

GLOBAL GARDEN INSPIRATION

Highlights from Destinations in the AHS Travel Study Program

Skrudur Botanical Garden, Iceland

by Holly Shimizu

Each year, the AHS Travel Program offers guided trips to destinations around the world, allowing travelers the opportunity to experience a variety of stellar public and private gardens as well as local culture, cuisine, and hospitality. In this occasional look at recent Travel Study trips, AHS Board member Holly Shimizu, who hosted a cruise aboard the Ponant to Iceland in August 2022, highlights a few notable gardens in this island nation known for its breathtaking natural beauty. (For information on upcoming trips in the AHS Travel Study Program, visit www.ahsgardening.org/travel.)



AFTER SPENDING 10 days touring Iceland and enjoying its spectacular beauty, I was left with many vivid memories of waterfalls, geysers, puffins, and volcanic areas. Unspoiled nature is everywhere on this island located in the North Atlantic, but its population of under 400,000 is also keeping the art of gardening alive and well. One pleasant surprise was a visit to

the Skrudur Botanical Garden, located on the banks of Dyrafiord Bay, one of western Iceland's many deep fjords. Founded in 1909 by Sigtryggur Gudlaugsson, a Protestant pastor and a teacher at the neighboring boarding school, this teaching garden was created with assistance from his students. The first project was to build a beautiful stone wall to define the space. After digging and preparing

the soil, Gudlaugsson and his students planted trees, flowers, herbs, and vegetables. The goal was to teach the students all facets of garden creation, how to work the land, and, of course, to learn about plants of all kinds. Their hard work improving the soil was apparently successful as all the plantings are robust. Reverend Gudlaugsson was a pioneer in growing vegetables in the country.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PONANT CRUISE TO ICELAND



Akureyri Botanical Garden is located in the city of Akureyri in northern Iceland, situated in the shelter of Eyjafjord, one of the longest fjords in country. One of the northernmost botanical gardens in the world, the garden has over 7,000 species of plants, including over 400 that are native to Iceland.

The garden's green abundance is such a contrast to the surrounding barren landscape. Upon arrival, we walked through a charming gate that brought us into this magical space. As you walk through this secret garden, all your senses are put on high alert—water sounds, lush colors, and a variety of lovely fragrances embrace you. Rowan trees (*Sorbus aucuparia*), which have powerful symbolic associations in Celtic and Norse mythology, are planted within the walls.

Within the interior, which is protected from strong winds, is a fine vegetable garden, a small greenhouse, a gorgeous fountain, and stunning views that create a peaceful sense of serenity.

The Icelandic poet Guðmundur Ingi Kristjánsson described the garden like this in 1938:

Skrúður is a smiling mark
that deserves to be seen
which shows how mild and powerful
the earth of your land can be.

Skrudur Botanical Garden demonstrates what is possible on the edge of the Arctic Circle. An enormous magnitude of work was invested in this space and the result is well worth the effort. ☺

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Iceland is a land of many volcanoes and hot springs that are a source of the country's geothermal energy system. At the Agricultural University of Iceland's Hveragerdi location, one of the horticulture professors, Gurry Helgadottir, left, explains to a group of AHS travelers how geothermal heat from more than 1,500 feet deep in the earth is used for the school's innovative, sustainable greenhouse production.



Reykjavik Botanical Garden in Iceland's capital is home to some plant specimens that grow to an amazing size thanks to a naturally fertile soil augmented by the efforts of the garden's successful composting program. With more than 5,000 species growing, the gardens are filled with horticultural treasures. Rock gardens, in particular, abound here. In fact, many of North America's prized rock garden plants, such as sea thrift (*Armeria maritima*), moss campion (*Silene acaulis*), and wild thyme (*Thymus praecox* ssp. *arcticus*), originated from Iceland and other geographic regions where the land is rocky and wind is a weather constant.