

THE ION ADVENTURE HOTEL

| BY CHRISTOPHER KANAL

A mere 45 minutes drive from the vibrant Icelandic capital of Reykjavik is the Ion Adventure Hotel. A sister property of the Ion City Hotel in downtown Reykjavik, the Ion Adventure hotel is altogether a different breed. The property is a striking piece of architecture on pillars set on a primeval mountainside in the spectral, emerald moss-covered, the pitch-black lava-encrusted landscape of the UNESCO-listed Thingvellir National Park. Indeed, the Ion has the enviable position of having one of the most spectacular settings of any hotel in the Northern Hemisphere.

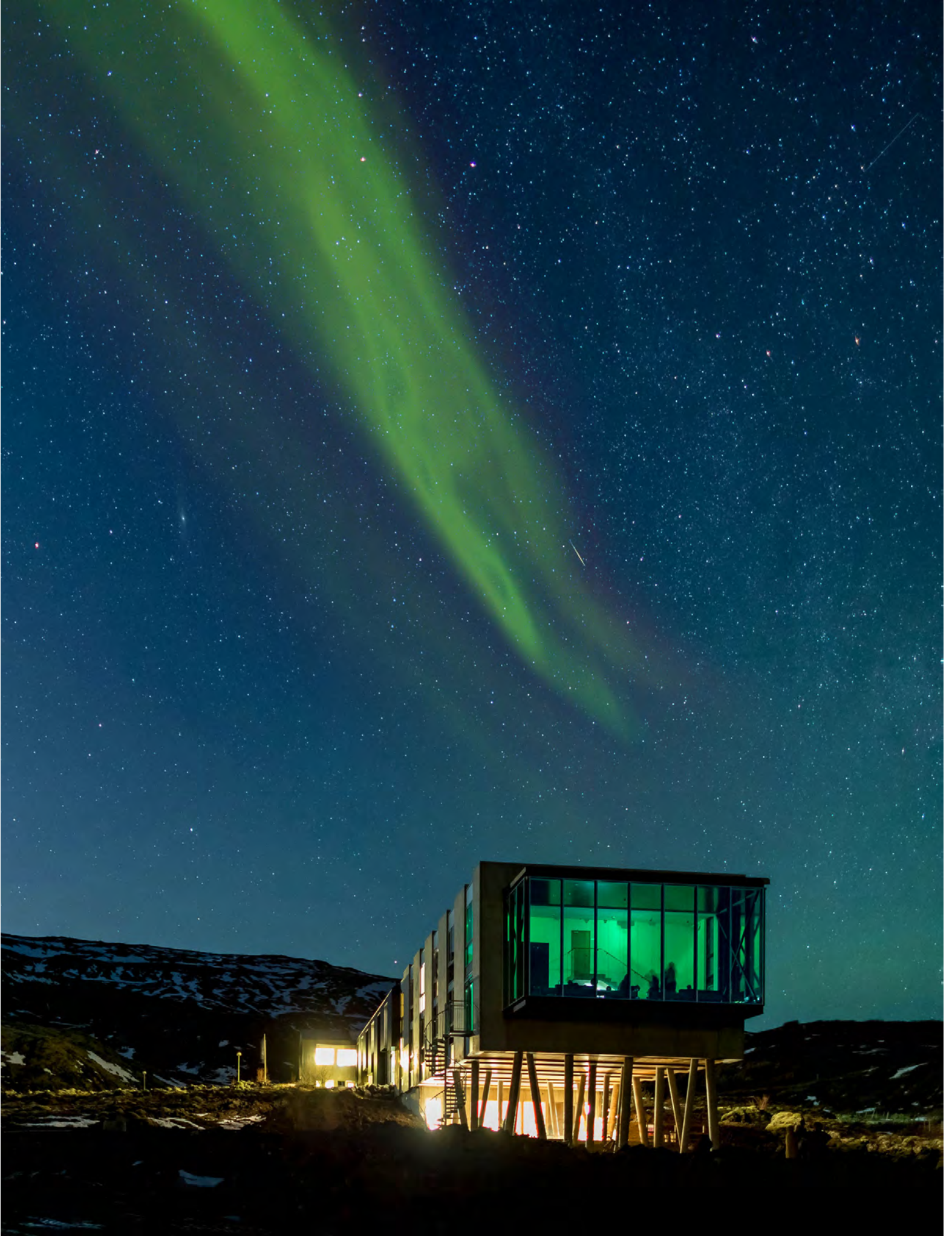
The Ion hotel is designed around its unique natural environment. It is a luxury destination that can be enjoyed year-round whether under the summer midnight sun when we arrived, or in winter beneath the extraordinary Aurora Borealis - the Nora Lyons as the locals call it. The fact that its location is off the beaten track only adds to its otherworldly appeal. As you turn off the road to the hotel you can see in the distance a giant geothermal power plant. Crystal white smoke billows silently into the turquoise sky as it looms sci-fi like and almost just alive in the distance.

Designed by Californian based architects Minarc, the Ion's standout feature it's a very slick plunge pool, sauna, and spa that fronts the hotel and is fed by the local volcanic hot spring. The outdoor heated plunge pool has magnificent vistas over the surrounding lava fields, the glittering waters of Lake Ázingvellir and beyond the distant, yet still in June, snow-capped mountains. Above the pool is a very impressive bar, Northern Lights, that is spread out with comfortable seating and snugs on two levels. Gargantuan floor to vaulted ceiling windows offers similar incredible

views as you enjoy an impressive cocktail list and seasonal IPAs, beers, and pilseners from local microbreweries.

Check-in was fast and efficient and after a complimentary glass of champagne, we were directed to our standard deluxe room on the first floor. There are 18 standard deluxe rooms, 24 twins, two single rooms for solo travelers, and a junior suite. All rooms are designed in a discrete, modern Nordic style with muted greys, blacks, and whites. Our room's sturdy dark wooden floors were complemented by industrial-chic designer lamps and chairs and abstract photographs of the famed Icelandic horses. Each room has a private bathroom with a water-saving shower. Toiletries include fragrant Icelandic handsoaps and local herb-infused soothing lotions from Sóley Organics. Fair-trade organic linen and towels are standard. There is a flatscreen TV, kettle, Nespresso coffee machine, iPhone docks, and a Minibar. The thermal junior suite takes its name from its surroundings and a dramatic view over the lava fields, the dormant volcano Mount Hengill and Nesjavellir Geothermal Plant which can be seen through its striking floor to ceiling windows.

The hotel award-winning Silfra restaurant serves local dishes that are simple and seasonal. Head chefs Sindri Guðbjartur Sigurðsson and Þráinn Freyr Vigfússon developed a *fondae* menu made with the freshest ingredients available from farms in the area. The menu when we stayed was relatively basic due to the ongoing COVID 19 outbreak but we happily tucked into very tasty gourmet burgers, fries and salad washed down with orange and coriander infused Einstök Arctic White Ale. In normal circumstances, the popular menu would include signature dishes such as starters of slow-cooked Arctic Char with smoked aioli, cucumber, char roe vinaigrette, or glazed pork belly with celeriac remoulade, pickled onions and onion glaze. The impressive mains feature freshly sourced Icelandic ingredients to create dishes such as lamb sirloin, rutabaga, green peas and red onion or fillet of halibut with cabbage, smoked onion, and lemongrass sauce. Tasty desserts such as Icelandic Skyr yogurt





complement a very sturdy menu that hopefully will return soon in happier days. Breakfast, served to 11 am, was a decent buffet affair of scrambled and hard-boiled eggs, bacon, cold cut meats, smoked salmon. There was a wide offering of gluten-free bread and cereals as well as fruits.

The Ion is located in the middle of Thingvellir National Park. From the hotel, you can easily drive to the nearby breathtaking natural wonders of waterfalls, the volcanic crater of Kerid and Silfra, the rift underneath Lake Ázingvellir. Silfra is where the Eurasian and North American tectonic plates meet to form part of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. The magical underwater world has four main caverns with depths ranging from 10 to 60 meters: Silfra Lagoon; Silfra Cathedral; Silfra Hall and Big Crack, the

narrowest section, where the continental plates are so close they are tantalizingly within reach of your fingers.

The tourist hotspots of the Geysir hot springs and Gullfoss waterfall are under 30 minutes' drive away as is busy, inviting the town of Selfoss. The Ion's concierge service will happily arrange activities including horse-riding, kayaking, and snorkeling in caves. The hotel can even offer an unusual wake-up call if the elusive Northern Lights make a dramatic appearance in the winter months, the Ion's isolated location in almost total darkness in winter provides a superb setting to marvel at this magnificent natural phenomena. The hotel can also arrange direct transfers from and to Keflavik International Airport and the capital. ♦

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