

Report of the Canadian Judges and Lawyers Foreign Conference to Iceland 2017

The group of lawyers, judge and significant others arrived on Saturday, April 29th into Reykjavik and received a morning coach tour of Reykjavik including a visit to the Supreme Court of Iceland, the monument to Lief Ericksen, the Harbour, Viking Village, etc. before arriving at the Grand Hotel. That evening we enjoyed a specialized Icelantic meal at the Harpa Building on the waterfront adjacent to the Coastguard Vessel of Iceland.

On Sunday we went to the Troll Falls and then onto the second largest glacier of Iceland by special vehicle and onto the glacier with wind and snow greeting us at the top. We then disembarked and entered a tunnel into the glacier and with special chains for our footwear walked through the glacier noting a ridge near the top of the tunnel wall of the fallout from the 2010 volcanic eruption, a chapel and conference room and a reception hall carved out in the glacial interior. After the hour tour, we returned down the mountain side to the main road and witnessed the thermal geysers which heat most of the homes and commercial buildings in the South Half of Iceland. As well, these thermal pits in the ground are environmentally friendly pools provide heating for green houses, growing tomatoes, cucumbers and other fresh vegetables. Our coach then carried on to Borgarnes, home of the original “Snow White” of Walt Disney. We had dinner overlooking the bay of the Village eating fresh lobsters before returning to our Hotel.

May 1st was the National Holiday and we first went to Pingvellir pronounced Thingvellir where the first Parliament met in 930 A.D. Chieftans from each of 36 regions of Iceland with attendants would meet for two weeks in July from that date until 1698 when it stopped, but was reinstated in 1848 in Reykjavik and continues to this day with 63 members of the Parliament in the downtown core. We then observed Gullfoss Waterfall and the Geysir before embarking on the five hour road trip to Akureyri on the north coast passing the stream used by Eric Clapton who fishes for salmon annually for two weeks.

The following day we went over the mountains on the north coast to see the lava layered falls, the Gooafoss, the craters of lava streams around Lake Myvatn until arriving at the mud hot

springs boiling away and then onto the northern “Blue Lagoon” at the Myvatn Nature Baths including the lava formations where the “Trolls” hang out and the naturally created lava rock formations.

On Wednesday morning we met with three lawyers representing the 18 lawyers of Akureyri. Ms. Ambjorg, Mr. Hrlinn and Mr. Sigmundur all have practised before the courts during their careers. Lawyers here are in general practise with some expertise in family, criminal and real estate as well as wills and estates. They practise before the District Court (First Instance) with three local judges. Later that morning we left for Reykjavik for a meeting with the Icelandic Bar Association. Akureyri, a city of 20,000 persons, very clean on a bay of the north Atlantic where the inhabitants are warm and friendly. The rural areas of the north are isolated with the odd farm house neatly situated in the high parts of the valley between the Mountain Ranges with domesticated “Iceland horses” in the fields of a shorter height but long bodies and huge manes.

The Icelandic Bar Association Chair explained to us the issues currently facing the bar:

- (1) There are four law schools in Iceland (which has a total of 330,000 persons) and there are too many graduating lawyers. Iceland has an agreement of association with the European Union, but there are not many lawyers coming to practise from EU countries. The bar consists of 1100 members and to be a lawyer one must be approved by a governing body of the Iceland Government.
- (2) They currently have completed the bankruptcy work involved in the collapse of three large corporations in 2008 and lawyers must now reach out for new roads of legal practise.
- (3) The Court system is jammed with there only being the District Court and appeals to The Supreme Court of Iceland. The government has now created a new layer or second tier between them to allow for appeals to this new body which may allow fresh evidence or rehearing of witnesses’ evidence. The Court will commence on January 2, 2018 and the 15 new judges to sit in this Court must be decided and approved by Parliament before the end of May 2017. Exciting Times!

Following the Chair's presentation, we all enjoyed questions and answers regarding Canada and Iceland and we closed this reception with fantastic hors d'oeuvres and refreshments before our departure.

That same evening, we enjoyed meeting and dining with Saemindur (Saemi) Finnbogason, our Canadian Trade Commissioner on behalf of our Ambassador Anne-Tamara Lorre who unfortunately was out of the country. Saemi gave us insight into the life in Iceland and the work of the mission. Last year there were 2.5 million visitors to Iceland. There is no unemployment and the minimum wage is \$4,000 per month. Tourism has overtaken fishing as the main industry. Tall cranes are building everywhere.

The following morning we packed our bags heading for the airport, but stopped at the Blue Lagoon for a soak/swim in the huge baths and then a special luncheon at the Lava Restaurant before rendezvousing at the airport. We were able to do a final look at duty free goods (after getting our VAT refund for items purchased on our travels), but everything is very pricey both goods and food. The lineups at the airport are quite long to the many countries served by this airport without any type of organization for boarding. Passport control both in and out was very speedy indeed.

Thus another successful conference was completed making this the 37th.

Yours truly,

J. Douglas Grenkie, QC, LSM
Foreign Conference Director