

# ICELAND

## A SHORT VISIT TO REYKJAVIK,

By TED COOKSON



Iceland's ancient parliament, the Althing, was established in 930 some 50 km (31 miles) east of where Reykjavik ('Rayk-yah-vik'), Iceland's capital, is now situated. In the late eighteenth century, the Althing was moved to Reykjavik itself.

It is thought that Reykjavik was settled in 974. Reykjavik means "hazy inlet" in Icelandic, referring to the geothermal steam produced by nearby hot springs. By 1786 the population of Reykjavik, then Iceland's main trading center, was 170. Today the city has 112,000 inhabitants; and, with its suburbs, the total is 180,000. This represents nearly two-thirds of Iceland's total population of 280,000.

In the last half century Iceland has progressed from a peasant culture to a modern society based on high technology. This economic activity has sparked the development of art and culture in the streets of Reykjavik. There is a national theatre and a symphony orchestra. In addition, today one finds trendy restaurants, cafes, coffee bars and even pubs. Only since 1989 has the serving of beer been allowed in Reykjavik after 74 years

as a dry city!

Interesting knitwear, ceramics and handicrafts can be found in Reykjavik's downtown shops. A recently-built shopping center contains both a Hard Rock Cafe and Eldhusid, a restaurant with a menu featuring over 100 items. There anyone who can finish his entire 500-gram whale steak can have it for free.



The local bus network around Reykjavik is good; and there are sights to see, including the national art gallery and the national museum. Iceland's best collection of bound sagas is displayed in the Arni Magnússon Institute. The stunning Halgrímskirkja Cathedral was completed in 1796, the year

**Iceland has functioned as a republic since receiving independence from Denmark in 1944. The country was first inhabited by Irish monks who later fled as waves of Norse settlers began to arrive in Iceland in the ninth century.**