



# *Festivals and traditions in preschools in Akureyri*



## Festivals and traditions

### Preschools in Akureyri

There are a number of important days in the year when the usual school routine is altered. Below is a brief description of some of the festivals and traditions that take place within the preschool. This is only a general description as each preschool approaches these days differently.



#### Children's birthdays

Each preschool celebrates the birthday of a child in a different way, however all schools acknowledge the day in some way. Parents are encouraged to gather this information from each school. Parents do not bring food from home to mark the occasion.

#### Family day

During the winter months, preschools invite parents to visit their children, and are offered refreshments. Some schools offer breakfast, while others offer refreshments that the children have helped to prepare. In some cases other family members are invited to visit the children (such as grandparents.) When the grandparents are not available, the children are welcomed to invite other family members. The purpose of these visits is to connect the preschool life of the child with their home life.

#### Icelandic Language Day

Icelandic Language Day is celebrated on the 16th of November each year, on the national poet Jonas Hallgrímsson's birthday. In preparation, the preschools celebrate the Icelandic language in many ways; for example, they may receive a visit from elementary school children who read short stories for the children.

#### Christmas crafts

In early December, some schools invite parents to take part in a craft day with their children. Sometimes children help to prepare refreshments in the preschool ahead of time.



#### Christmas party

The Christmas party is generally held in December. The children walk around the Christmas tree, sing traditional Christmas carols, and the Yule Lad (Icelandic Santa Claus) visits, sometimes with a little gift for the children. Some preschools have the Christmas party in the preschool during the week and others have the party at another location on the weekend where family members are welcome to join them.

#### Christmas

Preschools are open weekdays between Christmas and New Year. Parents, however, are requested to inform the school whether their children will attend on these days.

#### Þorrablót and other customs

In the old Christian calendar, the names of the calendar months differed from what we know today.

Þorri was the name of the month beginning in the 13th week of Winter (19 – 25 of Januari). Þorri always starts on Friday which is called Bónadagur / Mens Day (but bóndi means a farmer or a husband). During the month of Þorri, it is a tradition to eat certain Icelandic foods in a festival called Þorrablót. This special food includes smoked lamb, specially-treated shark, dried fish and pickled food. Songs are also



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sung in connection with this time of year. Some preschools celebrate Mens Day by allowing the girls to do something special for the boys, or the children invite their fathers for breakfast or a snack in the preschool that day.

The next month was called Góa, which started in the 18th week of Winter, always on Sunday (21. – 27. of February). The first day in Góa is called Konudagur / Woman's Day. Some preschools celebrate this day by allowing the boys to do something special for the girls, or the children invite their mothers for breakfast or a snack in the preschool.

The next month was called Einmánuður, which started in 22nd week of Winter, always on Tuesday (20 . – 26. of March). The first day in Einmánuður is called Yngismannadagur / the Young Men's Day. Then there is Harpa, which start on the first Thursday after April 18th. The first day of Harpa is Yngismeyjardagur / the Young Womans Day and is also the first day of Summer. The first day of Summer is a national Holiday in Iceland.

Some preschools celebrate these days by allowing the girls to treat the boys in school on Young Men's Day, just as they allow the boys to treat the girls on Young Women's Day. An old tradition is to bake waffles or pancakes in celebration of Young Men and Young Women's Days, and some preschools continue this tradition.

### 6th February - Day of the Preschool

As this is a relatively new celebration, preschools are still shaping the traditions for this day.

### Ash Wednesday (Öskudagur)



On this day it is a tradition for children and teachers to show up in a fancy dress costume and enjoy the day together. In some schools the oldest children visit the shops and local businesses, where they sing and receive some treats. On returning to the preschool the treats are shared among all the children. In other schools, the children visit each other within the preschool and sing. Sometimes the “cat in the barrel” is hit by the children, but the cat is often some treat for the children to eat. Finally the children and teachers celebrate together with a Ball where they sing and dance.

### Farm visit

In the Spring the preschools often visit a farm. Sometimes this is only for the eldest children, but sometimes all the children in the preschool visit the farm. Parents are often invited to join their children on the visit. The children are shown around a farm where they can meet and learn about the various animals.



### Spring festival

Most preschools hold some kind of Spring Festival at the end of the school year. In some schools the festival is connected with the graduation of the eldest children from the preschool. The eldest children receive a document of some kind in celebration of their formal departure from preschool. Children and parents are invited to the preschool for some treats; for example, it is common to serve grilled hot dogs.



**17th June**

The 17th of June is Icelandic Independence Day. Most preschools are involved in a parade on the last working day before 17th June. This parade could be around the preschool or the neighborhood.

**Open House**

Most preschools invite parents to an Open House Day in the Spring. On this day the staff and children have the opportunity to show parents what they have been doing during the Winter months. The Open House Day is sometimes held in connection with the Spring Festival or the June 17th celebrations.

