

Day 10 Aug. 3 – Isafjordur, Iceland

The day started with calm seas and overcast sky as we were entering the wide entrance to channel leading to Isafjordur, Iceland. Low hanging clouds touched the tops of the mountains that lined the channel.

As we approached the harbor of Isafjordur we could see snow on the surrounding mountains.



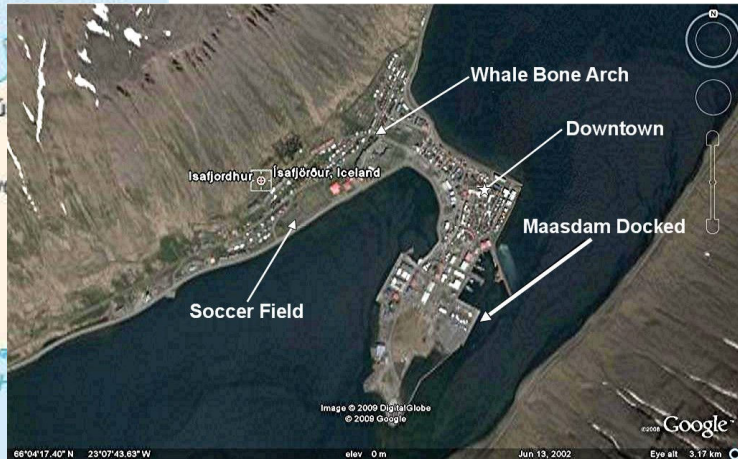
The town of Isafjordur was visible at the waterline of a massive cloud topped ridge.

We have been pleased that the ports of call in the North Atlantic have been exactly as advertised. They are small and easy to explore. Isafjordur, Iceland, continued on this theme of small towns. The whole town is captured in the following two photos taken as the Maasdam approached the dock.



Our cabin was located on the other side of the ship, away from town, and our view appeared to be that of a remote mountainside across a narrow strip of harbor water.

The map below shows the location of Isafjordur in Iceland with Isafjordur in the peninsula extending northwest from the mainland. Also shown is a Google photographic image of the whole city with arrows pointing to the location of the Maasdam at the dock and some sights we visited in the town.



The Maasdam was cleared by the local authorities by about 8am and we left the ship as soon as we could get ourselves organized. The temperature was comfortable but there was a light rain falling so we wore our rain jackets. Our first stop was the Cruise Passenger Terminal on the dock, as shown on the left. It was the smallest Cruise Passenger terminal we had

seen. However, it was well stocked with maps of Iceland and Isafjordur along with helpful people at the desk to answer our questions. We stopped in briefly and picked up a map to guide the walk around the city that we planned to take. A very nice service that was also offered by the Cruise Passenger Terminal was an Internet connection. Several passengers had already brought their laptops over and were busily engaged in email traffic and other Internet activity.

Not far from the Cruise Passenger Terminal was a Maritime Museum that we visited.

This was a rustic building that contained a nice collection of artifacts from the old fishing industry where small boats would go out to sea primarily for fishing but also for whale hunting. It was hard to imagine the difficult lives led by those hard working men in these freezing cold waters. This seal skin coverall shown in the photo on the right probably provided reasonable protection but it doesn't look very comfortable. Iceland fishermen were major providers of salted codfish to the world. An example of the appearance of salted codfish was provided by one of the exhibits in the museum as shown below.

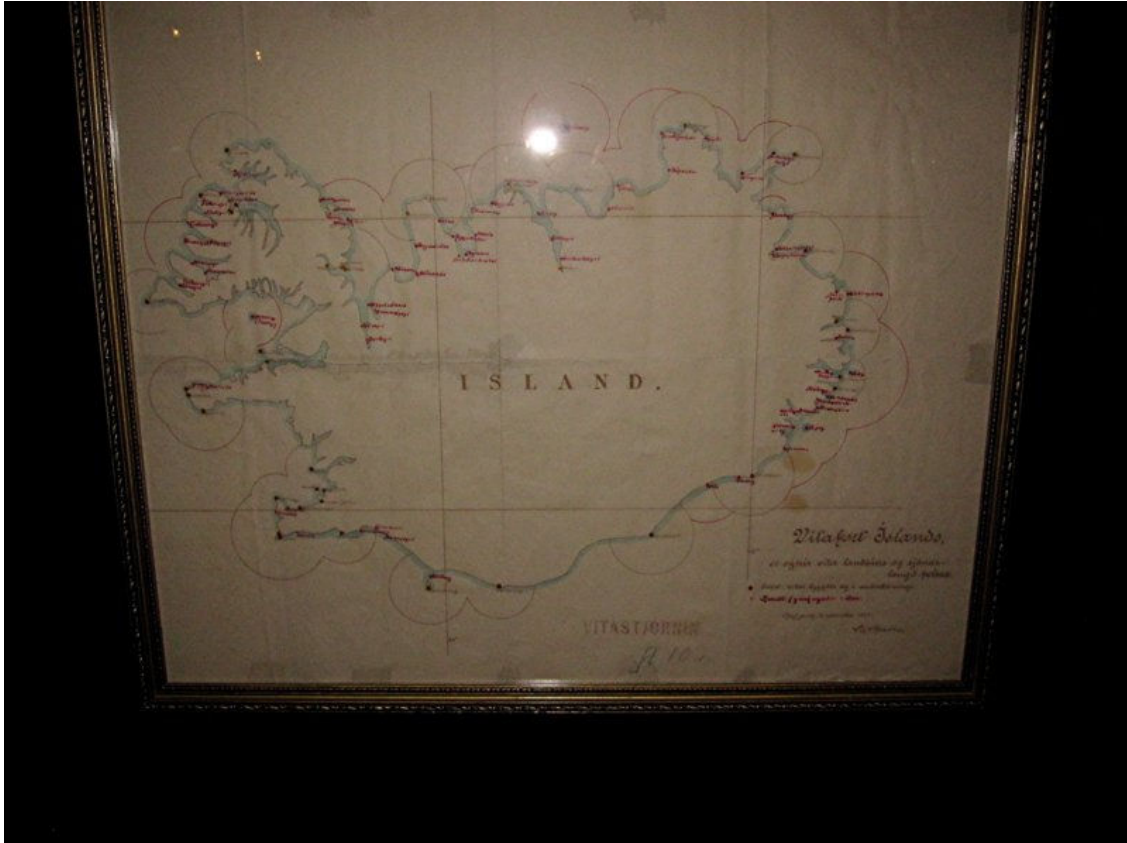


contained a picture on the wall showing the evolution of the accordion instrument played by the fishermen.

The hard life of the fishermen was softened somewhat by music provided by the accordion. Apparently this versatile instrument could be played by the sailors and it was rugged enough to survive life at sea. There were exhibits of accordions all around the museum. One display, shown below, was particularly large and



An old (1917) map of Iceland hanging on the wall of the museum caught our eye because the name of Iceland on the map was spelled “Island”. We understand that in the Danish language “is” means the English word “ice”. Therefore, “Island” in the Old Danish map of what was then a Danish possession was obviously “Iceland” in modern usage.



Orlin has always been bugged by the crazy way some English words are spelled. The generic English word for small piece of land surrounded by water is “island” and it is one of those irritating words because of the silent letter “s”. We are now wondering if the English word for island was derived from the Danish name for this important island in European history. If so, the silent “s” would seem to have some legitimate heritage and not be just the random accident of some ancient English dialect. This possibility is under study.

As we left the Maritime Museum we came upon a nice group of ladies in Icelandic costume who were posing for pictures. We quickly took advantage of the situation and snapped this picture shown below.



This was a holiday in Iceland, similar to Labor Day in the US, and most of the shops were closed. However, we had our raincoats and a map so we set out to walk around the 4 or 5 streets that make up the main part of Ísafjörður.

Still in the dock area we ran across a nice multilingual “Welcome to Ísafjörður” sign that was perfect for Barbara’s library card photo.

There was also a colorful flower bed nearby to brighten up our rainy day.



There was also an extensive informal graffiti like mural painted on a concrete wall that appeared to have a message of some sort. We connected with the image of a Viking boat with a guy in the front holding something that had the approximate shape of the nation of Iceland. The peninsula where Isafjordur is located was made to look like the tongue of a dragon-like head made up of the rest of the island. We got the picture shown on the right.



We found a gas station where we could check the price of 95 octane gas in Isafjordur. As shown on the sign in this photograph, a liter of gas was priced at 186.8 Iceland Krona. The current exchange rate is 1 USD = 131.590 Iceland Krona so each liter of gas would cost about \$1.42 USD. That price works out to approximately \$5.70 USD per gallon. This is a relatively high price compared with the US but in view of the remoteness of Isafjordur and unknown taxes it doesn't look completely outrageous. However, we observed that car traffic was rather thin on this holiday Monday morning and high gas prices may contribute.



Proceeding along the street bordering the harbor we passed the well kept city soccer field. We were nearing the edge of the city which was only 2 blocks wide at that point so we turned away from the harbor and took a short street up the hill to a street headed back in to the center of town. From that vantage



point we got a picture of the Maasdam at the dock with the soccer field in the foreground.

The houses along the city streets were multistoried separated structures probably single family dwelling. The house colors weren't as vibrant as we had seen in Greenland but the houses and yards were well kept. Some of the yards had extensive decorations reflecting a connection with boats and fishing, such as the one shown on the right.



The map of the city showed a Camping Site near the soccer field. From our perspective it



was unusual for a city to provide camp sites near the center of town. There were nice looking hotels in town and this camp site showed a commendable interest in providing for low cost accommodations. The tents we saw, as shown on the left,

appeared to be well kept and probably not intended for a long term stay at the camp site.

Further down the street we came to a series of houses without front yards that may have represented 10% of the houses in town. They did have small side yards. We guessed this may have been the low rent district of Isafjordur. A picture of the houses is shown on the right.



From this area we took a short walk in the direction of the downtown area. While exploring this part of Isafjordur we found the Whale Bone Arch that was made from the jaw bones of a giant whale. It was set up in a small park across the street from the modern looking Hospital. The large bone arch made for a nice photo opportunity that many Maasdam people were taking as we did in the photo on the left.



We next came across the cultural center of the town shown in the photo below. Because of the holiday the building was not open. It occupied the center of a large open area near the center of town.



Most of the early morning while we walked around the streets of Isafjordur in the rain there was only an occasional Maasdam



passenger that we encountered. As we entered the downtown area about noon it was the crowds of passengers appeared and it was clear that they had given up hoping for better weather. Since there were very few natives out today the Maasdam people appeared to flood the streets of this small town.

Parked on the street was a car with an easy-to-remember number. All the license plates we saw started with the letter “i” and not “1”. Also each plate had the flag of Iceland and the abbreviation for Iceland “IS”.



At a bakery in the center of town was this cute little truck being used as advertisement for the Gamla Bakariio. The bakery was one of the few stores open today and it was filled with Maasdam passengers getting pastry.



It was past noon by this time and we had spent more than 3 hours exploring Isafjordur. It was enjoyable in spite of the intermittent rain but we were now ready to return to the

Maasdam. We made our way back and spent the rest of the day lounging around the ship.

In the evening we went to a presentation by the Singers of the Maasdam who serenaded us with old time tunes we all remembered from the 1950s and 1960s. We enjoyed the nostalgia for the whole hour.

We got underway about 6pm and sailed slowly out the long channel to the open sea. We will cruise eastward all night in the Greenland Sea and then dock in Akureyri early tomorrow morning. Hopefully we will leave the rain behind.