Lange – The Long Serpent.

Today, Ormurin Langi is one of the best known of the Faroese ballads, and even has a Norwegian translation. When the Faroese metal band Týr covered the ballad in 2002, their version became popular throughout the Faroe Islands and Norway.

Here, we are giving just the verses, with translations, used in Týr's version.

1. Viljð tær höyravkvæðimítt,
   viljð tærorðum trúgva,
   um hann Ólav Trygvason,
   hagar skal ríman snúgva.

   [refrain, sang after each verse]
   Glymur dansur í høll,
   dans sláíð ring
   Glaðir ríða Noregs menn
   til Hildar ting.
   [end of refrain]

3. Knørrur varð gjørdur á Noregs landi,
   gott var í honum evni:
   sjúti alin og fýra til
   var kjøhrin millum stevni

8. Harkom maðuroman
   við sterkum boga í hendí:
   “Jallurin av Ringaríki
   hann meg higear sendi.”

1. Will you hear the ballad of mine,
   Will you my words believe,
   About Olaf Tryggvason,
   Here’s how the rhyme revolves.

   [refrain, sang after each verse]
   Raucous dance in the Hall,
   Dance, form a ring,
   Gladly ride Norway’s men,
   To the Hild’s[War]-Gathering.
   [end of refrain]

3. A ship was made in Norway’s land,
   Goodly make was she:
   Seventy eëls and four lengthwise
   The keel from [prow to] stern

8. Here comes a man down [from the hill]
   With a sturdy bow in hand:
   “The Jarl of Ringariki
   Has here sent me.”
10. “Einar skalt tú nevna meg, væl kann boga spenna,
Tambar eitur mín menski bogi,
ørvar drývr at renna.”

11. “Høyr tú tað, tú ungi maður,
vilt tú við mær fara,
tú skalt vera mín ørvargarpur
Ormin at forsvara.”

12. Gingu teir til strandar oman,
rikir menn og reystrir,
lunnar brustu og jørðin skalv:
teir drógu knørr ûr neysti.

71. Einar spenti á tríða sinni,
Ætlar jall at raka,
tå brast strongur av stálí stimna,
i boganum tókt at braka.

72. Allir hoyrdi strongin springa,
kongurin seg undrar:
“Hvat er tað á minum skipi,
sum ógvuliga dundrar?”

73. Svaraði Einar Tambarskelvir
kastar boga sín
“Nú brast Noregi úr tínum hondum,
kongurin, harri míni!”

Nú skal lætta ljóði av
eg kvøði ei longur á sinni
nú skal taka upp annan tání

dreingir leggi í minnið

10. “Einar shall you call me,
Well can I stretch the bow,
Tambar hight my manly bow,
For striving at shooting arrows.”

11. “Listen here, young man,
Will you fare away with me?
You shall be my champion-arrower,
The Serpent, [my longship] to defend.”

12. They come down on the strand,
Doughty men and strong,
The rails break and the earth shakes:
They tug the ship from the shipyard.

71. Einar drew a third time,
Meaning to strike the Jarl,
Then burst the string of sturdy steel,
In the bow it seemed to break.

72. All heard the string snap,
The king said in wonder:
“What’s that making my ship,
Rumble so dreadfully?”

73. Answered Einar Tambarskelvir
Casting the bow of his
“That was Norway breaking from your hand,
King sire, lord of mine!”

Now I will let up this song awhile,
I’ll recount not longer this time
So I shall take up the second tale,
And may it be remembered far and wide.

Ormen Lange refers to the longship of Olav Trygvasons. Here are two representations of it. The first is an illustration by painter Halfdan Egedius. The second is from a postage date, honoring the saga. The title image is from The Battle of Svolder, by Otto Sinding. It is a representation of a naval battle fought between King Olaf Tryggvason of Norway and an alliance of his enemies, the basis for the Ormurin Langi.
Letter From the Editor
Writer: Erik Zidowecki
Images: Petey: Faroe Islands map

Coming Home to Faroese - The Why and How of Learning a Small Language
Writer: Miranda Metheny
Miranda Metheny is the Petite Polyglottal American, who travels the world in search of language, culture, and interesting stories.
Images: Miranda Metheny: Miranda on rock (title); child playing on boat; Miranda in native costume; lovely ladies; mother and child at harbour; small concert; natural harbor; fishing boats

Danish and Faroese: A Biography
Writer: Uni Johannesen
Uni Johannesen is a 22-year-old Faroe Islander from the village of Norðragøta who is interested in science and languages.
Images: Miranda Metheny: Students on beach (title)
John Ubal: Picture of Uni
Johan Petur Dam: Road sign in Faroese
Petey: The Løgting building, 1950s
Edited by Miranda Metheny

At The Cinema - Ludo
Writer: Miranda Metheny
Sources: • "Ludo" Internet Movie Database <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3707316/>
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Basic Guide to Faroese
Writer: Erik Zidowecki, Miranda Metheny, Uni Johannesen, Johan Petur Dam

Celebrations - The Faroese Festival Summer
Writer: Miranda Metheny
Images: Miranda Metheny: youth at campgrounds [splash page]; young men play in harbor; women wearing Faroese national dress; Miranda at barn; sing-along; Hanus G. Johansen and Cantabile performing; crowd at Voxbotn; Faroese langoustine grilled and sold; Faroese parliament; Faroese national clothing woman; Miranda in Faroese national dress; Greta Svabo Bech; Danish pop singer Nabiha on beach stage; Festival-goers gathered at stage; variety of Faroese artists; Eivør Pálsdóttir at living room concert; Children playing on the beach; Hot-pots and a sauna; lighthouse [images background]

Revisited - The Faroe Islands
Writer: Samuel Kneeland
Images: webmastermarkt: Old postcard of Tórshavn
OrbitOne: Pan image of Tórshavn taken from old fort
David Stanley from Nanaimo, Canada: Interior of the Havnar Kirkja
Erik Christensen, Porkeri: Eystaravág, Tórshavn
Petey: Eggjarnar [title]; The Løgting, parliament, 1864; Street in Tórshavn from the book; Tórshavn morning; Sheep on a hill; Two girls in Faroese costume; Skansin, old fort of Tórshavn; Tórshavn Cathedral and harbourside buildings; Flag of the Faroe Islands [splash page]
Sources: • "The Faroe Islands" An American in Iceland Samuel Kneeland, Boston: Lockwood, Brooks, And Company. 1875
Word on the Streets - Famous Faroe Islanders

Writer: Sofia Ozols

Images:
Petey: Brú, Dahl
kristen1: Hay drying

Sources:
• "Heðin Brú" Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He%C3%B0in_Br%C3%BA>
• "Hedin Brú" Encyclopædia Britannica <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/81882/Hedin-Bru>
• "Marianna Debes Dahl" Famous Fix <http://m.famousfix.com/p26934519/marianna-debes-dahl/>

Where Are You?

Writer: Sonja Krüger

Images:
Erik Christensen, Porkeri: Mystery image

The Grind: Why the Faroese Hunt Whales

Writer: Elin Brimheim Heinesen, Morten Ejner Hønge, Miranda Metheny

Images:
EileenSanda: Whale hunt [title]
earl53: Pilot whales
Miranda Metheny: Whale steak and vegetables
Erik Christensen: Sheep, scenery from Hvalba, Faroe Islands
Arne List: Tvøst og spik - pilot whale meat

Sources:
• "If We Lose Our Foods, We Lose Who We Are" Elin Brimheim Heinesen, heinesen.info
  <http://heinesen.info/wp/blog/2012/05/21/if-we-lose-our-food-we-lose-who-we-are/>
Miranda was the editor for these articles and wrote the introductory paragraphs

The Legend of the Scottish Princess

Writer: Erik Zidowecki

Images:
Miranda Metheny: Prinsessutoftir
Petey: Nólsoy stamp

Faroese Ballads

Writer: Miranda Metheny, Erik Zidowecki

Images:
Erik Christensen: Beinisvørð north of Sumba [title]
Petey: Faroe stamp of the ballad of nornagest; The death of Nornagest, by Gunnar Vidar Forssell; Svolder, by Otto Sinding; Illustration for Olav Trygvasons saga; Faroese stamp 555 Ormurin langi

Sources:
• "Stories And Ballads Of The Far Past Translated From The Norse (Icelandic And Faroese) With Introductions And Notes" N. Kershaw; Cambridge 1921

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