

# HEYDALUR VALLEY: PARADISE FOR HIKERS



Numerous legends talk about elves and giants that once lived in Iceland. West Fjords and the Heydalur valley attract tourists not only with its unique folk stories, but also beautiful landscape and numerous hiking options.

The West Fjords are a world apart and something very special. The fjords are a unique part of Iceland and the 6 km long valley of Heydalur in Mjoifjordur is part of this. Here you will find untouched and pure nature, **beautiful mountains and fjords, rough and dramatic seashores** but very few people and therefore all the peace you need. The whole area is full of wildlife and flora. You will find the biggest gathering of seabirds in the mountain cliffs as well as other animals like the arctic fox, seals and whales in their natural environment.

The area of Heydalur is known for its geo thermal activity. Tourists can thus enjoy an indoor thermal swimming pool in a sheep house in the local farm hotel. In the pool, the visitors can relax after a day-long adventure. Such an adventure could be horse riding across the nearby river and down to the fjord, a walk in the valley or a hike up the mountain, a kayak paddling in the fjords among seals and maybe even whales or a hike to the nearby mountain lake where it is very exciting to catch a trout.

On the other side of the river, there is another thermal pool from ancient times. A local story says that the bishop Gudmundur the Good blessed this place in the 12th century and since then many sick people have been cured after a visit to the pool.

The oldest ruins tell us that the valley has been an inhabited area since 1100 and even the Icelandic Saga Fostbradradasaga mention the place. In the past, there were 12 farmers and a priest living in the valley. Now there is only one farm hotel left and several summerhouses. The story says that the farmers had a quarrel with the priest and decided to go to church in the next fjord. The priest was skilled in magical arts and changed the weather. It got very bad and a landslide fell down and killed them all. The ravine where it happened is called the Twelve Men's Death.

**Signs with information about the various plants of the valley have been placed around the place to give hikers information about the fauna.** One plant Skógarelfting (*E.sylvaticum* L.) is unique for Heydalur. It is probably a leftover from the Ice Age and indicates that there might have been some areas that were not covered with ice during that time.

In front of the farm hotel's restaurant, there is a big testing stone; it is 220 kg heavy and is called Legsteinn. Once a year, there is a competition in the Westfjords "The Viking of Westfjords" where the strongest men in Iceland compete. Part of the contest is also to carry the "Legsteinn".

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