



*Horses of
Iceland*

BRING YOU CLOSER TO NATURE



The saga

“ The history of the Icelandic horse is interwoven with the history of the Icelandic nation. For centuries, it was “the most indispensable servant” and was celebrated in the Icelandic Sagas.

The horses of Iceland are the original Viking horses and one of the purest horse breeds in the world. The breed has been isolated on the rugged island in the North-Atlantic since the settlement, or over 1000 years ago, without any genetic input from other breeds. As the first settlers came to Iceland they could only bring a limited number of livestock with them, and would most probably choose their very best animals. Thus, the Icelandic horse has its origin in a herd of preselected, high quality individuals who had to survive the rough trip on a Viking long ship across the Atlantic, before taking on their role as “the most indispensable servant” for the first Icelanders in this vast, wild, and entirely unknown country.



Sources tell us that at this time there was a breed in Northern Europe known as Equus Scandinavicus and some maintain that the Icelandic horse is a descendant of this breed. Others however say that the Icelandic horse traces its origin all the way to the steppes of Mongolia.

Throughout the centuries, the horse was the sole means of transport in Iceland and an essential work animal. With the arrival of the first car in Iceland in 1904, and an improved road system, the role of the horse would change dramatically. The first horse breeding society in Iceland was established in 1904 and placed new emphasis in breeding. By the 1950s the horse's function as a work animal and a means of transport had markedly declined. More and more it was being used for purely recreational purposes.

As the centuries passed, the Icelandic horse and its master came to adapt to their rugged and oft-times cruel environment, surviving natural disasters and climatic changes. The horse also had to contend with limited grazing and forage in wintertime. From these conditions emerged a hardy, intelligent and unique breed of horse that has few equals.





“ The Icelandic horse is gentle, willing, tough, and versatile.

The horses





The Icelandic horse is an extremely versatile breed. These strong, intelligent and smooth horses are successful in endurance racing and very well suitable for therapeutic riding. Some are excellent jumpers and many are trained to quite a high level in dressage. Carriage pulling, polo and barrel racing are also activities where the horses of Iceland do well. Today, the most common use for the Icelandic horse is as a general riding horse. A horse that the whole family can enjoy as a trustworthy and loved companion, but also out on long or short rides through the woods of Germany, along the beaches of Denmark or mountains of Iceland.

Most Icelandic horses are kept outside or in open stables their whole life, all year around, and usually only the riding horses in Iceland are in stables during winter. In spring, as soon as there is enough grass in the pastures, the horses are let out to graze through the whole summer and autumn. It is this natural upbringing that makes the horses both genuine and powerful. Courage, curiosity, self-reliance and calm – these are the shaping factors of nature.



Breeding

The official breeding goal of Icelandic horses is to produce a healthy, fertile, and durable riding horse, a robust and yet elegant and versatile horse with five excellent gaits. The conformation should offer optimal natural balance, and the movements should be supple, high and ground covering in all gaits, giving an elegant and powerful image.

The size of Icelandic horses can vary considerably, from just about 130 cm on highest point of withers, to over 150 cm high. Average size of horses shown in breeding evaluation is just under 140 cm on withers which is considerably taller than 30 years ago. The reason for horses growing taller is due partly to better feed, but also selected breeding.



PURITY

Due to the geographical isolation of Iceland, very few horse diseases occur there, and no vaccinations are needed. However, this also means that no horse can enter the country at all. Once a horse leaves Iceland it can never return. Anybody travelling to Iceland is also kindly requested to not bring any used leather riding equipment, such as gloves, chaps or riding boots, and to disinfect all gear (particularly helmets).



Gaits

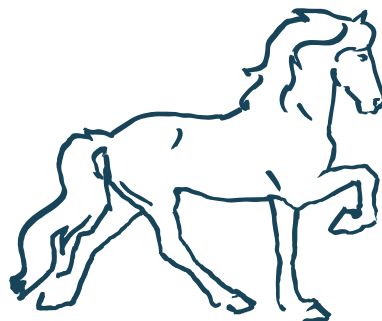
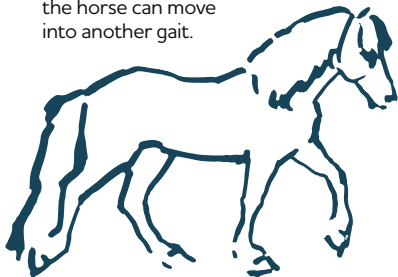
“ The Icelandic horse is exceptional in that it has five gaits, including flying pace and the unique tölt.

The horses of Iceland are a so-called gaited horse breed. This means that most Icelandic horses have two extra gaits to offer besides walk, trot and canter/gallop. All horse breeds have these three natural gaits and can perform them without training. The extra gaits that set the Icelandic horse apart from other breeds are called tölt and flying pace.

TÖLT

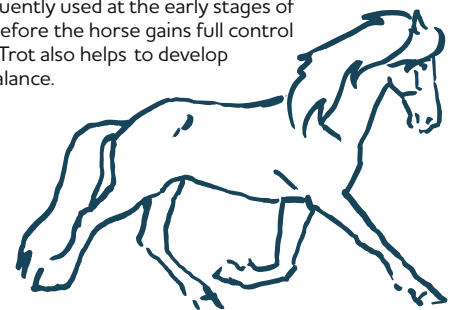
The tölt is the speciality of the Icelandic horse. It is a smooth, four-beat gait in which the horse's hind legs should move well under the body and carry more of the weight on the hind end, allowing the front to rise and be free and loose. A beautiful tölting horse has high foreleg movements, is well collected with good head carriage, and presents itself in a proud, free manner.

WALK is a four-beat gait. In a correct walk, the horse is relaxed and each leg hits the ground individually. Most exercises are first executed in walk and then the horse can move into another gait.



TÖLT

TROT is a two-beat gait where the horse moves its legs in unison in diagonal pairs. Trot is one of the basic gaits and frequently used at the early stages of training and before the horse gains full control over the tölt. Trot also helps to develop the horse's balance.

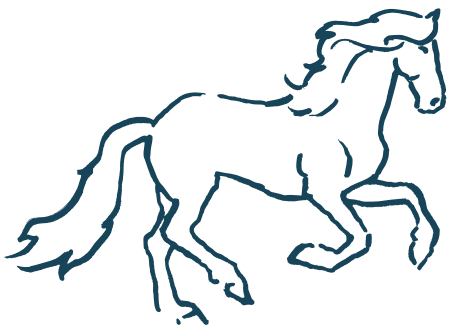




Similar gaits are known in other gaited breeds, such as the running walk or rack, but it is generally agreed that only the Icelandic horse can manage this gait so naturally and with so much extension and variations in speed. The smoothness of the tölt is what makes it so desirable. At demonstrations, Icelandic horses are often ridden in tölt while the rider holds a full glass in one hand and the reins in the other, and not a drop is spilled. The tölt can be ridden at any speed, from a gracious, collected slow tölt up to a very fast and extended tölt where the horse may keep up with a galloping or even pacing horse.

FLYING PACE

The flying pace is the “fifth gear”, offering a two-beat lateral movement with suspension. This gait is ridden very fast, even used for racing and only for short distances, 100–200 metres usually. Not all Icelandic horses can pace, but those that manage all five gaits well are considered the best of the breed.



GALLOP is a three-beat gait and can be ridden at different speeds. The horse can gallop on either the right or left rein. Gallop can be invigorating for the horse and make him more willing, positive and cooperative.



FLYING PACE



Character

The Icelandic horse is known for its genuine and welcoming character. The horses are friendly, adventurous, smart, and quick to learn. They are usually very easy to handle, cooperative both on the ground and while ridden, yet also powerful and have a great will to work.

Icelanders traditionally favour horses with great spirit, power and stamina, which is no wonder when taking into consideration what kind of long distances on hard terrain these horses needed to travel. However, the horses should always be reliable and treasured companions, ready to give their all in full speed when required, but also stand still for hours and shelter the humans from a snow storm if needed. There are many stories of how horses have saved their rider's life, by outsmarting them, refusing to go where the path was too dangerous, or finding the way home when the rider was completely lost.

A FRIEND FOR LIFE

Often the same horse can be used for competitions on the highest level as well as to safely carry the youngest family member on a ride out. The horses seem to adapt to each task given, knowing when it is time for full power or to tune down. They are an easy-going mount when a youngster or an unstable rider comes along. This versatility is highly treasured among Icelandic horse lovers, and is one of the most important breeding goals. Icelandic horses will reward mutual respect and fair handling with life-long loyalty and friendship.



Colour

The colouring of the Icelandic horse is very special. The breed is one of the most colourful breeds in the world and this is one of its valuable traits. **The breed has over 40 colours and up to 100 variations.** The rarest colour found is the colour changing roan. The most common are chestnut (red) and black (brown). In breeding, the tendency is to encourage this variety in colour.





Community

Being a rider is a way of life. Professionalism, education, and knowledge characterises activities and work concerning the Icelandic horse. We enjoy the outdoors in a unique way through the Icelandic horse. We experience the magic of nature and the wilderness directly. We experience peace, freedom, and new frontiers.





Competition

The main types of competition that Icelandic horses compete in are sport and the Icelandic "Gæðingakeppni" (E. good horse competition), as well as breeding evaluations. The quality of the gait is judged in all competitions but in sporting competitions the emphasis is on horsemanship and the interaction between horse and rider. In the Gæðingakeppni competitions it is the appearance, movements, spirit and behaviour of the horse that are being judged. There are various events to compete in, for example tölt, four-gait, five-gait, pace and racing pace, as well as several other events

*Riding
adventures*





AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE

Riding trips in summertime are very popular, both with Icelanders and foreign visitors. Iceland is a country with a vast wilderness and a terrain that is particularly well-suited for long journeys on horseback. Organized trips are offered all around Iceland and one can choose between trips lasting a day or up to several weeks.

Going on one of these extended trips through the spectacular Icelandic landscape is a perfect opportunity for rider and mount to become really acquainted with each other and is the experience of a lifetime.



Global organization



THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF ICELANDIC HORSE ASSOCIATIONS

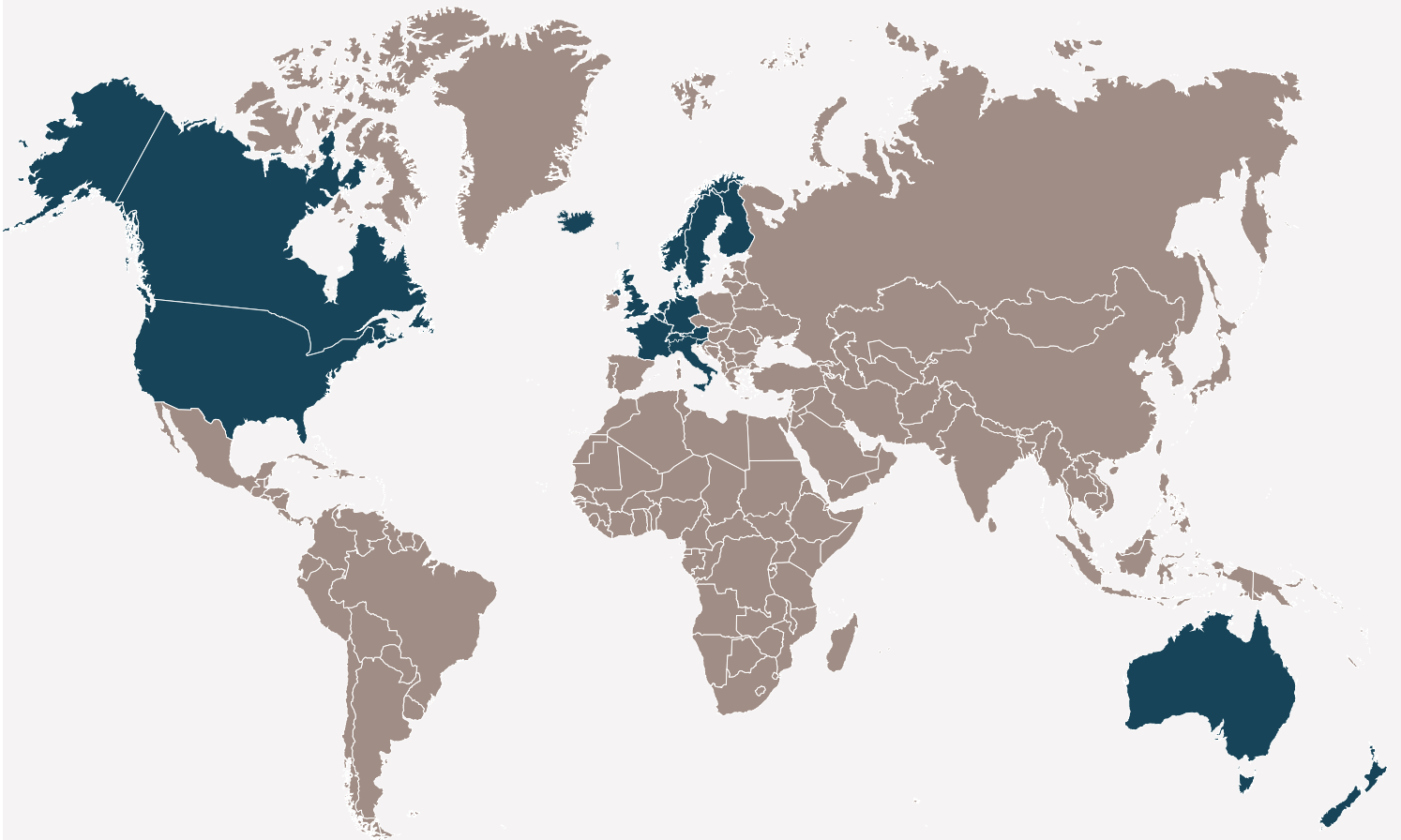
FEIF (www.feif.org) is the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations, representing Icelandic horse associations in 20 countries in Europe, America, Australia and New Zealand. FEIF is responsible for the biannual world championships where each member country can send its best team of riders.

The mission of FEIF is to bring people together in their passion for the Icelandic horse, connecting them

through the Icelandic horse culture, riding, lifestyle and enjoyment. FEIF's main focus is on horse welfare and to maintain the purity and quality of the breed.

FEIF hosts meetings where important issues and matters of the community are discussed and decided upon. This includes, for instance, rules and regulations for competitions, guidelines for the judges, exchanging views on breeding goals, education matters, youth work, and much more. Within the FEIF countries there is a single set of rules for breeding and competition matters, which is quite unique in the horse world in general.

Around the world



FEIF MEMBER COUNTRIES

ICELAND
AUSTRALIA
AUSTRIA
BELGIUM
CANADA

DENMARK
FAROE ISLANDS
FINLAND
FRANCE
GERMANY

GREAT BRITAIN
ITALY
LUXEMBOURG
NETHERLANDS
NEW ZEALAND

NORWAY
SLOVENIA
SWEDEN
SWITZERLAND
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



WORLDFENGUR: DATABASE ON OVER 400,000 HORSES

WorldFengur, the studbook of origin for the Icelandic horse, is a unique pedigree database. WorldFengur is the original lineage register and the official studbook for the Icelandic horse. It gathers information on the Icelandic horse in the member countries of FEIF, and makes this available online.

WorldFengur contains details on all registered Icelandic horses in the world. In WorldFengur, anything from a list of offspring and their owners, to competition results, photos and breeding value prediction (BLUP) can be found. Virtual pairings can be made, checking the options of various colours, possible breeding value in different traits, etc.



“ Only proven pure-bred Icelandic horses can be registered in WorldFengur and currently it hosts information on over 400,000 horses.



The Icelandic horses can be found all over the world. Over 250,000 Icelandic horses are registered around the world, thereof are approximately 40% in Iceland. They have amazing adaptation skills and do well in the ice-cold climates of Greenland and Alaska, but also down under in Australia and New Zealand. They can even be found in Hawaii.

It can surely be said that the horses of Iceland are the best ambassadors for the little island in the north. They present the country and its culture well and get their human relations to visit Iceland at least once, if not regularly.





“ There are multiple options of vocational training within the Icelandic horse world. Many countries have their own education system, usually run by the national Icelandic horse organisation.

Education and training

EDUCATION FOR HORSE PROFESSIONALS

Iceland offers a university programme in Equine Science, a unique and high standard Bachelor degree, incorporating a lot of practical riding and teaching experience. Hólaskóli, the Equine University of Iceland, receives students from multiple countries every year, who often go back to their home countries and work with teaching and training horses. Hólaskóli has been the driving power in the education system in Iceland for several decades, along with the Icelandic trainers' association, FT.

POPULAR EQUINE PROGRAMMES

In recent years, several high schools offer equine programmes as part of the school curriculum, making this wonderful sport and lifestyle more available to everyone. Various courses and seminars are also offered throughout the year, some organized by official organisations or schools, some held by private individuals. Generally, Icelandic horse riders are quite keen on expanding their skills and knowledge and many recreational riders attend various courses and seminars each year, making an effort to become a better rider and improving their horses.

In addition to this, hundreds of Icelandic children spend their summers at riding camp or take riding courses.





Before you visit Iceland

PROTECT THE ICELANDIC HORSE FROM INFECTIOUS DISEASES

As a result of its geographical isolation and strict import policy, Iceland has remained free of serious infectious diseases in animals. Please respect biosecurity measures and avoid introducing infectious agents to the country.

Cleaning and disinfection of riding clothes is required before you enter the country. Import of used riding equipment is prohibited.

DO NOT ENTER ICELAND WITH:

- Used riding equipment, such as saddles, bridles, nosebands, pads, rugs, whips, etc.
- Used riding gloves
- Other used riding clothes, unless disinfected

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION OF RIDING CLOTHES:

Used riding clothes have to be washed in a washing machine or dry cleaned prior to entering the country.

Riding clothes and boots that cannot be cleaned this way should be washed and disinfected as follows:

- Rinse thoroughly with detergent
- Dry
- Spray with 1% Virkon® S (10 g per liter of water)
- Store for at least 5 days prior to bringing the clothes into contact with horses in Iceland

Horses of Iceland

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