

Peter the Elf Wants to Meet the Sled Dogs

Disrupt who, or what? I really don't know.

I just know there are elves here. I can sense them. I can feel them. And I don't think I should deviate from this path I am walking on.

I feel like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* when munchkins popped out of bushes to see if she was a good witch, or bad witch. Only in this case, elves pop out of caves to see if I am a good person, or bad person.

I peek into a small lava rock cave at Hellisgerði Park, an elf park in the town of Hafnarfjörður just outside of Reykjavík. I am by myself but somehow I hear, "Don't get to close." I move back. The elves are telling me to stay a certain distance from their homes.

I walk further into the park thinking this could be featured in a *House and Garden* magazine; a design-type park with trees, shrubs, a fountain, little hills made of lava, steps, kooky caves (elf houses) and boulders.

I say to the elves, "Don't be afraid of me."

Elves are part of Iceland's culture. Although I am not sure anyone has actually seen an elf, speak to an Icelander and no doubt an elf story will be told. Whether it be elf books read to them as children, a road altered in order to protect an elf church, or a time when an Icelander blew up a rock (an elf's house) even though he was warned not to, only to have terrible things happen to him.

Not all Icelander's will admit to believing in elves although I suspect many do deep down. But I say: Why not believe in elves? Why not have imaginary friends like we did when we were children? What is wrong with having our inner child come out to play? Why do we always have to be so logical, so serious?

Ragnhildur Jónsdóttir is a fascinating and beautiful woman who cares for the elves and Elfgarden House in Hellisgerði Park. At age two, she befriended her first elf, a woman named Púlða. Over the years she acquired more elf friends, however, there are a few who have become special to her: Fróði, Amba and of course, Púlða.

Ragnhildur tells me of the journey that led her to being a protector of elves, her belief in elves, her storytelling of the elves living in the park through books and guided tours, and how elves always say: Have fun, all the way to your heart.

She has written two books: "Álfheimar Hellisgerðis" and "What does it take to see an elf?"

To see us elves, you only need three things. A touch of joy in your heart, a permission from the grown-up inside of you to allow your inner child to 'go out and play' and an elf willing to be seen.

She gives me an oracle reading using elf cards designed by her then asks me to pick a stone from what appears to be a bag of marbles. But these aren't any stones. They are crystals, pieces of wood, rocks – all treasures picked by her.

She tells me an elf is already with me, and he wants me to take him to Greenland. He wants to meet the sled dogs because I am going to go dog sledding. She says that it is not common for an elf to leave the park with someone. His name is Peter, he is small, adventurous and happy, and while we drink elf tea, he goes off to say good-bye to his friends.

No, Ragnhildur is not crazy because she has elf friends. Instead, she is gifted on a really lovely, intuitive and spiritual level.

When I tell the flight attendant on the Air Iceland flight from Reykjavík to Ilulissat that Peter the elf is sitting beside me, she asks if she should add him to her passenger manifest. At one point during the flight, when I sense Peter is angry with me – he thinks I am making fun of him with the flight attendant – she says something to him in Icelandic.

As the captain begins his descent into Ilulissat, Peter and I feel like we are about to begin a wildly fun adventure. We look out the window and below, bergy bits in various sizes peek out of the water, and big, bold & beautiful icebergs look as if a sculptor chiseled them.

Off in the distance, snow and rocky terrain compete with each other; which is more scenic? And in between, a fjord is iced for the winter. It is love at first sight. Peter and I are head over heels with Ilulissat and we have not even landed.

Ilulissat is strikingly beautiful. Regal icebergs and Disko Island frame Disko Bay, rocky valley dips and small mountains hug the city, and a luminous glow – almost in a magical way – seems to dance about in the air. One can easily imagine that Mother Nature dipped into her prize-box and waved a special magic wand across these lands.

The morning of my overnight dog sled adventure, I feel a bit anxious. I have never been dog sledding before and I have no idea what to expect. What if we get lost in Greenland's great white wild west? I am in the Arctic Circle after all, so perhaps my little anxiety is not far-fetched.

Breathe and repeat: *The dogs will find their way home.*

I shuffle out of World of Greenland's touring office in my sorrel boots, two layers of underthings, and seal skin trousers and amok. We drive to the place where I will meet my dog sled musher.

My musher, his sled, and eighteen Greenlandic huskies raring to go, come down the hill. It is surreal. Somehow, this wild adventure I am about to go on now feels almost polar-eccentric. Do I simply sit like an empress on a sled chariot and allow the dogs and musher to take me to my ice castle?

My dog sled musher is a Greenlandic Inuit fisherman named Karl. He speaks some English, which I am thankful for considering it will be just him, the sled dogs, Peter the elf, and me for the next twenty-eight hours.

Like Santa's sleigh and his reindeer (come on Dancer, Prancer, Vixen and Rudolf), off we go. Only on this sleigh ride, we are on ground and it is, come on Timuutu, Kuma, Amaroq, Puuluki, and so on. Each dog has a name.

I sit at the back of the sled, one leg on each side. Karl sits sideways in front and Peter is perched on top of Aaliku's furry neck – Aaliku is the lead dog. Peter takes pride in his leadership role. He snaps his whip into the air and bellows out orders.

The rhythmic sound of the sled's blades slushing over the snow hums in a background of silence. The dogs, fanned out in a somewhat triangular formation, run at a trotting pace. Cruising speed has been established and I'm thinking: this aint so bad. In fact, it is pretty darn amazing.

Picture this: 69.2167° N, 51.1000° W. Arctic Circle. Ilulissat, a city with approximately 4,600 inhabitants that is only accessible by ship (during spring, summer and autumn) or aircraft. And here I am dog sledding into the Arctic abyss, the soul of Dame Nature, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Ilulissat Icefjord) where no motor machine is allowed.

Up the little mountains, down the little mountains and across the fjords we go. It is brilliant. A crazy, wickedly wild and wonderful experience few others can match. A spell of something indescribably beautiful sinks in the soul and one cannot help but let out a number of tee-hees.

We arrive Sikuiuitsoq Fjord. Visual clarity and heavy snowflakes twist with each other. We sled further along the fjord until we reach our overnight hut, a hut perfectly placed in the middle of snowy-nowhere.

There is no electricity, toilet, running water or cellular connection. It is as rustic as one would desire in the dazzling wilds of outdoor exquisiteness. I am forty kilometres inland from Ilulissat, in a hub of open-air delicacy. It is flawless and pure. A quiet seldom heard, a calm rarely felt.

My admiration for (and trust in) Karl has created a bond. In this moment, two people from two different worlds' become friends. With a darkened sky and a glow from the candles, we sip whisky poured over eight thousand year-old ice.

It was a truly magical day today. It is a truly magical night. Tomorrow, we will sled back to Ilulissat. Right now though, Peter, who has tucked himself into the fur of one of the dogs curled up in a ball outside, and I, don't want this night to end.