

A FEW ANNUAL SOCIAL EVENTS

The Westman Islands' national festival

is unquestionably the best known festival attracting the greatest number of mainland visitors. Held in Herjólfssdalur on the first weekend in August, it is a 3-4 day outdoor festival where having a good time is everyone's easily fulfilled aim. The whole weekend is packed with entertainment of all description, including the traditional bonfire, fireworks and the famous "hillside sing-along". Specially built structures fill the valley, not to mention the large white tents of the locals who literally move house during the festival and prove their famed hospitality by welcoming guests for coffee, smoked puffin and sundry other delicacies.

Celebrating the end of eruption. This has become a fixed event in the islands' social life. It is held on the weekend following 3 July, the day in 1972 when the eruption was officially declared at an end. On Saturday night the island pubs open their doors and floors to musicians of all descriptions who are encouraged to sing and play to their hearts delight. A great number of former islanders choose this weekend for a visit.

The thirteenth is the 13th day of Christmas, traditionally a festive day in the islands.

A torch-lit parade of fascinating creatures: the ancient Icelandic ogress Grýla and her less than lovely husband and sons, as well as elves, fairies, demons and trolls join the locals at a huge bonfire and splendid fireworks.

Sailors' day, although a national day of festivities, has always been particularly dear to the hearts of the Westman islanders, not surprisingly so, considering their history. The sailor day festivities are held on the first weekend in June with a full programme on both Saturday and Sunday emphasizing seamanship connected sports as well as various entertainment for the general public.

17 June is Iceland's national holiday. This day was for a long time not given as prominent a place in the islands as on the mainland. The reason presumably was their own national holiday in August, a considerably more important event in islander's mind. During recent years, however, Iceland's national holiday, has been shown the respect it is due with a parade and outdoor festivities.

The puffling time is an annual event, unique to the Westman Islands. It is impossible to put a more precise date to it than early to mid-August as it is determined by the pufflings themselves. Leaving their cliff nests they fly into town attracted by the electric lights and discover a harder and considerably more complicated world than they have been used to. Everywhere, however, saviours are waiting: the island children with their cardboard boxes prepared and ready to gather the lost and totally bewildered pufflings and take them down to the shore to release them into the sea. In recent years whole families have visited Heimaey to take part in the puffling adventure, a unique event, full of joy.