

Q&A - IFAW Iceland campaign

How did IFAW get involved with the Iceland whaling issue?

IFAW has been committed to the welfare of whales in Icelandic waters **since 1990** when the organisation funded the first feasibility study into the potential for commercial whale watching in Iceland. The idea has always been to create a positive alternative to the cruelty of whaling. Since whaling was resumed in Iceland in 2003, after 13-year pause, IFAW has had Icelandic representation in the country and the approach has been to create a platform for dialogue about what is best for Iceland and for the whales.

What is the current status of whaling in Iceland?

Iceland's lone whaling crusader, Kristjan Loftsson, stopped hunting fin whales this year due to problems getting the whale meat onto the Japanese market. Minke whaling continues, and 80% of the minke whales killed in Iceland are harpooned in Faxaflói Bay right on the boundaries of the whale watching area. So far, the 2016 whaling season has seen **29 minke whales killed** (as of 7th July). Given the fall in demand for whale meat by Icelanders, there has been a big marketing push for tourists to taste whale meat in Iceland, despite the waning local appetite.

Tell me more about IFAW's 'Meet us Don't Eat Us' campaign...

Meet Us Don't Eat Us is a joint project between IFAW and IceWhale (the Association of Whale Watch Operators) that was launched in Reykjavík in the spring of 2010. So far around 400 SEEDS volunteers from 30 countries have participated in the project which runs mainly from May to September each year in Reykjavík.

So far we have collected over **70,000 postcards** with signatures from tourists and Icelanders who want the cruel and unnecessary whale hunt to end. We have regularly delivered these postcards to the Minister of Fisheries to underline international and Icelandic opposition to whaling. This year, support from high profile Icelandic musicians has increased the profile of the Meet Us Don't Eat Us campaign and it went digital this year. You can now sign the petition online at www.ifaw.is.

What is the aim of the campaign?

Whales are being killed to feed tourists and the aim of our campaign is to end whaling in Iceland. We inform and educate tourists about the facts regarding whale meat consumption in Iceland and appeal for their support to end commercial whaling instead of contributing to it by tasting whale meat in Reykjavík restaurants. There are three myths we have debunked:

- 1) MYTH: That whaling is traditional in Iceland – **in fact, commercial whaling only began in 1948 in Iceland. Before that it was carried out around Iceland by other nations like Norway, Britain and Holland.**
- 2) MYTH: Eating whale meat is an Icelandic thing to do during your visit, as all Icelanders eat whale meat – **actually in a recent survey, only 3% of Icelanders said they bought whale meat regularly during the last 12 months. Over 81% said they hadn't eaten it at all in the last 12 months** (Gallup, 2015).

- 3) MYTH: Trying a bit of whale meat on your trip won't make any difference to the whaling situation in Iceland – **yes it will, only 3% of Icelanders eat whale meat so now whales are being killed directly to feed tourists.**

But aren't whaling and whale meat consumption traditional Icelandic activities?

In reality, whale meat consumption is not that common and **whale hunting is not a traditional activity in Iceland.** Commercial whaling actually started only in 1948 with the company Hvalur inc. in Hvalfjordur. Before that most of the whaling around Iceland was conducted by Norwegians and English, Danish, Dutch, Basques and others.

Can't whaling and whale watching co-exist?

80% of the minke whales killed in Iceland are harpooned **close to the whale watching area** in Faxaflói bay outside Reykjavík. These whales will never be seen again by people going whale watching. IceWhale and its members are concerned about this issue and have therefore worked closely with IFAW on its campaigns.

What is IFAW's approach to help bring an end to whaling in Iceland?

Meet Us Don't Eat Us is a positive campaign because although this is a serious subject we want to approach tourists and indeed Icelanders in a constructive way, pointing out that the best sustainable way to enjoy whales is by responsible whale watching. By distributing informative material, promoting whale friendly restaurants and collecting signatures we regularly hand to the Minister of Fisheries urging him to stop whaling and encourage people to support whale watching, we are making people better aware how much their choices matter.

Success: whale meat consumption in Iceland is going down

So far, surveys show whale meat consumption by tourists is **down by more than half** since our project started, but we set our aim even higher. IFAW's campaign has led to great progress with 'whale friendly' restaurants; only a few years ago the majority of restaurants in downtown Reykjavik were serving whale meat and now it is well below 50%.

Visitors can help by choosing a whale friendly restaurant. When dining in the downtown Reykjavik area or at the old harbour during the summer you will likely see our volunteers in action. Please show interest in their important contribution to whale protection and choose a whale friendly restaurant when you are in Iceland. **Your positive contribution is highly appreciated.**

Not a tradition and few locals eat it, so why should tourists do so?

Since 2004 IFAW has carried out regular polling with Gallup which shows clear progress in reaching Icelanders with our message that whales are worth more alive than dead. In 2013 **only 3% of Icelanders said they had eaten whale meat** six times or more a year. Over 82% said they had never eaten it.

We have come far in recent years to reach the goal of ending commercial whaling in Iceland. Please help our campaign to protect whales. Thank you!